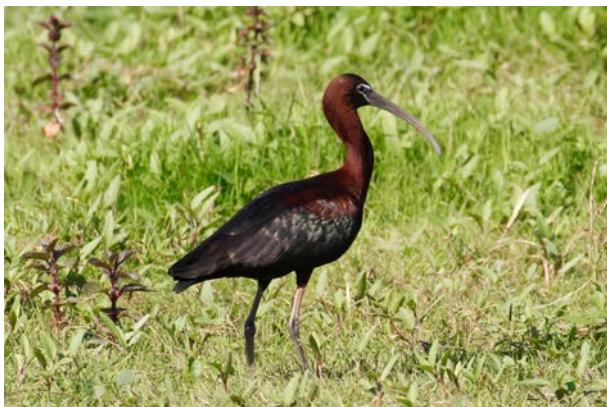


# Romania

Danube Delta & Black Sea

Sat 7–Sun 15 May 2016



*Images of Romania 2016 (Clockwise from top left): Face to face with a Black Tern • stately European Roller • Great White Pelicans like flying boats across the water • a resplendent Squacco Heron • Glossy Ibis • an 'Ehrenberg's' Common Redstart, complete with its smart, white wing patch. Photos © Zoli Baczo & Peter Kennerley*

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

## Romania | Danube Delta & Black Sea

### Tour Leader: Peter Kennerley

with Simon & Mandy Cook, Paul Day, Simon & Sheila Hindshaw, Keith Honnor & Anne Kane, Dennis Hotten, Brian Martin and Ian & Megan Simm.

Limosa's spring tour to Romania focuses on the breeding birds of this delightful eastern European country but also travels at a great time to experience the magic of migration which this region of the Black Sea experiences, regardless of the prevailing weather. This year we hit it just right, combining a wonderful selection of eastern European birds with migrants heading to breed to the north whilst enjoying a relaxing week-long break along the Black Sea coast and Danube Delta. Here it is possible to watch roadside birds included such delights as Golden Oriole, Roller and Bee-eater, together with common migrant species such as Thrush Nightingale, 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, Pied Wheatear and Paddyfield Warbler. By the coast, wetlands and shallow lagoons offer resting spots for many migrant shorebirds including large flocks of Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints, while small groups of Broad-billed and Marsh Sandpipers, and flocks of migrating marsh terns just add icing to the cake.

This exciting tour includes three nights on a floating ponton in the Danube Delta, which provides a wonderfully sublime experience as we cruise slowly along the backwaters of this unique region. The ponton is actually a luxury floating barge, slowly towed by a tug-boat. Birding is done from both the ponton and also from smaller boats, which can get along the narrower waterways and into 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, Squacco, Purple, Great White and Night Herons are common. Riparian woodlands of poplar and willow harbour Lesser Spotted, Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, and the songs of Thrush Nightingales, Redstarts or Garden Warblers are a constant presence. White-tailed and Lesser Spotted Eagles occasionally appear while Hobbies and Red-footed Falcons regularly appear.

This proved to be a most relaxing and bird-filled week. 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 May

After meeting our guide, Zoltan (Zoli), and driver, Lazlo, at Bucharest airport we sped off on the modern highway heading towards the town of Calarasi, which lies on the Danube's northern shore part way between Bucharest and the coast. As we pressed on eastwards the skies darkened and distant lightning bolts arced to earth; a storm was brewing and we were heading into it. We had hoped to spend the last of the day birding at the wonderful fishponds on the outskirts of Calarasi but when we got there the skies were so dark that birding was almost impossible. We could see the shapes of hundreds of marsh terns wheeling over the ponds but their identification was virtually impossible in the gloom. So we pressed on to our hotel, to discover it was hosting a wedding reception and the dining area was the centre of events. To say it was noisy is an understatement. We were finished eating around the time the children's activities were concluding. From 10pm it was the adults turn to enjoy themselves. We were invited to join in with the festivities but everyone declined, we really weren't dressed for a night of disco dancing.

### 8th May

The pre-breakfast stalwarts gathered at 6am to witness some of the party guests leaving the all night and still on-going disco stagger back to their rooms. Quickly fleeing the scene, we made our way to the Danube where we encountered our first Romania birds. Common Redstarts sang from aials and Common Nightingales from the riverside scrub, Pygmy Cormorant, Red-backed Shrike, Golden Oriole, Syrian Woodpecker and flocks of Bee-eaters spiralling into the sky from their overnight roost were the highlights before returning for breakfast. Our post-breakfast departure was slightly delayed when Zoli located a nest containing two rather cute Long-eared Owl chicks, then attractive Green Toads were discovered in the nearby pool. But eventually we were on our way, initially back to the fish ponds, where the marsh tern population was considerably reduced, although there were still plenty of Whiskered and

Black Terns plus a sprinkling of Little Gulls. In the 40 minutes we spent here we came across 50 or more species with the highlights included three Dalmatian Pelicans, lot of Ferruginous Ducks, Black-necked Grebes in their smart breeding plumage, a fine selection of herons and egrets and several croaking Great Reed Warblers.

All too soon it was time to cross the Danube, using the rather antiquated ferry that appeared to date from the Ceausescu era, despite the EU signs saying how much funding had gone into improving the transport system. That said, we made it safely across the Danube and were soon watching singing and displaying Barred Warblers at one of Zoli's regular sites for this species. Overhead, Black and White Storks, Short-toed and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Honey-buzzard and a Marsh Harrier suggested soaring raptors were on the move after yesterday's downpour grounded them, while closer to ground level, we found several Red-backed and our first Lesser Grey Shrike. Continuing to the east, we made several roadside stops where waterbirds continued to dominate, the best being a brief male Little Bittern in flight. We stopped for a picnic lunch at our regular site near Canaraua Fetei where a couple of Lesser Spotted Eagles were mobbing a White-tailed Eagle, elusive Golden Orioles sang from the trees, a calling Hawfinch flew over, and a single Red-rumped Swallow was seen – this was formerly a regular site for this species with several pairs breeding.

From here we pressed on to reach our next birding stop, the Sitorman Quarry, home to one of Romania's star breeding birds, the Pied Wheatear, here at the western limit of its breeding range. Our first stop by the roadside gave us a pair of Stone Curlews, a Little Owl below the bridge, Hoopoe, Long-legged Buzzards, and both Isabelline and Northern Wheatears plus a black-and-white wheatear of uncertain parentage (which your leader missed!) . We continued higher into the quarry and soon found two pairs of very dapper Pied Wheatears which showed nicely for the entire group. At this point Zoli mentioned that around 20% of the Pied Wheatears in Romania are hybrids with Black-eared Wheatears and show an entirely white back. Just a minute though. How can they be hybrids if one of the parent species (Black-eared) is rare in Romania and doesn't breed here? Surely if hybrids are occurring both parent species are required?, Has Black-eared declined to the point of extinction and vanished from Romania? But if so, then over subsequent generations the hybrid features would largely be lost as the hybrids would breed with the Pieds? Unless the hybrids are selectively choosing hybrid mates... Too much thinking and not enough eating - one to sort out on a future visit with more time to spare. All too soon we were off again to Sinoe which would be our base for the next three nights.

