

Holiday Highlights  
Croatia and Slovenia  
17 – 25 June 2017

**Guides:** Roy Atkins, Milan Vogrin and Istvan Pentek

**Guests:** Alison Cawley & John Scotford, Joyce & Tony Sawford, Sheila Rodgers, John Duerden, Christine & Max Maughan, Heather Welcome and Jane Atkins

**Day 1:** We gather at Stansted Airport for our flight to Ljubljana where we arrive a little early. We are greeted by Milan, our local guide, along with an 'apprentice guide' called Istvan and our driver Janos. We are soon on our way heading quickly out of town and into the countryside and we pass agricultural fields but also woodlands and small villages before getting further out into the hills. Here the slopes of the hills become completely covered in forest and Milan explains that this is the second most heavily forested country in Europe after Finland.

We see remarkably few birds - the occasional Buzzard but little else. We pass through Bled which is a real tourist spot with the beautiful blue lake, the castle perched above it on a rocky crag and the well photographed island church. Milan points out the strange gondola like boats being rowed by a standing man at the back - a speciality here.

As we travel on, the countryside becomes even hillier and the snow-capped peaks of the Julian Alps are visible above the tree-line. We arrive at the hotel with a view out to the mountains and after a little time settling in meet up for our evening meal. A Spotted Flycatcher is nesting in the roof and also Tree Sparrows then, while we are eating, a family of Hawfinches fly in and land in the trees close by. We dash round the back of the restaurant and find them coming down to drink at a small pool in the back garden and we enjoy superb views of an adult and rather spotty looking young bird.

**Day 2:** The weather is beautiful, warm and sunny with just a few small clouds as we gather at the van for the short drive down to the lake. We are impressed with the beautiful scenery as we get out to take a walk round the edge of the lake. Snow-capped mountains peep up above the forest and we spot a Buzzard, a Heron colony on the far side, House Martins over the houses and several Mallards on the lake. There is an impressive shoal of fish in the shallows which turn out to be Chub - a bit of a surprise in a lake but Milan assures us that this is what they are and they are only just out of the river.

As we set off round the lake a couple of Hawfinches fly over but generally it feels extremely quiet for birds. The forest seems almost silent with just the occasional Chaffinch and Blackcap song but little else. We find Lesser Butterfly Orchid then a rather superb looking Nine-spotted Moth, which turns out to be relatively common. We come to a scrubby area nearer the trees and start finding a lot

of butterfly species including Heath and False Heath Fritillaries, Large Skipper, Speckled Wood, Peacock, Red Admiral, Black-veined White and Pearly Heath.

There is a rather surreal moment when Milan produces from his rucksack a tiny fishing rod! It looks like a child's toy but instead of going to the lake-side he approaches a small bush and starts very carefully easing the tip into the base of the bush. There is no bait, just a little lasso at the end and after a couple of attempts he suddenly lifts it with a brilliant green lizard wriggling from the line at the end. He takes it in his hand and is clearly well used to handling them as he soon has it held firmly but carefully in his fingers - a beautiful male Western Green Lizard! It is a superb colour, bright green with a blue throat and he shows it to us before placing it on the ground where we are surprised it does not just vanish into cover but runs a little way up the bank and stops, allowing for some rather more natural looking photos.

We walk slowly on checking out any butterflies that appear such as Marbled White, Dark-green Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Essex Skipper. There are also some very nice flowers such as Upright Clematis (*Clematis recta*), Red-leaf Rose (*Rosa glauca*) and Yellow Melancholy Thistle. We find a superb adult male Field Cricket like a big black beetle with a yellow band across the back. We are surprised when a Bullfinch flies into a bush right in front of us and Milan has a little look - calling us to see a nest with some almost full grown baby Bullfinches looking very stubby-billed and cute.

We walk back, getting a brief view of a Red-backed Shrike plus Buzzard and Hooded Crow then drive to a spot much higher up the slopes where the habitat changes completely to conifer forest with little meadows in amongst the trees. Here we enjoy lunch in a lovely flower meadow where we identify Fragrant Orchid, Arnica, Dark Rampions, Ragged Robin, Alpine Bistort and Vipers Bugloss.

We take a walk through the trees passing large patches of flowering May Lily and Purple Coltsfoot while in a boggy patch we find Cranberry and Round-leaved Sundew. We get fantastic views of a Crested Tit coming right down to eye level to check us out then in a large meadow find a Crab-spider eating a moth on an Alpine Bistort Flower. In the meadow, we add a couple of new butterflies - Dark-veined White and Woodland Ringlet. There are more interesting flowers here such as Aconite-leaved Buttercup, Small White Orchid and gorgeous Round-headed Rampions. We spot Goldcrest and more Crested Tits but apart from that the woodlands seem remarkably quiet. Back at the van we find a Southern Comma and very pretty moth called a Speckled Yellow.

We drive along the road a short way to make a stop at a very small pond right by the road. It is alive with Common Toad tadpoles but we soon spot our first Alpine Newt in there and once you get your eye in you realise there are lots!! Milan has a net with him and catches us a couple to look at in the hand - the females rather dark but the males with rather bluish spotty tails and brilliant orange bellies. We also catch a Common Frog and zipping around over the pond

are Broad-bodied and Four-spotted Chasers. A Common Hawker dragonfly has just emerged and takes flight for the first-time landing in the water!! We decide to rescue it and place it on a rock to dry out and recover.

