

Rose-Coloured Starlings Pastor roseus at Cape Kaliakra

Report compiled by Ed.O'Hara with images by Comghal McQuillan and Ed.O'Hara

Foreward:

Initially I had planned to do this trip two years ago but due to family reasons I could only do so this spring and was joined by fellow birder Comghal McQuillan. Our guides were supplied by **www.neophrontours.bg** for their four day spring birding tour of the coastal areas of the Black Sea.

Sunday 20 May 2018: Sarafovo: Overcast / Sunny spells.

We flew out to Bourgas Airport the day before the trip began, so that we could 'rest up' before the four days of intensive birding began. We left Dublin at 06:00 and arrived in Bourgas at 12:00 [local time], roughly a four hour flight. Our hotel was the **Mirana Family Hotel** in Sarafovo, a 15 minute walk from the airport, which we did walk to, when we were asked to give some exorbitant fare for the five minute drive by the local taxi men.

Having checked in by 14:00 Comghal and I went for a walk along the beach in the direction of Bourgas City, to an old saltpan which appeared to be no longer in use, by the state of the buildings. This walk proved productive and Comghal started to notch up the first of his eventual 35 lifers for the trip. Olivaceous Warblers were singing all along the track, along with Golden Oriole, Yellow Wagtails feldegg, Common Whitethroat and Blackcap. A Booted Eagle flew over, and a White Pelican was sitting out in the sea, 200m from the marina. Several Red-Backed Shrikes were sitting high up in the bushes making photography much easier than expected.

At the saltpans itself there were a lot of people bathing in the pools, for medicinal reasons we were told, thus only a few birds about, with a female **Whinchat**, **Sand Martin**, **Red-Rumped Swallow** and several distant waders being birds of interest.



Red-Rumped Swallow Cecropis dauric

Day 1: Eastern Balkan Range

Monday 21 May 2018: Sunny 24C with some cloudy periods

This was the first day of our tour and *Dimiter Georgiev* of **Neophron Tours** picked us up at 08:15 after an excellent breakfast at the hotel. We headed north immediately towards the Eastern Balkan mountain range. Along the way we saw several **Red** -Backed Shrikes, Lesser Grey Shrikes and many **Turtle Doves**, **Corn Buntings** and **Black-Headed Bunting** and **Hawfinch**.

Our first stop was a small riverine valley with a small stream which provided some lush vegetation for **Sombre Tit**, a bird which we got only fleeting views. More showy was the **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** which flew within a few yards from us. Also present were

Raven, Sparrowhawk, Jay, Golden Oriole and Lesser Grey Shrikes. We continued further up the valley until we came to more open terrain and the birding just got better. Within a few minutes near the village of Kozichino we found Barred Warbler, Isabelline Wheatear, Northern Wheatear, Woodlark, Short-Toed Eagle, Northern Wheatear, Linnet, Red-Backed Shrike, Long-Legged Buzzard and Bee-Eaters.



E. Bonelli's Warbler Phylloscopus orientalis

After such a productive stop, we decided to head for lunch at a roadside café, located in a forest clearing. While we were having lunch, we were treated to some excellent views of **Spotted Flycatchers** that were nesting in a swallows'nest in the rafters of the café.

After lunch we visited the surrounding forest for our next set of targets and it wasn't long before we were looking at Semi-Collared Flycatchers, Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Syrian Woodpeckers.





Middle-Spotted Woodpecker Dendrocopus medius

Semi-Collared Flycatcher Ficedula semitorquata

Having had a brilliant afternoon's birding we headed north to our first night hotel in Kavarna, along the way we came past what looked like an old disused quarry and perched near the top, some distance from the road was a **Long-Legged Buzzard**.

The final stop was a Bee-eater colony near the road, no new birds, but we got close-up views of **Isabelline and Northern Wheatears**, **Yellow Wagtail** and ofcourse the **Bee-Eaters**.



Long-Legged Buzzard Buteo rufinous



Yellow Wagtail ssp. Feldegg

Day 2 : Cape Kaliakra / Lake Durankulak

Tuesday 22 May 2018: Sunny 25C, windy especially at the coast.