### 9th May

We began the day with a pre-breakfast amble through the picturesque village, where a pair of Syrian Woodpeckers excavating a nest hole provided everyone with much better looks than yesterday's birds. The fluty song of Golden Orioles drifted throughout the village while obvious migrants included several Red-breasted and Spotted Flycatchers, Willow Warblers and numerous fly-over Bee-eaters. Our destination for the morning was to be the ruins of the ancient Greek colony at Histria, as well as the adjacent reedbeds that are home to the abundant Paddyfield Warbler, a species that appears to be increasing along this coast – its westernmost regular breeding site. We found the warblers straight away, they were singing from almost every patch of *Phragmites* and, although most were too low to see well, several showed very nicely. With the warbler done and dusted we began by exploring the scrub and damp grasslands for migrants, which were pretty numerous. First up came a European Nightjar, roosting in the open and in full view, affording spectacular views of this rarely seen species – at least in daylight. Next up came a spectacular male Collared Flycatcher which flitted between the fence and bushes and showed brilliantly – this is something of a Nemesis bird for me (only my 5<sup>th</sup> ever of this common European breeder in over 50 years of birding). Other goodies included Redstarts, a good selection of warblers, three Red-throated Pipits and a pair of spectacular Golden Orioles which repeatedly flew from the bushes, hovered over the grassland and dropped to select a tasty morsel which they returned with to the bushes to feast on. A good selection of wetland species on the adjacent pools included a lingering White-fronted Goose, a youngster that had joined the resident Greylags. It was around this moment that two adult Pallas's (aka Great Black-headed) Gulls sporting the jet-black head of breeding plumage flew over – another rare breeder, in accessible Europe restricted to a single inaccessible island in the Danube delta.

By the time we reached the ruins themselves it was well past what you'd call lunchtime but the general consensus was to spend time viewing the ruins. Well, some did, others first got onto Red-breasted and Spotted Flycatchers, followed by a showy Thrush Nightingale that repeatedly popped into view. And just when we thought it couldn't get any better, a Redstart with a large white wing panel popped into view – Ehrenberg's Redstart – the distinctive race of Common Redstart that breeds in the Levant, from central

Turkey east through the Caucasus to northern Iran. It is a vagrant to Romania and, indeed, to just about anywhere in Europe. Reading around provides a vague suggestion that a few pairs breed in Bulgaria, although a trawl of the interweb provides few clues to where they might occur or anyone who has seen them. This isn't an easy bird to find, you may have seen them in Turkey, or on migration through Israel or Kuwait, but if not then you'll be hard pushed to see one.

It was almost 2pm when we returned to the hotel for lunch, and by 3pm we were on our way to Grindor Lupilor – the Wolf's Head peninsula – an area of shallow coastal pools that can be thronged with migrating waders at this time of the year. We got our timing right yet again; the pools were alive with Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints, far too many to check through so we could only scratch the surface. In the next couple of hours, on the few pools we had time to check, we rattled up over 80 species including Kentish Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, *orientalis* Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit (unusual here), 800 or more Curlew Sands, Little Stint, 80 Collared Pratincoles, and four of those stripy-headed waifs of the boreal bogs – Broad-billed Sandpipers. Terns weren't too shabby either, headed up with Caspian and Gull-billed, all three marsh terns in good numbers, plus Commons and Littles. Throw in Red-throated Pipit, Calandra and Short-toed Larks, good numbers of Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes, 20 or more Red-footed Falcons, lots of Bee-eaters. It was really painful to have to drag ourselves away from this wonderful place.

### 10th May

We started the day with a repeat of yesterday's ramble through Sinoe, this time being serenaded by singing Thrush Nightingales, at least four, which weren't here yesterday, and with a bit of patience, one even showed briefly. Otherwise, it was as you were, with a scattering of migrants and the residents, which included a decent flock of Spanish Sparrows mixed with their House and Tree cousins. We spent the remainder of the day at Vadu, a superb area of wetlands, woodlands and scrub that attracts inordinate numbers of migrants. Our impeccable timing saw us enjoy another outstanding day of migration and crack the 100 species barrier. Beginning with 800 or more Black Terns hawking over a smallish pool, accompanied by lesser numbers of White-winged Black and Whiskered Terns, we soon moved onto the waders scurrying and probing along the water's edge, including hundreds of Curlew Sands and Little Stints, a limping Marsh Sandpiper – a laggard from the main passage, and five Temminck's Stints. A Little Crake called from the reeds in a nearby pool but we were too distracted to be concerned at this time, hopefully we would have time to try for him later. Next up came the Common Tern breeding colony, home to 200 or more pairs, while beyond them numerous Collared Pratincoles were hawking the skies; then we noticed even more on the ground. It's rare for there to be too many birds to look at... And then there were the entertaining Souseliks that were running at our feet, we almost overlooked them!

Reaching the beach, we broke open our lunch packets and began to check the waders present, a nice selection that included our first Sanderlings and Turnstones (birds on the beach, not in the lunch packs – just to make that clear). At this point there was a huge explosion and that was pretty much that for the waders – the military were detonating explosives a mile or so away along the beach – with birding there is never a dull moment and always something to amaze. But on the offshore fish trap the birds were unperturbed; the Dalmatian Pelicans continued balancing on a single wire - and doing this far better than the accompanying cormorants. How do they even land here in the first place? Eating lunch on the hoof, I soon bumped into yet another Thrush Nightingale, RBF and Barred Warbler. As most had yet to see a Thrush Nightingale (and some were struggling with RBF), I summoned the group. Zoli used a bit of playback, and the Sprosser popped nicely into view in its isolated bush, being joined there minutes later by the flycatcher and warbler. Next came an obliging Wryneck, yet another lifer for some, more Sprossers and Barred Warblers plus the now obligatory Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes. And so the day went on, good bird after exciting bird. We did try for the Little Crake again, and it did respond by coming a little closer, but mid-afternoon really isn't the best time for this elusive crake and it remained unviewed. Water Rails were slightly more obliging, moving back and forth and offering an occasional fleeting glimpse, but for most it remained hidden. We wrapped up the afternoon with a visit to a small plantation that was alive with migrants including a singing Icterine Warbler which stubbornly refused to put in an appearance. Also here we saw several nest boxes placed for the numerous Red-footed Falcons and which appear to be proving quite attractive for them.