Time is flying by so we turn back for home pausing when Milan brilliantly spots an Orange-Lily as we are driving past. It has a spectacular large brilliant orange flower - a real beauty! Max spots an Arran Brown from this spot as well as Common Blue - and we are already well over 20 species of butterfly today! We make a stop for people to photograph a couple of local men busy stacking hay into the hay drying racks to dry, a method used nowhere else in the world as far as Milan knows. Each rack consists of a little roof over a series of horizontal bars, one above the other, that the hay is hung over. Hay meadows, full of flowers, are still the thing here and it really makes you realise what we have lost in the UK now everything is silage! A Sparrowhawk circles up from the woodland as we watch.

Back at the hotel a few of us have a coffee and are delighted when a group of Hawfinches fly into the trees right by the restaurant! We enjoy superb full frame scope views and also find Spotted Flycatcher, Black Redstart and a couple of Jays as we eat our evening meal - it is so nice to be able to eat outdoors in the warmth.

**Day 3:** We take an earlier breakfast today as we want to get on our way towards the mountains and it is a two-hour drive. We watch the world go by as we drive along spotting occasional Buzzards, Hooded Crows and Ravens and suddenly there is almost an audible gasp from everyone as a spectacular mountain range appears from behind the nearer hills! It is a stunning view and we make a couple of stops to take photos as it just gets better and better.

At one stop we spot a couple of Kestrels, White Wagtail, Black Redstart and other bits and pieces and at another a few Mountain Ringlets as we continue onward and upward. We make another stop at a spot where a high wall protects the road and we jump out to search for a very rare species of lizard - Horvath's Wall Lizard. It is a rather smart looking little lizard with a broad dark band down the flanks making it very distinctive. It is amazing how Milan catches them quick as a flash so we can see them in detail, then places them carefully back on the wall and they don't even run away!

We continue on higher and higher and the scenery becomes more and more spectacular with mountains as far as the eye can see and some truly spectacular peaks all around. The road winds its way up and around hairpin bends and eventually we make a stop at the side of the road and get out to explore. We are bowled over by the flowers!! It is a true alpine garden all around with which no gardener could possibly compete. There are flowers everywhere! Brilliant blue Alpine Forget-me-nots, bright pink Moss Campion, delightful patches of Mountain Avens and brilliant yellow Geums, Globe Flowers and buttercups. Closer searching reveals Spring Gentian, Dolomite Saxifrage, Alpine Clematis,

Alpine Snowbell, Purple Coltsfoot, Yellow Veronica, Frog Orchids and lots more - it is almost overwhelming.

There are butterflies too including lots of whites that seems to be a mix of Green-veined and Black-veined Whites, Dingy Skipper, an Alpine Grizzled Skipper, lots of Small Tortoiseshells and plenty of Dewy Ringlets. Roy is astonished to suddenly find a snake! It looks rather like an Adder though subtly different and he calls Milan over. Milan catches it and after taking photos to help with the identification takes it to show everyone. There are two species that look like this - both beautifully marked with a zigzag pattern on the back - Adder and Asp Viper and they can be hard to tell apart when young like this one and after we release it, back where we found it, Milan checks the book and we are just a little disappointed it is the Adder - a species we have mostly seen in the UK - but a particularly beautifully marked one and it is actually the first snake Joyce has ever seen in the wild!

We enjoy lunch here and watch Alpine Choughs playing around on the slopes and some even come to take a bit of bread thrown down nearby providing fabulous close views. High in the sky a bunch more are joined by a flock of Alpine Swifts and down below us we get good views of a Water Pipit.

After lunch part of the group take a walk up to the coll, taking a fairly steep, rocky path up over the ridge and into a small valley then upwards to the coll. The rest of us take the easy life and are driven up in the bus!

The walkers start with some superb flowers including Globeflower, Verticillate Lousewort, Edelweiss and an absolutely stunning Red Vanilla Orchid!! This is a really beautiful species and not common, so is a particularly exciting find. Further up there are spectacular Trumpet Gentians and flowering Alpenrose. Scanning the hillside, they find Northern Wheatear, a female Ring Ouzel and a Water Pipit. They are delighted to spot a Stoat running across the rocks below then the first Alpine Marmots on the grassy slopes.

At the top of the coll the other half of the group enjoys watching Alpine Choughs as we look out at a truly incredible view! It is a very steep drop down the other side of the coll and poor Istvan finds it quite un-nerving! A group of artists are painting the view and tell us they have seen birds down one of the gullies, so we sit and scan the slopes down below - and eventually this pays off with some great views of Snowfinch as a pair is nesting in a hole in a cliff face on the far side. We also enjoy good views of Alpine Accentor with one bird sunbathing - almost lying on its side with its head cocked in a most peculiar way and tail fanned! Alpine Swifts zip overhead at incredible speeds and we scan the far slopes in search of Alpine Marmots. The flowers here are also stunning with lots more of the same plus we find white-flowered Séquiere's Buttercup, Long-flowered Primrose, masses of Alpine Forget-me-not, Yellow Veronica and many more. We finally find a couple of Alpine Marmots on the slopes and, though distant, they look great through the scope.

Once all back together again we enjoy a coffee while the new arrivals wait to see the Snowfinches and Alpine Accentor - then we start on our way back down, making a brief stop for Roy to see the Vanilla Orchid, a species he has always wanted to see. We spot another Marmot from here but realise we had better make tracks or we are going to be late!!