We started before breakfast, **05:30-08:30**, with an early morning visit to the Cape, before the tourists arrived. Well the early start was certainly worth it, three hours of brilliant birding, a spot where you keep your eyes pinned upwards as you never know what is about to appear. Driving towards the Cape, we saw three **Rollers** on the telegraph wires and several **Redbacked Shrikes** [RBS] the number of RBS in Bulgaria is amazing. As we entered the drive towards the Cape the birds soon began to show with **Isabelline / Northern Wheatears, Linnets, Bee-eaters, Common Whitethroat, Lesser Grey Shrikes** and overhead several flocks of migrating **Rose-Coloured Starlings**. When we arrived at the car park we immediately found one of the iconic birds for the Cape, **Pied Wheatear**. In addition was a very confiding **Black-Headed Bunting**.



Black Headed Bunting: Emberiza melanocephala



Pied Wheatear: Denanthe pleshanka

As we walked along the path to the end of the cape, we picked up the eastern race of Shag desmarestii, Alpine Swift, Yelkouan Shearwater, Black-Necked Grebe, Black-Throated Diver, Cormorant, Honey Buzzard, Hobby and amazingly Reed Warbler in the scrub at the side of the cliff. It was approaching breakfast time so we headed back to the hotel, what a fantastic few hours birding.

After breakfast **Dimiter** handed over the 'reins' as it were to his colleague **Mladen Vasilev** to guide us for the next three days of our four day tour. Mladen headed north to Lake Durankulak a small reed lined lake next the Black Sea coast, for thee iconic bird of the trip Paddyfield Warbler. On the way to the lake once again the usual suspects were seen ,Turtle Dove, Red-Backed Shrike, Roller, Golden Oriole and Lesser Grey Shrike. When we arrived at the lake it was clear there was still some late migration in progress with **Whiskered Tern, Collared Pratincole**, **Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper** and most remarkably coming in off the sea, two **Nightjars**, other waders were seen out at sea travelling north. We looked along the edge of the reeds for views of the **Paddyfield Warbler** but due to the high winds it took much longer than expected but eventually we got good views of this much sought after bird of Bulgaria.



Paddyfield Warbler Acrocephalus agricola

After Lunch we went to the back of the lake and got great views of Ferruginous Duck, Turtle Dove, Lesser Grey Shrike, Red-Backed Shrike, Spanish Sparrow, Corn Bunting, Great Reed Warbler, Yellow Wagtail, Golden Oriole and most unexpectedly a Steppe Buzzard hovering about 20metres from our vehicle.

Leaving Lake Durankulak we were very impressed by the birdlife of this small lake.



Alpine Swift Apus melba



Nightjar Caprimulgus europaeus



Steppe Buzzard Buten buten vulpinus

Day 2 [Contd]: Remnant Steppe Area

Mladen then took us to a small steppe area, typical of the vegetation before agriculture arrived. The speciality

birds in this terrain were the larks and wheatears.

It wasn't long before we were getting cracking views of Calandra Lark, Greater Short-Toed Lark, Isabelline Wheatear, Black-Headed Bunting, Linnets, Little Owl, Yellow Wagtail and a brilliant find by Mladen singing in small clump of knapweed, a River Warbler.

It had been a long day and so we decided to finish on a high with the River Warbler. A fantastic day;s birding. We headed back to our hotel in Kavarna where we looked forward to our evening meal and a pint of the local beer.



Calandra Lark Melanocorypha calandra

Day 3: Drive south to Bourgas along the coast

Wednesday 23 May 2018: Sunny 25C

After an early breakfast we drove southwards to our first stop, a private nature reserve at Albena. After a two hour walk through the forest we eventually caught up with the following **Black Woodpecker**, **Nuthatch** and **Short-Toed Treecreeper**. Forest birding is never easy but rewarding when you turn the audio into a sighting.

This was repeated at our next site, a forested area in the eastern Balkan Range. Mladen heard a one of my seven lifers for the trip, a **Grey-Headed Woodpecker** and after a fifteen minute search we eventually got good views of the birds. Also seen were **Short-Toed Treecreeper**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and **Syrian Woodpecker**.

We then visited a fresh water lake on the coast for marsh terns but unfortunately we dipped on both target species , Mladen had seen the terns here the previous week but they had obviously migrated north . However on the road down to the lake we saw Spanish Sparrow , Crested Lark, Golden Oriole, Pygmy Cormorant , Gloosy Ibis, Ruddy Shelduck, Little Egret and hunting around the lake area were Common Kestrels and Lesser Spotted Eagle.

The final stop of the day was to the day was to the Pomorie / Bourgas Lakes areas, which yielded two lifers for me Dalmatian Pelican and White Pelican along with Broad-Billed Sandpiper, Spoonbill, Little Tern, Ruff, Glossy Ibis, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Coot, Moorhen, Kingfisher, and Little Egret.