All too soon it was time to return to Sinoe for dinner, but still the birding didn't stop. Once back on the 'highway', first came a Black-headed Bunting, which Zoli heard from the speeding bus. After bundling out we were rewarded with fine views of this attractive songster as it sang from a roadside power pylon. Next stop, also on a power pylon, was a magnificent adult Saker, presumably intent on spending the night

here. Saker is a really rare breeding bird in Romania but this may have been a migrant as they aren't known to breed in this area, but they are more numerous in Ukraine. Regardless, a cracking bird and a joy to see so well. And with that we sped off to the hotel and a well-earned beer.

### 11th May

The day began with yet another ramble through Sinoe. The Syrian Woodpeckers were still excavating, the Thrush Nightingales were silent or had moved on, to be replaced by a singing Icterine Warbler that showed superbly in the early morning light. This was followed by a couple of Golden Orioles, never a dull moment when you're birding. Following breakfast we packed our bags and set off for the Macin Mountains National Park. Along the way we stopped at an attractive patch of oak woodland near Horia where we quickly found a couple of Middle Spotted Woodpeckers and a Nuthatch. A little farther and our target bird appeared, a rather sombre-like Sombre Tit, quite an appropriate name and one of four titmouse species for the morning. The highlight, however, proved to be a gorgeous male Levant Sparrowhawk soaring low overhead. Romania lies at the northern limit of its European breeding range and this is never an easy bird to find so we were particularly pleased to be rewarded with this unexpected encounter. At other roadside stops we dropped on to Booted and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard, our only Raven of the tour and a singing Short-toed Lark. We reached Greci around noon and with time to kill before lunch we made for the grasslands just beyond the village where several Isabelline Wheatears were nesting, and overhead soaring migrants including White and Black Storks, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Long-legged Buzzard.

After lunch we continued on to the Macin Mountains National Park, a range of dry limestone hills near Greci that run north to south and prove a magnet for soaring birds on migration when conditions are right. Almost immediately another male Levant Sparrowhawk soared into view, bonus bird and super views. While the birds here continued to grab our attention, there was actually much more going on around our feet with various butterflies and lizards loving these dry conditions. The only way to sort out what we were seeing was to get photographs and sort the identifications out later. Among the butterflies we found Grizzled Skipper, Cardinal, Queen of Spain and Glanville Fritillaries, Scarce Swallowtail, Clouded Yellow and what appeared to be Berger's Clouded Yellow. Among the reptiles we identified Spur-thighed Tortoise, Balkan Green and Balkan Wall Lizards. Others remained unidentified as we were still intent on the birds (just). Initially things seemed quiet, but gradually we picked off our target species; a pair of Black Redstarts, several monochrome male Pied Wheatears, a couple of lovely male Rock Thrushes, three or more singing Ortolans, and rounded off with a pert pair of Sombre Tits. By late afternoon we called it a day and drove the 90 minutes to our lakeside hotel in Tulcea, where the steam locomotive proved particularly appealing to some of our party.

### 12th May

Our early stroll began by the lake and continued to the Danube. Birds were few and far between but we did manage to find European Pond Terrapin and some hybrid frogs. And then we were off to join our ponton and were greeted by our five-person crew comprising the cook (outstanding), her assistant who ably looked after us, a couple of assistants/boat drivers and the captain who we rarely saw, but he got us to where we wanted to go, and back again. Almost immediately we set off downstream along the Sulina channel towards Crisan. With the current in our favour we were fairly motoring along and covered the 40km or thereabouts to our destination in just over four hours. Now Simon was in his element – he only keeps a list of birds seen from or on boats – and he was pointing out a multitude of species from the ponton's upper deck including White-tailed Eagle, Stock Dove, Goldeneye, numerous Rollers, Grey-headed Woodpecker and a multitude of wetland species.

Straight after lunch we boarded the ponton's two smaller craft and began an exploration along the maze of winding channels and lakes in the heart of the delta, frequented by some of the more highly sought-after wetland species including Ferruginous Duck, Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes, Pygmy Cormorant, Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Glossy Ibis and Black and Whiskered Terns. But birding in the delta isn't just about wetland birds. The channels are lined with willows that are home to Red-footed Falcon, Hobby, Golden Oriole, Roller and several woodpecker species. Perhaps the best birds of this session were a male Penduline Tit that came in close to investigate us, several white-headed Long-tailed Tits, an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler – not the habitat I was expecting to encounter this species but it is apparently a common breeder in these parts - and several Common Redstarts and Garden Warblers. To round off a great afternoon, as we returned to the ponton we were greeted by a spectacular Black Woodpecker at a nest hole just meters from where we were moored. Birding really doesn't get much better than this.

### 13th May

The morning kicked off with a pre-breakfast gathering and a coffee on the upper deck of the ponton, where we were serenaded by Thrush Nightingales, Redstarts, Golden Orioles and Garden Warblers, although for most a lingering Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was the highlight. For the next two days, our plan was to be very much as the previous day, excursions morning and afternoon in the smaller craft, and travelling and sleeping on the ponton. This morning we set off to explore the lakes to the north of the Dunarea Veche – one of the main channels in the delta – while the ponton continued along to Mila 23 where we rejoined it just before lunch. Along the way the photographers enjoyed some great opportunities to snap away at the numerous Red-necked Grebes, Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Purple and Squacco Herons, a White-tailed Eagle being mobbed by Hooded Crows, Whiskered Terns nesting on the mats of emergent vegetation, lots of Common Cuckoos – a common breeding bird in the delta - and yet another Black Woodpecker posed for photographs. As we neared the ponton a Black-tailed Godwit, our first of the tour, was probing in the damp grassland and gave great views – definitely a case of *Limosa limosa limosa*, while nearby an intergrade *superciliaris* Yellow Wagtail showed nicely.

Our afternoon departure was delayed by an hour as a torrential rainstorm passed overhead. But by 3.30pm the rain had ceased and the sun was thinking of making an appearance. So we were off again, but soon Zoli's boat slowed down to investigate a couple of hoodies that were becoming increasingly upset – perhaps an owl was in the tree. What he didn't expect was to see a cat sitting in a nest – presumably the crow's nest and we guessed it had just eaten the contents. But this was no ordinary cat; its widely spaced ears and thick, banded tail pointed to it being a Wild Cat, one of the most elusive of the deltas inhabitants and one that had been taking shelter from the storm. We hadn't expected this, a real bonus. We continued on to a drier area to the north where we were able to disembark and stroll around some fields where Red-footed Falcons and Rollers were numerous. No abandoned factory complex would be complete without its nesting Kestrels and Black Redstarts and both duly put in appearances.