We make one last stop as we are passing back through Italy at a beautiful lake. Another chance for photos and also so we can say we really have set foot in Italy as Jane says you can't say that if you never got out of the bus! We have a quick look at the lake where Jane spots a Common Sandpiper and Roy hears a Firecrest singing! Milan plays a little of the song and it responds quickly, coming down to inspect us and we get absolutely superb views of this delightful little bird which even raises its crest as it tries to work out where this rival is! We drive on back to the hotel where we see a Crested Tit in the trees above the restaurant.

**Day 4:** Today is a travelling day but we have not got that far to go so we are including a few birding sites, starting with the lakeside down the road to search for Western Bonelli's Warbler. It is another absolutely glorious day, with wall to wall blue sky, as we drive down to the spot where we get out and walk to the wooded edge of the car park. Here we try playing just a little of the song and after a few moments we get a response! The song is very distinctive and a bird flies into the tree close by showing extremely well - a lovely little bird with pure white belly, green wings and rather grey head.

We get back on the bus and drive back up the road a little way parking by a church to have a look at the lake. It is a beautiful spot indeed and the church is pretty too. There is a Red-backed Shrike in the orchard by the church and also Jay and Spotted Flycatcher. Down by the lake we take photos of the view and also look at the fish - Chub, Perch and a tiny introduced species called a Pumpkinseed. Milan finds a Martagon Lily and we discover Masterwort and some beautiful Dark-red Helleborines in perfect flower.

We continue on our way making our next stop to take photos of the lake and the castle high on its rocky outcrop at Bled. It is a very touristy spot with people sunbathing along the shore or going out on the 'gondolas' but we add Mute Swan and House Sparrow to the list! We walk down to look at the famous island church and already the day is starting to get hot.

It is about an hour's drive to our next destination where, arriving in the large car park by the caves, we decide to have lunch first in the small park by the river. It is very pleasant though there are few birds around other than House Sparrows, Goldfinch, Blackcap and Blackbirds.

Once we have eaten we head over to the cave entrance where we queue for a while then meet our guide and follow him to the little train that takes you into the caves. We settle into the seats then rattle along the track at speed and wow - what astonishing scenes we pass through! The tunnel passes through narrow

bits and then wide chambers filled with stalactites and stalagmites. It is jaw-dropping and we pass some spectacular scenes as we go, including a chamber they call 'The Ballroom' with chandeliers and lights on the walls. The rocks and structures are beautiful, lit all along and the scale of it all is simply breath-taking. We alight at a platform and walk up through enormous chambers and astonishing scenes as we follow steps and walkways down and around passing thousands of stalagmites and stalactites. There are fins of rock thin enough for light to shine through, thick strangely shaped columns and all sorts of wonderful shapes - some like trees - others like daggers - some like enormous white chocolate fondues! Every turn reveals more astonishing displays and it is all on a scale that is hard to take in. At one point, we take a bridge over the trail then after a lot more walking realise we are now passing back under the same bridge! In honesty our guide is not particularly good, walking too fast then talking about everything before we catch up but we don't really care as the spectacle is what it is all about.

We do manage to catch up, however, when near the end he talks about the Olms - something we are all very keen to see. These are long, thin, skin-coloured salamanders that are 'neotic' in that they never come out on land like a salamander but stay in the immature stage and breed in that state - still keeping the external gills. They are very rare and only found in a few caves, some of which are in this complex but very hard to get to, so they have a few for people to see in a large aquarium. We are absolutely thrilled, despite the fact they are not in the wild, and what bizarre animals they are! Very slim and long bodied but short tailed and with bright red gills and a strange almost tubular snout and no eyes!! We feel very privileged to see them at all.

Back on the train we are transported back to the entrance and emerge blinking into the daylight and heat. We check into the hotel, which is right here, and the rest of the afternoon is free time. Some of us meet up by chance and enjoy a nice cold drink or ice cream and chat in the sunshine, others take a short walk by the river before we meet up again for our evening meal.

**Day 5:** Breakfast is a fabulous feast with so many options!! Everything from eggs and sausage to cereal, yoghurt, fruit, cake, nuts and seeds, cheese, sliced meat and more, so well fed we gather at the bus where a Serin is singing happily from the tree tops in the car park.

We make a stop along the road to have a look at a White Stork nest. There is an adult bird plus at least three chicks all of different ages and sizes, the biggest a lot bigger and more feathered than the smallest. A Honey Buzzard flies over very low providing excellent views.

We head out to a large lake that is not far from here. It looks huge on the map so we are a little surprised to discover it has gone! Milan tells us this often happens in the heat of summer but it is the first time he has ever known the lake to have disappeared so early in the year. It seems hard to believe that while the

lake floods right across the road we are on in the winter it can vanish like this leaving what looks like grassy fields instead.

We make our first stop beside a small bridge over a stream and a Green Sandpiper takes flight as we get out. Within what seems like seconds Milan has caught a Grass Snake and he places it on the ground in some short grass for us to photograph. There are plenty of Buzzards around and a pair of Kestrels and we get superb views of a Hobby. Birds are coming down to the water to drink and we watch Goldfinches, House Sparrows, White Wagtails and a few Linnets. We are particularly surprised to see a Fieldfare, though Milan explains that they breed in this area - which must be the most southerly site surely?

As well as birds, there are insects too including lots of Beautiful Demoiselles - gorgeous damselflies with iridescent blue bodies and dark wings. We spot Lesser Emperor flying back and forth and a club-tail type dragonfly called a Small Pincertail. Butterflies come down to drink too - Red Admiral, Southern Comma, False Heath Fritillaries, a Swallowtail and later a superb Lesser Purple Emperor.