The bushes around the lakes had Olivaceous Warbler, Penduline Tit, Red-Backed Shrikes, Golden Oriole, Common Starlings, Great Tits, Goldfinch and Yellow Wagtail.

After another wonderful days birding we headed back to our hotel in Sarafovo



Pygmy Cormorant Phalacorax pygmeus



Grey-headed Woodpecker Picus canus



Red-backed Shrike Lanius collurio



Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

Day 4: Bourgas Lakes area and inland forest site.

Thursday 24th May: 23 C Sunshine with intermittent cloud

The final day of a fantastic tour began once more at the Bourgas Lakes area and the wonderful sight of hundreds of White Pelicans in the air migrating northwards to the Danube. The supporting cast wasn't bad either Dalmation Pelicans, Pygmy Cormorants, Little Terns, Little Bittern, Night Heron, Squacco Heron, Little Egret, Common Tern, Whiskered Tern, Penduline Tit, Crested Lark, Golden Oriole Red-Backed Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, Honey Buzzard and Lesser Spotted Eagle.



White Pelican Pelecanus onocrotalus

After spending a few hours in and around the lakes, we headed inland to a forest site about an hour from Bourgas and what a memorable stop, with four more year ticks for me as well as a 'lifer'.

It was a this stop in particular that Mladen's skill of bird finding was superb. He had been impressive over the previous days but at this site his ability to hear birds singing and find them, when Comghal and I struggled to hear anything, was something else. Within the space of one hour we had Ortolan Bunting, Lesser Whitethroat, Olive-Tree Warbler, Masked Shrike, also present was Woodchat Shrike, Golden Oriole, Green Woodpecker and Syrian Woodpecker



Olive-tree WarblerHippolais Olivetorum



Ortolan Bunting Emberiza hortulana

After lunch we went to a private fish farm but apart from Golden Oriole, Squacco Heron, Reed Warbler and Marsh Harrier no new birds were added to the trip. All in all we had a wonderful four days birding with Neophron Tours and our thanks go to Dimiter and Mladen especially for making it so memorable. A final total of circa 160 birds in four days. Superb.

List of Birds seen during stay in Bulgaria

English Name	Latin Name	Date	Notes
Swan, Mute	Cygnus olor	21-May	Seen at two locations
Goose, White-Fronted	Anser albifrons (russian)	24-May	One injured bird at private lake
Duck, Ferruginous	Aythya nyroca	Daily	At inland lakes
Duck, Gadwall	Anas strepera	24-May	Bourgas
Duck, Garganey	Anas querquedula	22-May	Lake Durankulak
Duck, Mallard	Anas platyrchynchos	Daily	At inland lakes
Duck, Pintail	Anas acuta	24-May	Bourgas
Pochard	Aythya ferina	Daily	At inland lakes
Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna	Daily	At inland lakes
Shelduck, Ruddy	Tadorna ferruginea	Daily	At inland lakes
Shoveler	Anas clypeata	24-May	Bourgas
Diver, Black-Throated	Gavia arctica	22-May	Cape Kaliakra : 2 birds
Grebe, Black-Necked	Podiceps nigricollis	22-May	Cape Kaliakra : 5 birds
Grebe, Great Crested	Crested Podiceps	24-May	Bourgas
Grebe, Little	Tachybaptus ruficollis	Daily	At inland lakes

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Shearwater, Yelkouan	Puffinus yelkouan	22-May	Cape Kaliakra : 50+ birds
Pelican, Dalmatian	Pelecanus crispus	24-May	Bourgas Lakes
Pelican, Great White	Pelecanus onocrotalus	24-May	Bourgas Lakes : 100's migrati
Cormorant, Pygmy	Phalacrocorax pygmeus	24-May	Bourgas Lakes
Cormorant, Eastern	Phalacrocorax ssp sinensis	22-May	Cape Kaliakra : 10 birds
Shag, Eastern	Phalacrocorax demarestii	22-May	Cape Kaliakra : 4 birds
Bittern, Little	lxobrychus minutus	24-May	Bourgas Lakes
Egret, Little	Egretta garzetta	Daily	At inland lakes
Heron, Grey	Ardea cinerea	Daily	At inland lakes
Heron, Night	Nycticorax nycticorax	Daily	At inland lakes
Heron, Purple	Ardea purpurea	Daily	At inland lakes
Heron, Squacco	Ardeola ralloides	Daily	At inland lakes
Stork, Black	Ciconia nigra	22-May	Eastern Balkan Range
Stork, White	Ciconia ciconia	Daily	Several locations
lbis, Glossy	Plegadis falcinellus	Daily	At inland lakes
Spoonbill, Eurasian	Platalea leucorodia	23-May	Bourgas Lakes : A flock of 24
Buzzard, Steppe	Buteo buteo vulpinus	22-May	Lake Durankulak
Buzzard. Common	Buteo buteo	22-Mav	Eastern Balkan Range