On our return we passed a camouflaged boat full of photographers, just sitting waiting for something to happen – we never did discover what they were waiting for. Thankfully we didn't linger and almost straight away we were enjoying great looks at a Penduline Tit, followed minutes later by our second Wild Cat of the afternoon, this one just sitting on the riverbank and allowing us to slowly bring our boats right up to it. These were extraordinary looks at this most elusive of species – clearly not a thickly coated Scottish Wild cat in winter, this cat was all set for a summer of heat and humidity in its sleek summer pelage. Boom as they say up north. We returned to the ponton in a daze, we thought the birding couldn't get any better, perhaps it couldn't, but the mammals certainly surprised us. What a memorable day!

### 14th May

Those who rose early were treated to a magnificent dawn from the top of the ponton. We had moored on the opposite bank to the village and were able to watch a flypast of small numbers of various herons, cormorants, pelicans, Hobbies, Caspian Gulls and Whiskered Terns. Today was designated Global Big Day – the day when birders from around the world submit the species they record into an on-line database, and I was intent on supporting this effort by submitting all the species we encountered today. Following breakfast, we began a short excursion to a nearby lake where a fly-by Montagu's Harrier and Honey-buzzard made for a good start. The lake itself was partially covered with water-lilies and this proved to be attractive to Red-necked, Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes, Pygmy Cormorants, Black and Whiskered Terns and the usual range of herons and egrets. In the willows lining the canals, Penduline Tits called and Long-tailed Tits showed nicely, Rollers sat in the bare trees and our first Reed Bunting in the delta posed nicely. Once we had safely boarded the ponton we continued our return along the Sontea channel towards Tulcea, and moored for our final night in the channel near Mila 35. From here we made our way to a large waterbird breeding colony where both species of cormorant, Little Egrets, Night Herons and Spoonbills were tending their nests. Some of the young Cormorants appeared almost ready to fledge so the breeding season here seems likely to begin in early March. On a nearby lake Zoli picked out a pair of Smew, the pied male displaying to the more sombre female. Although a common winter visitor, there are also a few breeding records from the delta and it appeared that we had stumbled across one such breeding pair. We rounded the afternoon off with yet more Grey-headed and Black Woodpeckers and a rather magnificent Red Fox, a much healthier specimen than those we had encountered on the coast.



Our farewell meal that evening consisted of several delicious stuffed Pike, a traditional dish served to visitors on their last day, washed down with numerous flaggons of wine and beers. Our species total for the day was 75 and these birds have been added to the eBird Global Big Day total.

### **15th May**

By 5am we were on the move again, being towed behind the trusty tug and heading towards Tulcea. Being much farther from the coast, the land here was considerably drier; long gone were the reedbeds and the riverside trees were considerably taller. For those who rose early, we were able to enjoy the songs of numerous Garden Warblers, Thrush Nightingales and Common Redstarts, which were still in abundance for much of the journey. A total of five Goldeneye were an unexpected bonus, although they do breed nearby. Following our final breakfast we said our farewells to the crew of the ponton, who had made us so welcome over the past three days. Before departing Tulcea a male Black Redstart appeared by our bus, then we were on our way towards Bucharest and home. We made a brief stop at the fish ponds near Horsova but the wind had got up which made viewing difficult. But we did find a pair of Ruddy Shelducks with nine chicks on a small stream, a final bird for most of the group. In the far distance a thermal of White Storks spiralled against the grey clouds, the ponds held now familiar Squacco Herons, Glossy Ibises, Spoonbill, Whiskered Terns and Great Reed Warblers, and a distant White-tailed Eagle appeared briefly. After this, we drove to the airport, pausing only for lunch on the outskirts of Bucharest. We reached the airport just before 2pm, with more than ample time to spare. After saying our goodbyes to Zoli and Lazlo, and also to Simon and Mandy who were staying on in Bucharest, we waited until the check-in desk opened, then sailed through the formalities without incident or delay and on to London.

We all enjoyed a fantastic tour and between us we had seen a wonderful range of birds, 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 that added variety, quality and quantity to our experience. Add in the mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates and it would be difficult to better this on a one week tour anywhere in Europe. 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, while enjoying 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, Lazlo, 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, May 2016***

## Systematic Lists

### Birds

#### **Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix***

Two flushed from the roadside near Histria on 9/5 and another two similarly flushed on 11/5.

#### **Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix***

One calling before breakfast at Sinoe on 9/5.

#### **Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

As in the UK these are released 'game' birds. Heard most days and occasionally seen.

#### **Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Fairly common with 12 at fish ponds along the Danube on 8/5, 60 or more at Histria and 20 at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and six at Vadu on 10/5. Much less numerous in the delta, where up to 12 noted daily from 12/5 to 14/5.

#### **White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons***

A young bird with Greylags at Histria on 9/5 was unexpected.

#### **Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Common on wetlands throughout and in the delta.

#### **Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

At least 90 at Histria and 15 at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and 30 at Vadu on 10/5.

#### **Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea***

Two flew over the Sitorman quarry on 8/5, and a pair with nine chicks showed very nicely in a small stream at the fishponds near Harsova on 15/5.

#### **Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope***

At least six with the Red-crested Pochards at Histria on 9/5.

#### **Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Between 15 and 20 noted most days at inland and coastal wetland sites, and also in the delta but not recorded on 11/5 when we didn't visit any wetland sites.

#### **Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Up to 30 most days at inland and coastal wetland sites, and in the delta but not recorded on 11/5 when we didn't visit any wetland sites.

#### **Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

At least 15 at Histria and eight at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and a pair at Vadu on 10/5.

#### **Garganey *Anas querquedula***

Several scattered individuals and small parties but no large gatherings, and absent from the delta. Sightings included two at Calarasi fish ponds on 8/5, six at Histria and two at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and six at Vadu on 10/5.

#### **Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina***

At least 30 at Histria on 9/5 and a male at Lacul cu Cotete on 14/5.

#### **Common Pochard *Aythya ferina***

Status similar to that of Ferruginous Duck, but slightly less numerous. Good totals included 12 at the Calarasi fish ponds on 8/5, 15 at Histria on 9/5, and up to 20 daily in the delta from 15th to 17th.

#### **Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca***

Fairly common and widespread, and recorded daily apart from 11/5. Good totals included 40 at the Calarasi fish ponds on 8/5, and 30 or more daily in the delta from 15th to 17th.

#### **Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula***

A female flew past our ponton in the Sulina channel on 12/5, and parties of two, one and two were seen as we approached Tulcea, which included immature males and females.

#### **Smew *Mergellus albellus***

A male displaying to a female in the delta at Lacul cu Cotete on 14/5. Apparently a rare breeding bird in the delta region.

#### **Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

One seen and others whinnying at Calarasi fish ponds on 8/5.

#### **Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena***

Only seen in the delta with 15 there on 12/5, 10 on 13/5 and ten on 14/5. Like Black-necked Grebe it prefers to remain close to patches of floating vegetation.