We walk round to a nearby meadow where more butterflies are flitting around including Marbled Whites, Sooty Copper, Meadow Brown and more fritillaries. A Red-backed Shrike shows well and we get good views of a Yellow Wagtail of the Italian race, *M.f.cinereocapilla* known as Ashy-headed Wagtail plus Yellowhammer and Whinchat. We then take a walk up the road a little way spotting more Red-backed Shrikes and we hear both Sedge and Marsh Warbler singing. The Sedge is relatively easy to see but one of the Marsh Warblers flies back and forth when we play a bit of song, only landing briefly making it difficult to get a good view.

We drive on to a nice area of woodland where we get out and search around for orchids. There are plenty of well over Lesser Butterfly Orchids, a few with the last flowers still complete but much better is a Red Helleborine that Milan finds - a beautiful flower. It seems almost bird-less here but there are a few butterflies with Woodland Brown very common and we find a White Admiral and lots of Pearly Heaths.

We take lunch in the shade here though it proves a bad idea as we are constantly pestered by a Silver-washed Fritillary that wants to land on people - what a nuisance!! We find a couple of Birds-nest Orchids and a fabulous beastie - a Large Saw-tailed Bush-cricket, which looks quite fearsome! We hear a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Chaffinch and can't believe there is nothing else calling other than a distant Blackcap.

After lunch we try a couple of other spots along the 'lakeside' while Milan points out how high the water should be and tells us we could not even drive this road in the winter. The farmers seem to be treating it as a bonus crop and are even collecting the grass for hay!

At the next few stops we find more butterflies - Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Twin-spot Fritillary, Brimstone, Small Heath and a Ruddy Darter Dragonfly. We get fabulous views of Red-backed Shrike taking food to its nest and find Tree Pipit and Whinchat. We also finally find the lake - well a little bit of water with about three Grey Heron stood around the edge.

We decide, given the intense heat, to go and get an ice cream - which goes down very well. Driving on towards our next stop, Roy spots an animal in one of the fields. Something about it catches his eye and he calls for the bus to stop even though it is now obvious it is a cat. Something makes him think it might be a Wild Cat and we jump out to check and sure enough - it is a Wild Cat!! There are high fives all round as we get great scope views of this solid looking animal, grey with dark stripes and thickish tail with dark tip and we are grinning from ear to ear as we get back on the bus once it vanishes into the bushes.

Our final stop of the day is in another bit of woodland where we walk to view a natural bridge in the rock. It is an attractive spot and the woodland is lovely but again, birdlife is non-existent. There are a few nice flowers including a beautiful Purple Cyclamen.

**Day 6:** Another fabulous breakfast and we are on our way as today we have a long way to go. We watch the scenery go by as we travel down to the Croatian border then, passports checked, we drive down towards the coast before heading inland to the famous Plitvice Lakes. We make a brief stop for loo and find Littoral Bush Cricket and a rather superb Alpine Dark Bush-cricket by the car park. It is then a long drive onwards through rolling countryside, forest and fields until we arrive at the car park for the lakes.

We find there are no picnic areas in the car park so we eat lunch by the bus while Milan goes to get the entrance tickets. Once we have eaten we get on our way and it is quite a steep walk up above a string of lakes with shallow waterfalls in between them. The colour of the lakes is amazing - a wonderful crystal blue colour and, unusually, the waterfalls are covered in trees and scrub giving them a very beautiful look as the water is divided into hundreds of little rivulets as it cascades down. There are taller waterfalls too and it is all extremely beautiful with viewpoints from which we take a silly number of photos!

We continue on our walk up, stopping here and there to view, but spotting very little wildlife-wise as this is a very touristy place with hundreds of people following the same path. We spot Chaffinch, Blackcap and Nuthatch but the biggest surprise by far is an adult and young Grey-headed Woodpecker quite close to the path and showing well if briefly. The path then drops down to the lake and here we find lots of dragonflies, though all apparently the same species - Green-eyed Hawker (still called Norfolk Hawker in UK). There are lots of Beautiful Demoiselles too and lots of Chub in a shoal in the outflow from the lake.



It is very hot now and we are all feeling the effects so we enjoy an ice-cream before we board the boat for a lovely trip up the lake, passing more waterfalls though with the dry weather these have little water in them. We cross the lake on another boat then walk up lots of steps back up to the road where we wait for the bus. Here we find a singing Serin though it is hard to see in a conifer.

Once we get off the bus we walk back pausing for one last thing - a helleborine close to the path! We take plenty of photos to help us identify it later as it looks like one of that difficult group of species of which several look much the same. Back on the bus we identify it as Small-leaved Helleborine.

It is already after 5:00pm and we still have a way to go so we get on our way driving through some very pleasant countryside with the occasional Woodchat Shrike on the bushes. We then go through a 5km long tunnel through the mountains coming out the other side in much rockier looking terrain and with a view of the sea. We drop down to the coast spotting Yellow-legged Gull and Shag (Mediterranean race) on the shore before we reach our hotel. Here we are split between this hotel and another just down the road, also owned by the same people, but we all eat together here and what a feast it is - platters full of mixed grilled meats, veg, soup, salad, fries and more followed by ice-cream - fabulous!!

**Day 7:** We decide to have a 6:00am breakfast today so that we are using the cooler part of the day, but even before breakfast a quick look across to the trees and scrub the other side of the road produces Hoopoe, Turtle Dove and Red-backed Shrike while Nightingales are singing in the background. Milan also catches a Turkish Gecko, a delightful little beastie that we place in a tree where it poses nicely for photos.