Latin Name

Buzzard, Honey Pernis apivorus Daily Several locations Buzzard, Long-Legged Buteo rufinus **Daily** Several locations Several locations Eagle, Booted Aquila pennata Daily Eagle, Spotted Lesser Aquila pomarina **Daily** Several locations Harrier, Marsh Circus aeruginosus **Daily** At inland lakes Kite, Black 24-May Bourgas: 1 bird Milvus migrans

Sparrowhawk Eastern Balkan Range Accipiter nisus 21-May Hobby Falco subbuteo 22-May Cape Kaliakra Kestrel, Common Falco tinnunculus Several locations Daily Coot, Eurasian Fulica atra Daily Several locations Moorhen, Common Gallinula chloropus Several locations Daily Avocet, Pied At inland lakes Recirvorostra avosetta Daily Pratincole, Collared Glareola pratincola 22-May Lake Durankulak 20+

Plover, Kentish Charadrius alexandrinus Pomorie Lake 23-May Charadrius hiaticula Plover, Ringed 23-May Pomorie Lake Plover, Ringed Little Charadrius dubius 23-May Pomorie Lake Pomorie Lake Dunlin Calidris alpina 23-May Greenshank Pomorie Lake Tringa nebularia 23-May Ruff Philomachus pugnax 22-May Lake Durankulak 10+ Sanderling Calidris alba 21-May Lake Durankulak

Pomorie Lake Sandpiper, Common Actitis hypoleucos 23-May Sandpiper, Curlew Calidris ferruginea Lake Durankulak 20+ 21-May Pomorie Lake Sandpiper, Green Tringa ochropus 23-May Pomorie Lake Sandpiper, Wood Tringa glareola 23-May