#### **Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Fairly widespread including 20 at the Calarasi fish ponds and six at fish ponds along the Danube on 8/5, and two at Vadu on 10/5. Common on lakes with floating vegetation in the delta with 60 on 12/5, 70 on 13/5 and 50 on 14/5.



**Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis***

Status similar to that of Great Crested Grebe with 12 at the Calarasi fish ponds and three at fish ponds along the Danube on 8/5, and several at Vadu on 10/5. Common on lakes with floating vegetation in the delta with 35 on 12/5 and 15 on 14/5.

**Black Stork *Ciconia nigra***

One near Calarasi on 8/5 and one in flight over grasslands near Greci on 11/5.

**White Stork *Ciconia ciconia***

Common and widespread on the mainland with many nesting on poles in villages. Scarce in the delta with just four seen over the three days spent there, and the same individual feeding near the ponton at Mila 23 accounted for sightings on two days.

**Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus***

Up to 20 at Calarasi and Danube fish ponds on 8/5, but only between four and six at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5 and Vadu on 10/5. Common in the delta with 80 or more seen daily from 12/5 to 14/5.

**Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia***

Quite scarce, with one at the Calarasi fish ponds on 8/5, one at Histria, and four at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, four at Vadu on 10/5. Singles daily in the delta apart from a dozen or so in the mixed waterbird colony near Cotete on 14/5.

**Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris***

Booming birds heard at Histria and Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, Vadu on 10/5 and in the delta on 13/5.

**Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus***

Just two males seen, one in flight by fish ponds along the Danube near Canaraua Fetei on 8/5, and one in the delta on 13/5. In addition, a barking male was heard in the delta on 12/5.

**Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax***

Singles at Calarasi on 7/5 and 8/5. All other sightings came from the delta where it was common and regularly seen with up to 40 daily. Found to be breeding in the waterbird colony near Cotete on 14/5.

**Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides***

Recorded in small numbers from the coastal wetlands, with four at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5 and Vadu on 10/5 being the highest counts. Common in the delta, including estimates of 30 on 13/5 and 14/5.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Widespread in small numbers and seen daily except 11/5.

**Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea***

Common and widespread in coastal wetlands including Histria, Grindor Lupilor and Vadu, and also in the delta with daily counts of up to 20.

**Great Egret *Ardea alba***

Common and widespread in wetland areas throughout, particularly in the delta, but less numerous than Little Egret.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Common and widespread in wetland areas throughout.

**Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus***

Recorded daily apart from 11/5 when we didn't visit any suitable habitat. Decent totals included 400 on 9/5, 350 at Vadu on 10/5, and similar numbers daily in the delta. Often seen the large flocks of several hundred birds, either at rest or soaring.

**Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus***

Fairly common and every day apart from 11/5 when we didn't visit any suitable habitat. Good counts included 12 at Histria on 9/5 and 15 at Vadu on 10/5, then up to 20 daily in the delta. Generally seen in singles or pairs and only occasionally associated with White Pelicans.

**Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus***

Away from the delta, we saw two near the hotel in Calarasi on 8/5 and at least 12 at the Calarasi fish ponds later the same day, and two at the fishponds near Harsova on 15/5. All other sightings came from the delta where it was common and widespread with up to 50 birds each day. Found to be breeding in the mixed waterbird colony near Cotete on 14/5.

**Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Common in coastal wetlands, and particularly so in the delta, where feeding flocks often associated with flocks of Great White Pelicans. At least 250 were attending nests at a colony near Cotete on 14/5.

**European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus***

Singles near the hotel in Calarasi and over the Barred Warbler site on 8/5. One in the delta on 14/5.

**White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla***

Outside the delta, one mobbed by two Lesser Spotted Eagles at Canaraua Fetei on 8/5, one at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5 and one at the fishponds near Harsova on 15/5. Up to seven seen daily in the delta from 12/5 to 14/5.

**Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus***

One in flight over the Barred Warbler site near Calarasi on 8/5.

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

Common, widespread and seen daily.

**Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus***

Just one female, in the delta on 14/5.

**Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes***

Two males, the first over woodland near Horia and the second in the Macin Mountains National Park, and both on 11/5.

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

Surprisingly scarce, with just two on 8/5 and six at various locations on 11/5. All appeared to be typical birds and no 'Steppe' Buzzards were seen.

**Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus***

Ones and twos seen daily from 8/5 to 11/5, although four were seen on the latter date. Mostly found in areas where Souseliks occur.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina***

One over the Barred Warbler site near Calarasi and two at Canaraua Fetei on 8/5, two at a roadside stop near Cerna and one in the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5, and one in the delta on 14/5.

**Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus***

Two pale morph birds at a roadside stop near Cerna on 11/5, and one dark morph near Greci later the same day.

**Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Widespread, fairly common and seen daily over open grassland areas. Good counts included nine on 9/5 and six on 10/5 and 11/5.

**Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus***

This attractive falcon was common, widespread and seen daily from 8/5 to 14/5. Good counts included 20 at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, 40 or more at Vadu on 10/5 and 15 in a cultivated area in the delta on 13/5. Often noted in small parties, with several birds hovering over open fields while a scan of the ground would often reveal others sitting there.

**Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo***

Seen daily from 8/5 to 14/5 in small numbers. Most numerous in the delta with between six and eight birds daily.

**Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug***

An adult perched on a pylon near Vadu on 10/5 showed very well in the late afternoon light.

**Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus***

A pale adult circling overhead at Histria on 9/5 was probably of the arctic breeding race *F. p. calidus*.

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

Two calling in the same patch of sedges where the Little Crakes were hiding at Vadu on 10/5, and like them, they remained firmly out of view.

**Little Crake *Porzana parva***

Two calling at Vadu on 10/5. Rather disappointingly they remained hidden from view.

**Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

At least 20 at the Calarasi fish ponds on 8/5, otherwise just odd singles in the delta on 12/5 to 14/5.

**Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra***

Common, widespread and recorded daily except 11/5 when we did not visit any suitable habitat. The highest count was 300+ at the Calarasi fish ponds on 8/5.

**Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus***

Three at the Sitorman quarry on 8/5, and one at Histria on 9/5.

**Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus***

A good scattering at coastal wetlands, with 20 at Histria and 40 at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and 40 or more at Vadu on 10/5. Less numerous in the delta, with eight on 12/5 and two on 13/5.

**Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Six at Histria and six at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and 12 at Vadu on 10/5. In the delta, two noted on 12/5.

**Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Widespread and common in the coastal wetlands, particularly Vadu where we saw 25 or more on 10/5, and they were clearly breeding here. Much less numerous in the delta, with two to four seen daily from 12/5 to 14/5.

**Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola***

At least two at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5.

**Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

Two at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and four at Vadu on 10/5.

**Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius***

One at Histria on 9/5, and two at Vadu on 10/5.

**Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus***

Three at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and three on the beach at Vadu on 10/5.

**Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa***

A male in the delta near Mila 23 on 13/5 and 14/5.

**Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica***

One at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5.

**Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Four at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5. These birds were exceptionally long billed individuals and probably were of the eastern race *N. a. orientalis*.

**Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus***

One at Histria and 15 at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and one at Vadu on 10/5.

**Common Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Two at Histria and six at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and 14 at Vadu on 10/5.

**Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis***

Singles at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5 and Vadu on 10/5. Most had already passed through.

**Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola***

Always satisfying to see this attractive species in good numbers, which included six at Histria and 12 at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, 25 or more at Vadu on 10/5, and occasional singles in the delta.

**Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos***

Ones and twos noted on five dates in the coastal wetlands and delta.

**Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres***

One at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and six or more on the beach at Vadu on 10/5.

**Red Knot *Calidris canutus***

A bird in non-breeding plumage at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5.

**Sanderling *Calidris alba***

At least seven on the beach at Vadu on 10/5.

**Little Stint *Calidris minuta***

Not quite as numerous as Curlew Sandpiper, but there were plenty to look at. Counts include six at Histria and an estimated 400 at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and 400 or more at Vadu on 10/5.

**Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii***

Five at Vadu on 10/5 was the only sighting.

**Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea***

By far the most numerous shorebird, there were probably many more present in the coastal wetlands than the following estimates suggest. On 9/5, at least 100 at Histria and 800 at Grindor Lupilor, while on 10/5 an estimated 600 were at Vadu. The overwhelming majority were in breeding plumage.

**Dunlin *Calidris alpina***

Singles at Histria and Grindor Lupilor on 9/5.

**Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus***

Four at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5.

**Ruff *Philomachus pugnax***

Ten at Histria and eight at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and 12 at Vadu on 10/5.

**Collared Pratincole *Glaucopis pratensis***

One at Histria and 80 or more at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and at least 60 at Vadu on 10/5.

**Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus***

Common throughout the coastal areas and delta.

**Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus***

Two first-summer birds at the Calarasi fish ponds on 8/5, ten at Histria on 9/5 and 13 at Vadu on 10/5.

**Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus***

Four adults flew over calling at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5.

**Pallas's Gull *Larus ichthyæetus***

Two adults in breeding plumage flew over Histria on 9/5, and one in flight over Vadu on 10/5.

Unfortunately none were found in the roosting gull flocks this year. Now breeds on an island in the delta mouth, the only breeding site in 'western' Europe.

**Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis***

At least 80 at Calarasi and along the Danube towards the coast on 8/5, and many at Vadu on 10/5.

**Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans***

Common and widespread throughout the lowlands, coastal wetlands and the delta.

**Little Tern *Sternula albifrons***

Two at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5 and three at Vadu on 10/5.

**Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica***

One at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5.

**Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia***

Seven at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5.

**Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus***

Very common and seen daily except 11/5 when we didn't visit any suitable habitat. A common breeding bird in the delta where it nests on floating vegetation.

**Black Tern *Chlidonias niger***

Common and widespread but overall less numerous than Whiskered Tern. Double figure counts recorded daily except 11/5 when we didn't visit any suitable habitat. The best day was 10/5 when a flock of 800 or more made an incredible sight at Vadu.

**White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus***

Scarcer than the previous two species but still moving through the Black Sea coastal wetlands in good numbers. In an electrical storm and almost total darkness on 7/5, at least two with hundreds of marsh terns at Calarasi fish ponds and one there the next day. Thereafter, two at Histria and at least 60 at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, 70 or more at Vadu on 10/5, and ten in the delta near Crisan on 12/5.

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***

Common on coastal wetlands and in the delta, the highest daily estimate being 400+ at the breeding colony at Vadu on 10/5.

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

Common around human habitation.

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Singles in the delta on 12/5 and 13/5, and two on 14/5.

**Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

At least 12 on 8/5 between Calarasi and the coast, thereafter only seen in the delta with up to 14 noted daily from 12/5 to 15/5.

**Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur***

Noted on five dates from several locations but absent from the delta. The highest count was ten or more on 11/5.

**Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Widespread and common along the coast and inland. Only ones and twos noted in the delta close to human habitation.

**Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus***

Common and good numbers seen daily, with a high of 20+ calling in the delta on 13/5.

**Little Owl *Athene noctua***

A total of six singles recorded daily from 8/5 to 11/5.

**Long-eared Owl *Asio otus***

Two fluffy youngsters in a nest outside our hotel in Calarasi on 8/5.

**European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus***

A roosting bird, presumably a migrant, brilliantly spotted by Keith and Anne, at Histria on 9/5.

It is rare that we come across such an obliging individual.

**Common Swift *Apus apus***

Common and widespread away from the delta. Not recorded in the delta on 12/5 and 13/5, and only in the later afternoon on 14/5 as were neared Tulcea.

**European Roller *Coracias garrulus***

Widespread and seen daily. Particularly numerous in the riparian forest of the delta where the old trees provide numerous nesting sites, and up to 20 seen daily.

**Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

Apart from one at Calarasi on 8/5 all other sightings came from the delta with up to seven seen or heard daily during our stay there.

**European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster***

Common and seen daily. Highest estimate was 150+ at Vadu on 10/5.

**Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops***

Common and widespread on the coast and inland but scarce in the delta. Seen daily.

**Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla***

One showed well at Vadu on 11/5.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor***

Only recorded from riparian poplars and willows in the delta, with three on 13/5 and one heard on 14/5

**Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius***

Two in woodland near Horia on 11/5.

**Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus***

One at Calarasi and another in roadside trees en-route to the coast, both on 8/5. A pair excavating a nest hole in a tree in Sinoe were seen daily during our stay there from 9/5 to 11/5.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

Away from the delta, singles heard at Canaraua Fetei on 8/5 and woodland near Horia on 11/5.

Encountered daily within the delta from 12/5 to 15/5 with up to three daily.

**Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius***

Only recorded from the riparian woodland of the delta, with one on 12/5, three on 13/5 and two on 12/5. Several showed bleached flight feathers, could these be last year's youngsters?

**Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus***

Recorded daily from 12/5 to 14/5 in the woodlands of the delta where it was regularly heard calling and occasionally seen.

**Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio***

Widespread and up to 12 recorded daily throughout the tour.

**Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor***

A regular roadside bird, with up to six seen daily between 8/5 and 11/5. Absent in the delta.

**Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus***

Common, widespread and seen or heard daily. The liquid, fluty song of the male was heard wherever there was woodland. They could, however, be difficult to see well in the open, so the birds feeding in the grassland at Histria on 9/5 were particularly appreciated.

**Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

One at Canaraua Fetei on 8/5 and one heard in woodland near Horia on 11/5.

**Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica***

Very common throughout.

**Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula***

Widespread, common and seen daily. These birds showed a conspicuous pale nape collar and a whitish spot at the sides of the neck, which is typical of the race *C. m. soemmerringii*.