We get under way and make the short drive to the local reserve - a beautiful spot with a trail that goes up a gorge. Almost as soon as we start walking we find a Western Rock Nuthatch - and soon realise there is in fact a family of them with young birds following the adults about. They are quite noisy and we get very good views. Crag Martins are flying back and forth overhead, plus Kestrels too, and then we are pleased to find a smart male Blue Rock-Thrush. A second bird appears high on the rocks and Milan draws people's attention to the pigeons flying around and perching on ledges high up as these are actually proper wild Rock Doves. A bit further up we get superb views of a colony of Alpine Swifts racing around in front of the cliff-face. What fantastic birds they are!!

At this point the path becomes much steeper and while most of the group are happy to continue, for some it is too steep and a small splinter group therefore stay down along the path and around the entrance road. We find Nuthatch in the trees as well as the Western Rock Nuthatches again and get a brief view of a Black Redstart, and then way in the distance Roy picks out a Black-eared Wheatear on the skyline and another Blue Rock-thrush.

There are quite a few butterflies around and we identify Eastern Rock Grayling, Meadow Brown, Wall Brown, Southern White Admiral, Scarce Swallowtail and we are astonished when John actually find a Cicada calling noisily from a tree trunk by the path! A Golden Oriole is calling but as the day heats up things become very quiet and we walk back to the car park and sit in the shade watching butterflies and enjoying an ice cream.

The main group continue upwards on quite a steep path and Milan tries playing a bit of Sombre Tit call and one comes in and shows quite well. Pausing here and there to check out butterflies including Lulworth Skipper, Chequered Blue and others they see more Nuthatches and Alpine Swifts then the view opens out and eventually the path levels out a little. There is a bit more flow in the stream here and at one point a natural pool and more trees here so there is a bit more shade for walking. A pile of horse poo produces several butterflies including Great Banded Grayling, Eastern Rock Grayling and Dryad and there are lots of tadpoles in the stream which Milan identifies as Italian Crested Newts. There are Grass Snakes here too and Milan amazes everyone by catching two beautifully marked ones with stripes down their backs! John gets to hold one and to everyone's surprise it regurgitates some Italian Newt tadpoles - which are still wriggling!! Milan puts them back in the water - a lucky escape for them indeed!! Meanwhile two hungry Grass Snakes have to find another meal.

At one spot there is a bramble with lots of flowers which is attracting lots of butterflies including Blue-spot Hairstreak, Speckled Wood, Chalkhill Blue, Marbled White, Silver-washed Fritillary, Southern White Admirals and more. Arriving at a café there are drinks and tables for lunch. Coming back down Milan finds some very nice lizards with red bellies and bluish heads called Dalmatian Algyroides - a great find!!

Now it is getting really hot and back at the bus there is tea and coffee before heading back to the hotel for a break in the hottest part of the day.

After our break we gather again at around 6:30pm and head out in the bus just a little way up the road to a lovely area of scrubby habitat with bushes, trees and gardens. Walking slowly along the road Milan finds a lovely little Praying Mantis, then we are distracted when we hear a Wryneck calling and try playing a bit of the call - which gets an immediate response with a bird flying in. It does not show well unfortunately and we just get brief views and flight views but it is a lot better than nothing! A Cirl Bunting a few minutes later proves a lot more co-operative and shows extremely well - but seems to have the little Praying Mantis in its bill!!

Further along the road, we find butterflies like Blue-spot Hairstreak and Great Banded Grayling and Sheila spots a Golden Oriole flying across. We try coaxing out Sardinian Warbler and eventually get a response with a bird flitting back and forth amongst the bushes but never really perching out properly. A little further on we are delighted when Christine spots a bird in the bottom of a tree that

turns out to be an Eastern Orphean Warbler. It looks like a huge Lesser Whitethroat and flits across the road where it is immediately joined by a second bird. We are surprised when we suddenly realise the second bird is much smaller and is actually a very pale female Eastern Subalpine Warbler - a very challenging identification indeed! As we head back for our evening meal we make a pause by the main road to check out a Turtle Dove on the wires - then as we eat we are pleased to see both Alpine and Common Swifts cruising round the hotel. The evening is finished with a superb looking Antlion which came flying into the restaurant - a beautiful spotted winged insect like a floppy dragonfly.

**Day 8:** After an early breakfast we gather at the bus for our trip out to Pag Island. Passing the large bay we spot Shags out on the buoys, Yellow-legged and Black-headed Gulls in the bay and after following the main road most of the way we take a detour to increase our chances of seeing more birds. On a minor road we can now stop to look when we spot things and we see several Red-backed Shrikes and then our first Woodchat Shrike, soon followed by several more and including some close views. We get superb views of Tawny Pipit and then start seeing Spanish Sparrows in the fields and around the houses. A Hoopoe flies by and perches in a distant tree for a little while.

We cross a bridge over to the island and as we get out of the van a Montagu's Harrier flies past. We find two immature Black-eared Wheatears and as we are watching them a Crested Lark flies in. Further along the road a superb male Montagu's Harrier appears flying parallel to the road and Milan encourages the driver to drive alongside at the same speed allowing us a fabulous view first from one side of the road then the other - incredible!!

We make a stop at a grassy area that really should be a lake and find several Bee-eaters on the wires and fence posts plus Skylark, another Montagu's Harrier, Rock Doves and a Spotted Fritillary before we move on to the large lake.