Limicola falcinellus

 Snipe, Common
 Gallinago gallinago
 24-May
 Bourgas Lakes

 Gull, Mediterranean
 Larus melanocephalus
 24-May
 Bourgas Lakes

 Gull, Yellow-Legged
 Larus michahellis
 Daily
 Several locations









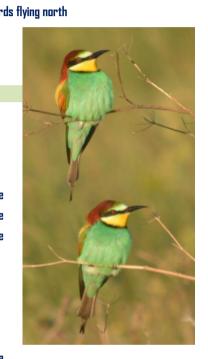
Sandpiper, Broad-Billed

English Name

Pomorie Lake

23-May

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English Name	Latin Name	Date	Notes	
Tern, Arctic	Sterna paradisaea	22-May	Cape Kaliakra	
Tern, Common	Sterna hirundo	Daily	At inland lakes	
Tern, Gull-Billed	Gelochelidon nilotica	22-May	Lake Durankulak 4 flying	j north
Tern, Little	Sternula albifrons	23/5 +24/5	At inland lakes	
Tern, Sandwich	Sterna sandvicensis	22-May	Cape Kaliakra	25
Dove, Collared	Streptopelia decaocto	Daily	Several locations	
Dove, Turtle	Streptopelia turtur	Daily	Several locations	
Dove, Rock	Columba livia	22-May	Cape Kaliakra	
Cuckoo	Cuculus canoris	Daily	Several locations	
Owl, Little	Athene noctua	22-May	Balchik	
Nightjar, Eurasian	Caprimulgus europaeus	22-May	Lake Durankulak 2 birds	s flying north
Swift, Alpine	Tachymarptis melba	22-May	Cape Kaliakra	
Swift, Common	Apus apus	22-May	Cape Kaliakra	1
Kingfisher, Common	Alcedo atthis	Daily	At inland lakes	
Bee-eater, European	Merops apiaster	Daily	Several locations	
Roller, European	Coracias garrulus	Daily	Several locations	7
Hoopoe, Eurasian	U рира ерорѕ	Daily	Several locations	
Woodpecker, Black	Dryocopus martius	23-May	Albena	
Woodpecker, Gt. Spotted	Dendrocopos major	Daily	Several locations	
Woodpecker, Green	Picus viridis	23-May	Eastern Balkan Range	
Woodpecker, Grey Headed	Picus canus	23-May	Eastern Balkan Range	Car
Woodpecker, Mid. Spotted	Dendrocopos medius	21-May	Eastern Balkan Range	10 10
Woodpecker, Syrian	Dendrocopos syriacus	23-May	Albena	
Lark, Calandra	Melanocorypha calandra	23-May	Balchik	
Lark, Crested	Galerida cristata	Daily	Several locations	100
Lark, Short-Toed Greater	Calandrella brachydactyla	Daily	Several locations	
Lark, Sky	Alauda arvensis	Daily	Several locations	
Lark, Wood	Lullula arborea	21-May	Eastern Balkan Range	
Martin, Crag Eurasian	Hirundo rupestris	21-May	Eastern Balkan Range	
Martin, House	Delichon urbicum	Daily	Several locations	
Martin, Sand	Riparia riparia	Daily	Several locations	
Swallow, Barn	Hirundo rustica	Daily	Several locations	
Swallow, Red-Rumped	Cecropis daurica	Daily	Several locations	
Pipit, Tawny	Anthus campestris	22-May	Lake Durankulak; one or	sand dunes
Wagtail, White	Motacilla alba	Daily	Several locations	1960
Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava feldegg	Daily	Several locations	
Blackbird	Turdus merula	Daily	Several locations	
Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos	Daily	Several locations	. 5 3
Thrush, Mistle	Turdus viscivorus	Daily	Several locations	
Thrush, Song	Turdus philomelos	Daily	Several locations	
Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla	Daily	Several locations	
Warbler, Barred	Sylvia nisoria	21-May	Eastern Balkan Range	
Warbler, Bonelli's Eastern	Phylloscopus orientalis	21-May	Eastern Balkan Range	The state of
Warbler, Cetti's	Cettia cetti	Daily	Several locations	S Va
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English Name	Latin Name	Date	Notes
Warbler, Marsh	Acrocephalus palustris	22-May	Balchik
Warbler, Olivaceous E.	Hippolais pallida	Daily	Several locations
Warbler, Olive-Tree	Hippolais olivetorum	24-May	Eastern Balkan Range
Warbler, Paddyfield	Acrocephalus agricola	22-May	Lake Durankulak :
Warbler, Reed	Acrocephalus scirpaceus	22-May	Lake Durankulak :
Warbler, Reed Great	Acrocephalus arundinaceus	22-May	Lake Durankulak :
Warbler, Willow	Phylloscopus trochilus	24-May	Bourgas Lakes
Whitethroat, Common	Sylvia communis	Daily	Several locations
Whitethroat, Lesser	Sylvia curruca	24-May	Eastern Balkan Range
Flycatcher, Semi-Collared	Ficedula semitorquata	21-May	Eastern Balkan Range
Flycatcher, Spotted	Muscicapa striata	Daily	Several locations
Robin	Erithacus rubecula sardus	Daily	Several locations
Stonechat, Eurasian	Sax.torquatus rubicola	22-May	Balchik
Wheatear, Isabelline	Denanthe isabellina	Daily	Several locations
Wheatear, Northern	Denanthe cenanthe	Daily	Several locations
Wheatear, Pied	Denanthe cenanthe	22-May	Cape Kaliakra
Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra	20-May	Bourgas
Tit, Blue	Cyanistes caeruleus	20-May	Bourgas
Tit, Great	Parus major	Daily	Several locations
Tit, Penduline	Remiz pendulinus	Daily	Several locations
Tit, Sombre	Parus lugubris	21-May	Eastern Balkan Range
Nuthatch	Sitta europaea caesia	21-May	Eastern Balkan Range
Short-toed Treecreeper	Certhia brachydactyla	23-May	Albena
Eurasian Golden Oriole	Oriolus oriolus	Daily	Several locations
Shrike, Grey Lesser	Lanius minor	Daily	Several locations
Shrike, Masked	Lanius nubelicus	24-May	Bourgas
Shrike, Red-Backed	Lanius collurio	Daily	Several locations
Shrike, Woodchat	Lanius senator senator	Daily	Several locations
Crow, Hooded	Corvus cornix	Daily	Several locations
Jackdaw	Corvus monedula	Daily	Several locations













Garrulus gl. atricapulus

Pica pica

Corvus corax

Sturnus vulgaris

Emberiza hortulana

Daily

Daily

Daily

Daily

24-May



Bunting, Ortolan

Jay

Magpie

Raven

Starling

Eastern Balkan Range

Several locations

Several locations

Several locations

Several locations