**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

Widespread, common and recorded daily. Unlike eight years ago, now common in the regions in the delta that we visited.

**Raven *Corvus corax***

One at a roadside stop made en-route to Greci on 11/5.

**Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix***

Widespread, common and recorded daily.

**Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris***

One in the forest near Horia, and two at the Macin Mountains National Park, both on 11/5.

**Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris***

A family party including recently fledged juveniles in the forest near Horia on 11/5.

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Common and widespread, especially in the delta.

**Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

Apart from two in the forest near Horia on 11/5, all other sightings came from the delta where it was fairly common and recorded daily from 11/5 to 15/5.

**Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus***

Single males showed very nicely in the delta on 12/5 and 13/5. Several others heard on 13/5 and 14/5.

**Sand Martin *Riparia riparia***

Common away from the delta, but only recorded twice within the delta region.

**Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Common, widespread and up to 60 recorded daily.

**House Martin *Delichon urbicum***

Common and widespread along the coast and inland, but only recorded twice within the delta region.

**Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica***

Singles near Calarasi and Canaraua Fetei on 8/5, and one at Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5.

**Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus***

Only recorded from the delta where small parties were occasionally encountered along the narrower channels from 12/5 to 14/5. All those seen well showed an entirely white head and belonged to the

nominate form which occurs in northern and eastern Europe, east to eastern China.

**Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra***

Two at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and eight at Vadu on 10/5. Much less numerous than eight years ago.

**Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla***

One in song at Histria and another at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, two at Vadu on 10/5 and one near Greci on 11/5.

**Crested Lark *Galerida cristata***

Common during the early part of the tour with up to ten daily noted from numerous sites from 8/5 to 11/5. Not recorded from the delta.

**Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

One between Calarasi and the coast on 8/5, four at Histria on 9/5 and one at the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5.

**Woodlark *Lullula arborea***

Two singing between Calarasi and the coast on 8/5, and two near Horia and one at the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5.

**Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides***

The distinctive nasal droning of this species was occasionally heard coming from deep within *Phragmites* reedbeds, but actually seeing one was another matter. In total we heard about nine individuals including two at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, two at Vadu on 10/5, and at least five at various locations in the delta.

**Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus***

Common, widespread and recorded daily except on 11/5 when we didn't visit suitable habitat.

Frequently heard wherever we stopped by *Phragmites* reedbeds.

**Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus***

One at Vadu on 10/5 was the only sighting.

**Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola***

Six at Histria and two at Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, and at least 15 at Vadu on 10/5. Not noted in the delta.

**Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus***

Surprisingly scarce away from the delta. Two heard in reedbeds between Calarasi and the coast on 8/5, four at Vadu on 10/5, then up to 12 in song daily in the delta from 12/5 to 14/5.

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida***

Singing males showed well in the delta on 12/5 and 14/5, where they frequented mature riverside willows. These birds would be of the eastern race *I. p. elaeica*.

**Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina***

A singing bird remained stubbornly out of view at Vadu on 10/5, but another showed very nicely before breakfast on 11/5 in Sinoe.

**Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus***

Large numbers were passing along the Black Sea coast during our visit, with three at Sinoe and 12 at Histria on 9/5, followed by 20 or more at Vadu on 10/5, and two on 11/5. Just three heard in the delta.

**Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita***

A singing bird at Canaraua Fetei on 8/5 was the only one recorded away from the delta. Up to five recorded daily within the delta.

**Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla***

Ones or two seen daily in drier woodlands at the start of our visit, but not recorded from the delta.

**Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin***

A common bird in the riparian woodlands of the delta, where it was regularly heard, with up to 25 singing daily between 12/5 and 15/5. Surprisingly, none were seen!

delta in the wetter woodlands in the delta with up to 20 seen or heard daily on 16th and 17th.

**Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria***

Three males singing and display fighting at a breeding site near Calarasi on 8/5, and two migrants lurking in coastal scrub at Vadu on 10/5.

**Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca***

Just four seen away from the delta, two singing males near the hotel in Calarasi and one at Canaraua Fetei on 8/5, and one at Sinoe on 9/5. More common in the delta from 12/5 with up to six singing daily.

**Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis***

Two singing males in the Barred Warbler patch near Calarasi on 8/5, one at Histria on 9/5 and at least three at Vadu on 10/5.

**Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus***

Two showed well in reedbeds at Vadu on 10/5 with others calling nearby. These are considerably paler than those that breed in western Europe and belong to the eastern form *P. b. russicus*.

**Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europea***

One in woodland near Horia on 11/5.

**Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Widespread and common, nesting in most villages.

**Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Two at Canaraua Fetei on 8/5, and three singing males in the forest near Horia on 11/5.

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Singles heard in song in the forest near Horia on 11/5 and in the delta near Crisan on 12/5.

**Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis***

Two singing males showed nicely in the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5.

**Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia***

Two at Histria on 9/5, four singing in Sinoe on 9/5 and at least 13 during the day at Vadu on 10/5, several of these birds being seen well by all of the group. An abundant breeding bird in the riparian woodlands of the delta, where it was regularly heard, with up to 12 heard daily between 12/5 and 15/5.

**Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos***

One singing near the hotel in Calarasi on 8/5, and five or more heard during the day between Calarasi and the coast. A further four or more heard on 11/5 at various roadside sites. None were seen.

**Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochrurus***

A pair at the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5, a female entering a building in the delta on 13/5 and presumably breeding there, and a male in the parking lot in Tulcea on 15/5.

**Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus***

Two males singing from aereals and rooftops in Calarasi during our pre-breakfast walk on 8/5, and a female at Histria on 9/5. An abundant breeding bird in the riparian woodlands of the delta, where it was regularly heard and occasionally seen, with up to 25 heard daily between 12/5 and 14/5.

**Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisicus***

A male at Histria on 9/5. This distinctive race of the Common Redstart is a vagrant to Romania. It differs from the nominate by the large white patch in the closed wing, formed by white edges to the tertials, secondaries and primaries. In Europe, it apparently breeds in very small numbers in Bulgaria, otherwise it occurs from central Turkey east to Iran.

**Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra***

Two at Histria and one at Grindor Lupilor on 8/5, and one at Vadu on 9/5.

**Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina***

At least 12 in steppe grassland at the Sitorman quarry on 8/5, and eight or more near Greci on 11/5.

**Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe***

The most numerous and widespread wheatear, noted daily from 8/5 to 11/5 and clearly breeding. Several noted in steppe grassland habitat on 8/5 and 11/5, others on cliff faces, and occurred sympatrically with Pied and Isabelline Wheatears. These birds are of the paler southern race *O. o. libanotica*, which share a similar display flight with Seeborn's Wheatear *O. seebohmi* of North Africa.

**Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka***

Two pairs at the Sitorman quarry on 8/5, where the female of one pair was collecting grasses for nest construction. Also, at least three singing males in the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5. Some 20% of birds in Romania are said to be hybrids with Black-eared Wheatear *O. hispanica* and some of our group did briefly see a bird with a completely white mantle on 8/5, thus resembling Finsch's Wheatear *O. finschii*. If Black-eared Wheatear is absent as a breeding bird from Romania, where are these birds coming from? If hybrids are breeding with Pied Wheatears then surely the Black-eared features would disappear after a few generations. But if these hybrids selectively breed with each other, are they behaving as a species? Unless Black-eared are breeding nearby, then this hybrid theory really doesn't hold water.

**Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata***

A common migrant at the start of the week, with four in Sinoe and 12 or more at Histria on 9/5, six at Vadu on 10/5, and one at the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5. Virtually absent from the delta with just one seen on 15/5.

**Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis***

A stunning male showed well at Histria on 9/5. An unidentified female Pied/Collared Flycatcher was at Sinoe on 10/5.

**Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva***

At least two at Sinoe on 9/5 to 11/5, including a singing male on the last date. A minimum of six at Histria on 9/5 and one at Vadu on 10/5. All were in female-type plumage, but young males retain a female-like plumage in their first summer.



**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Widespread and common.

**Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis***

Common and easily seen at Sinoe, Histria, Vadu and at various sites visited on 11/5 en-route to Tulcea. Often noted nesting in White Stork nests.

**Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus***

Common and seen daily. The most numerous and widespread sparrow in the delta.

**Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava***

Widely distributed and seen on six dates. However, very few completely black-headed birds were seen, and even fewer of these showed the full suite of characters typical of 'Black-headed Wagtail', i.e., some had white rather than yellow wing-bars, others lacked the characteristic black extension of the cap hooking below the rear of the ear-coverts, and some had a greenish cast to the lower nape. Several males showed the characters of the intergrade form *dombrowskii*, which resembles Blue-headed Wagtail with a bluish-grey crown and nape, slightly darker ear-coverts and a white supercilium. We also saw several *superciliaris* types, another intergrade with a white supercilium and dark grey ear-coverts. One *xanthophrys* type was seen, matching *superciliaris* but with a yellow supercilium. These forms are usually treated as intergrades between various Yellow Wagtail subspecies. We saw none of these parent species that we could say with confidence were not intergrades. However, all birds which called gave the slightly buzzing flight calls typical of Black-headed Wagtail *M. f. feldegg*, and singing and displaying birds also behaved like *feldegg*.

**White Wagtail *Motacilla alba***

Seen daily in small numbers

**Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris***

Singles showed well at the Sitorman quarry on 8/5, Histria on 9/5 and Vadu on 10/5.

**Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus***

Three in flight at Histria on 9/5 and one showed well by the road en-route to Grindor Lupilor on 9/5.

**Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Noted in small numbers on six dates. Widespread throughout the delta.

**European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris***

Six at Calarasi during our pre-breakfast walk on 8/5, and two at Canaraua Fetei, also on 8/5.

**European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Regularly seen and noted on six dates.

**Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina***

Four seen at various locations on 8/5 and one heard in the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5.

**Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes***

One flew overhead Canaraua Fetei on 8/5, then singles seen near Horia and in the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5, and two flew over the Danube near Tulcea on 15/5.

**Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra***

An abundant roadside bird in agricultural and steppe grassland areas, and its distinctive song was heard almost everywhere we went. Mostly absent from the delta, except in the drier areas.

**Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella***

A singing male heard in the forest near Horia on 11/5 but not seen.

**Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana***

Three singing males in the valley leading into the Macin Mountains National Park on 11/5.

**Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala***

Singing males singing from overhead wires or pylons near Histria on 9/5 and 10/5.

**Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Several singing males seen at Histria and Grindor Lupilor on 9/5, Vadu on 10/5 and in the delta on 14/5. These showed the large, swollen and arched bill of the race *E. s. intermedia*. Their song also differs slightly from that of western European birds and includes an additional concluding phrase.

**Mammals****Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus***

Up to four at Histria on 9/5, Vadu on 10/5 and en-route to Tulcea on 11/5.

**European Sousek *Spermophilus citellus***

The first were two at the Sitorman quarry on 8/5, then numerous at Vadu on 10/5 and grasslands near Greci on 11/5.

**Weasel *Mustela nivalis***

One seen by Mandy on 9/5 at Histria.

**Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes***

Singles at Vadu on 10/5, near Greci on 11/5 and in the Danube delta on 14/5, the latter appearing much healthier than the previous two.

**European Wild Cat *Felix sylvestris***

Two sightings in the delta, both on the afternoon of 13/5. The first was found by Zoli and his boat when they went to investigate what was upsetting the Hooded Crows. They expected an owl but instead found one of these sitting in what was presumably their nest. The second came an hour or so later and 3 km distant when our boatman spotted it sitting by the water's edge. It seemed completely at ease with us and remained while we took the boats in closer to it, but eventually lost patience with us and sauntered away. Both showed no obvious signs of introgression with domestic cat.

**Reptiles**

Spur-thighed Tortoise *Testudo graeca*  
 European Pond Terrapin *Emys orbicularis*  
 Balkan Green Lizard *Lacerta trilineata*  
 Balkan Wall Lizard *Podarcis taurica*  
 Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*  
 Dice Snake *Natrix tessellata*

**Amphibians**

Common Toad *Bufo bufo*  
 Green Toad *Bufo viridis*  
 Yellow-bellied Toad *Bombina variegata*  
 Marsh Frog *Pelophylax ridibundus*  
 Edible Frog *Pelophylax kl. esculentus*\*1

\*1 kl.=klepton= fertile hybrid of the Pool Frog (*Pelophylax lessonae*) and the Marsh Frog (*Pelophylax ridibundus*).

**Dragons & Damsels**

The following species were identified, others were seen but not sufficiently well to put names to.

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*  
 Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*  
 Southern Emerald Damselfly *Lestes barbarus*  
 Vagrant Emperor *Anax ephippiger*  
 Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*

**Butterflies**

The following species were identified. It seems certain that we overlooked many others – we just didn't have sufficient time to look at everything and butterflies probably lost out.

Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides podalirius*  
 Green-veined White *Pieris napi*  
 Small White *Pieris rapae*  
 Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*  
 Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*  
 Berger's Clouded Yellow *Colias alfacariensis*  
 Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*  
 Large Copper *Lycaena dispar*  
 Lesser Fiery Copper *Lycaena thersamon*  
 Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*  
 Silver-studded Blue *Plebejus argus*  
 Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*  
 Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*  
 Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*  
 Cardinal *Argynnis pandora*  
 Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia*  
 Glanville Fritillary *Melitaea cinxia*  
 Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*  
 Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*  
 Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*  
 Large Skipper *Ochlodes venatus*