Here at the lake we scan the water finding Mute Swan, lots of Coots, Great Crested Grebe but better than these are several Pygmy Cormorants including a few that may be nesting in the low bushes. A Marsh Harrier is hunting over the reeds then suddenly Max calls that he and Christine have found a Bladetail!!! This is a superb dragonfly, not just very different to look at but a rare species with only a few sites in Europe and is a very exciting find indeed! We dash over and enjoy superb views - taking lots of photos and even getting the scope on it - a fabulous beastie. We find a Saddleback Bush-cricket here too, a strange looking animal, and a few ascalaphids, a yellow and black relative of the Antlion.

We walk down to the lakeside where, scanning from a hide, we spot a few more bits and pieces like Yellow Wagtail, Purple Heron, another Marsh Harrier, more Montagu's Harriers and Little Egret. We check out the dragonflies as we have one more rarity we are hunting here - the Black Pennant Dragonfly - but there is no sign. It is only as we are leaving and walking back to the bus that Christine suddenly notices a small dragonfly just ahead which lands in the very characteristic

pose of this species - tail almost vertical!! We gather round for photos of this second really localised rarity which behaves impeccably.

We travel on a little way pausing again when Jane spots a Little Owl on top of a dry-stone wall. It takes flight landing part way up another wall and we enjoy good scope views. A Crested Lark is perched very close by too. The scenery here is astonishing - it is like visiting the moon with bare rock in all directions and hardly any vegetation. We drive down through a small village before climbing up the other side pausing to take photos of the view. On the other side of this ridge the scenery changes and there is now much more vegetation again with scrubby bushes amongst the rocky scenery and Milan tells us this is much better for Rock Partridge and we scan the fields around and about but with no luck - not surprising given the intense heat - nothing with any sense would be sat out on the rocks in this heat!

We drive on spotting more Woodchat Shrikes, Corn Bunting and Montagu's Harriers then we stop for a coffee at a coffee place by the supermarket where we buy ingredients for lunch. The Spanish Sparrows are very tame here. We try to find somewhere for lunch with at least a bit of shade and pause at some trees - but we are a little put off by the presence of several naked people wandering around on the beach just the other side of the trees so we decide to move on. It is hard to find more trees but Milan knows a spot we might try and we drive on for quite a while wondering where as there seem to be no trees anywhere! In the end our lunch spot feels very sneaky, at the edge of a private camp ground with caravans and the like. We park in a bit of shade and quickly have something to eat and occasionally people appear and watch us as if wondering what we are doing but no-one chases us away or says anything. Even here a nudist wanders past which is almost enough to put you off your lunch so we concentrate on the scores of Spanish Sparrows in the trees here instead. When we head off we try playing a bit of Rock Partridge call at a likely looking spot but there is no response which is perhaps no surprise.

We have one last place to visit before turning round - a small pond with lots of dragonflies skimming the surface and three Pygmy Cormorants when we arrive providing astonishingly good views. There is Dabchick and Moorhen with chicks too but much better are the astonishing views of Alpine Swifts coming in to drink which was fabulous to watch. We see a Pallid Swift too and identify the dragonflies as Emperor, Black-tailed Skimmer, Scarlet Darter and Red-veined Darter. Also a Niobe Fritillary comes in to drink at the edge of the pond - a rather tricky species to identify which is similar to High Brown.

We start for home but decide to take in a large complex of salt pans on the way, and we drive very slowly along the edge scanning the water's edge for waders or anything else. They seem remarkably quiet except for plenty of Yellow-legged Gulls, but the inland side seems to be Red-backed Shrike central and they are perched every few yards. There are also lots of Bee-eaters here and we notice plenty of nesting holes in the sandy banks. On the pans are a few Little Egrets

plus a Redshank, Common Sandpiper, several Black-winged Stilts and a family of Shelducks - then at the far end a Kestrel disturbs a Ruff and two Little Stints and we find a few Kentish Plover. We get excellent views of a Tawny Pipit and find a singing Cicada.

We drive back to the hotel leaving ourselves plenty of time to freshen up before our evening meal but it is still hot and sticky as we eat on the veranda outside despite a slight breeze. We enjoy our meal then make a final run through the checklist before going round the group for our traditional round-up of the holiday where we go round each person asking for a favourite species or two from the trip, a favourite place and a 'magic moment'.

We decide each person can choose two species and wow - what a selection is chosen as we go round the group! Everything from flowers such as Dark-red Helleborine and Vanilla Orchid through butterflies and dragonflies and snakes to a great selection of birds but it is surely unusual for there to be a draw between a dragonfly and a bird for top species - Snowfinch and Bladetail both receiving four votes! The favourite place is a white-wash with Mangart Pass scoring very highly and receiving many more votes than anywhere else but Magic Moment is as ever less predictable. People choose all sorts - the flowers at Mangart, the gorge walk, the moment the two warblers appeared in one bush, the olms, Wild Cat, drinking Alpine Swifts and more but with three votes each we have another draw! The wonderful Montagu's Harrier we kept pace with is one of them and the astonishing caves at Postojna being the other. We finish by thanking Milan and Istvan for showing us such a fabulous variety of wildlife - so much variety in one week is astonishing.

**Day 9:** Today we head for home but we have enough time to take a walk before breakfast just out from the hotel. Over the road, we can hear invisible Golden Orioles calling then hear a Serin singing which we find in the tree tops and enjoy nice scope views. A Nightingale is singing and there are Goldfinches, Greenfinches and following the coast round we pause to look at a Red-backed Shrike then in the bay we add Common Tern to the list! There are plenty of Italian Wall Lizards, the males superb with green on their backs and heads. One is looking interested in a white butterfly and we look carefully at the details of it and conclude it is a Southern Small White! We also find a very nice Mallow Skipper which means we have added another two more species to the butterfly list making a total of 74 - an incredible tally for a European trip and perhaps the best on any Speyside Wildlife holiday. We walk on spotting a couple more Clouded Yellows more lizards and then a Hoopoe flies past and lands on the track ahead of us - a superb view at last!

We arrive back at the hotel to enjoy a very relaxed breakfast with no deadline for finishing then we have plenty of time to finish our packing and make lunch and load up the bus before we get on our way for the two-hour drive to the airport. On the way we make a stop for lunch at a service station then continue on our way reaching the airport with plenty of time to check in and relax before our flight back home

## BIRDS

Mute Swan  
Shelduck  
Mallard  
Common Pheasant (h)  
Little Grebe  
Great Crested Grebe  
White Stork  
European Shag  
Pygmy Cormorant  
Grey Heron  
Purple Heron  
Great Egret  
Little Egret  
Honey Buzzard  
Black Kite  
Marsh Harrier  
Montagu's Harrier  
Sparrowhawk  
Common Buzzard  
Eurasian Moorhen  
Eurasian Coot  
Black-winged Stilt  
Kentish Plover  
Common Sandpiper  
Green Sandpiper  
Common Redshank  
Black-headed Gull  
Yellow-legged Gull  
Common Tern  
Rock Dove  
Wood Pigeon  
Turtle Dove  
Collared Dove  
Cuckoo (h)  
Little Owl  
Alpine Swift  
Common Swift  
Pallid Swift  
Hoopoe  
Bee-eater  
Wryneck  
Great Spotted Woodpecker  
Grey-headed Woodpecker  
Kestrel  
Hobby

Red-backed Shrike  
Woodchat Shrike  
Golden Oriole  
Jay  
Magpie  
Yellow-billed Chough  
Jackdaw  
Rook  
Hooded Crow  
Common Raven  
Calandra Lark  
Crested Lark  
Skylark  
Crag Martin  
Barn Swallow  
House Martin  
Coal Tit  
Crested Tit  
Sombre Tit  
Blue Tit  
Great Tit  
Nuthatch  
Rock Nuthatch  
Wren  
Goldcrest  
Firecrest  
Chiffchaff  
Western Bonelli's Warbler  
Sedge Warbler  
Marsh Warbler  
Great Reed Warbler (h)  
Blackcap  
Eastern Orphean Warbler  
Subalpine Warbler  
Sardinian Warbler  
Spotted Flycatcher  
Robin  
Nightingale  
Black Redstart  
Blue Rock Thrush  
Whinchat  
Northern Wheatear  
Black-eared Wheatear  
Ring Ouzel  
Blackbird  
Song Thrush

Fieldfare  
Starling  
Alpine Accentor  
Yellow Wagtail  
Grey Wagtail  
White Wagtail  
Tree Pipit  
Water Pipit  
Tawny Pipit  
Yellowhammer  
Cirl Bunting  
Corn Bunting  
Chaffinch  
Greenfinch  
Goldfinch  
Bullfinch  
Linnet  
Serin  
Hawfinch  
House Sparrow  
Spanish Sparrow  
Tree Sparrow  
White-winged Snowfinch

## MAMMALS

Alpine Marmot  
Stoat  
Wild Cat  
Rabbit  
Wood Mouse

## REPTILES and AMPHIBIANS

Adder  
Grass Snake  
Western Green Lizard  
Horvath's Wall Lizard  
Italian Wall Lizard  
Dalmatian Wall Lizard  
Dalmatian Algyroides  
Turkish Gecko  
Common Frog  
Common Toad  
Olm  
Italian Crested Newt  
Alpine Newt

## **BUTTERFLIES (many thanks to Max and Christine for their help with this list)**

Large White	White Admiral
Small White	Lesser Purple Emperor
Wood White	Large Copper
Common Blue	Silver-washed Fritillary
Small Blue	Lesser Marbled Fritillary
Chalkhill Blue	Twin-spot Fritillary
Brown Argus	Swallowtail
Black-veined White	Small Heath
Dark-veined White	Sooty Copper
Green-veined White	Wall Brown
Large Skipper	Lulworth Skipper
Essex Skipper	Blue-spot Hairstreak
Small Skipper	Large Wall Brown
Pearly Heath	Chequered Blue
Woodland Ringlet	Southern White Admiral
Comma	Hungarian Glider
Southern Comma	Great Banded Grayling
Peacock	False Grayling
Small Tortoiseshell	eastern Rock Grayling
Red Admiral	Grayling
Marbled White	Dryad
Painted Lady	High Brown Fritillary
Heath Fritillary	Scarce Swallowtail
False Heath Fritillary	Clouded Yellow
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Spotted Fritillary
Dark-green Fritillary	Eastern Bath White
Orange tip	Small Copper
Alpine Grizzled Skipper	Cleopatra
Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper	Nettle-tree Butterfly
Duke of Burgundy	Meleager's Blue
Northern Wall Brown	Lesser Spotted Fritillary
Dingy Skipper	Niobe Fritillary
Dewy Ringlet	Speckled wood
Mountain Ringlet	Arran brown
Meadow Brown	Woodland brown
Mazarine Blue	Southern small white
Brimstone	Mallow skipper

## **DRAGONFLIES**

Azure Damselfly  
Blue Featherleg  
Beautiful Demoiselle  
Emperor Dragonfly  
Lesser Emperor Dragonfly  
Green-eyed Hawker  
Bladetail  
Four-spotted Chaser  
Broad-bodied Chaser  
Small Pincertail  
Ruddy Darter  
Red-veined Darter  
Scarlet Darter  
Black Pennant

## **OTHER INSECTS**

Nine-spotted Moth  
Speckled Yellow  
Burnet Moth  
Forrester Moth  
Cream-spot Tiger Moth  
Praying Mantis  
Rose Chafer  
Field Cricket  
Large Saw-tailed Bush-Cricket  
Alpine Dark Bush-cricket  
Littoral Bush-cricket  
Wart-biter  
Cicada  
Antlion  
Ascalaphid  
Saddled Bush-cricket  
Potter Wasp

## Flowers (many thanks to John Duerden for compiling this list of the flowers)

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Botanical Name</u>	<u>Remarks / Location</u>
Hop Hornbeam	<i>Ostrya carpinifolia</i>	Paklenica Gorge Car Park
Least Willow	<i>Salix herbacea</i>	Mangart
Net-leaved Willow	<i>Salix reticulata</i>	Mangart
Pellitory of the Wall	<i>Parietaria judaica</i>	
Alpine Bistort	<i>Polygonum viviparum</i>	Bohinj Lake
Glasswort	<i>Salicornia europaea</i>	Starigrad-Pelenica
Annual Seablite	<i>Suaeda maritima</i>	Starigrad-Pelenica
(Sandwort)	<i>Minuartia hybrida</i>	Paklenica Gorge
Cyphel	<i>Minautia sediodes</i>	Mangart
Alpine Mouse-ear	<i>Cerastium alpinum</i>	Mangart
Sand Spurrey	<i>Spergularia rubra</i>	Bohinj Lake
Bladder Campion	<i>Silene vulgaris</i>	
Moss Campion	<i>Silene acaulis</i>	Mangart
Forked Catchfly	<i>Silene dichotoma</i>	Paklenica Gorge
Red Campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>	
Ragged Robin	<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i>	
Yellow Water-lily	<i>Nuphar lutea</i>	
Globe Flower	<i>Trollius europaeus</i>	Mangart
Marsh Marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	
Monte Baldo Anemone	<i>Anemone baldensis</i>	Mangart
Bulbous Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus bulbosus</i>	
Aconite-leaved Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus aconitifolius</i>	Pokljuka
Sequier's Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus seguieri</i>	Mangart
Pyrenean Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus pyrenaicus</i>	Mangart
Common Poppy	<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>	
Long-headed Poppy	<i>Papaver dubium</i>	
Yellow Horned Poppy	<i>Glaucum flavum</i>	Pag Island
Upright Clematis	<i>Clematis recta</i>	(none climbing)
Traveller's Joy	<i>Clematis vitalba</i>	Paklenica Gorge
Alpine Clematis	<i>Clematis alpina</i>	Mangart
Forking Larkspur	<i>Consolida regalis</i>	Pag Island
Alpine Rockcress	<i>Arabis alpina</i>	Mangart
Roseroot	<i>Rhodiola rosea</i>	Mangart
White Stonecrop	<i>Sedum album</i>	
(Stonecrop)	<i>Sedum tenuifolium</i>	Bohinj Lake
Rough Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga aspera</i>	Mangart
Musky Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga moschata</i>	Mangart
Meadowsweet	<i>Filipenda ulmaria</i>	
Goatsbeard Spiraea	<i>Aruncus dioicus</i>	
Dewberry	<i>Rubus caesius</i>	
Common Lady's Mantle	<i>Alchemilla vulgaris</i>	
Alpine Avens	<i>Geum montanum</i>	Mangart
Mountain Avens	<i>Dryas octapetala</i>	Mangart
Sulphur Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla recta</i>	Cerknica
Bladder Senna	<i>Colutea arborescens</i>	Pag Island
Purple Milk-vetch	<i>Astragalus danicus</i>	Mangart
Spiny Rest-harrow	<i>Ononis campestris</i>	Pag Island



Kidney Vetch	<i>Anthylus vulneraria</i>	
Tall Melilot	<i>Melilotus altissima</i>	Cerknica
Birdsfoot Trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Bohinj Lake
(Birdsfoot Trefoil)	<i>Lotus collinus</i>	Paklenica Gorge
Tuberous Cranesbill	<i>Geranium tuberosum</i>	
Pyrenean Cranesbill	<i>Geranium pyrenaicum</i>	
Cypress Spurge	<i>Euphorbia cyparissias</i>	Bohinj Lake
Christ's Thorn/Jerusalem Thorn	<i>Paliurus spina-christii</i>	(with distinctive disc-shaped fruits)
Grape Vine	<i>Vitis vinifera</i>	Paklenica Gorge (Introduced)
Common Mallow	<i>Malva sylvestris</i>	Plitvicka
Mountain Pansy	<i>Viola lutea</i>	Mangart
Bavarian Masterwort	<i>Astrantia bavarica</i>	Bohinj Lake
Sickle Hare's-ear	<i>Bupleurum falcatum cernuum</i>	Paklenica Gorge
Dwarf Alpenrose	<i>Rhodothamnus chamaecistus</i>	Mangart
Oxslip	<i>Primula eliator</i>	Mangart
Long-flowered Primrose	<i>Primula halleri</i>	Mangart
Yellow Loosestrife	<i>Lysimachia patula</i>	Paklenica Gorge
Common Rock-rose	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	
Purple Loosestrife	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	Cerknica
Sanicle	<i>Sanicula europaea</i>	Cerknica
Field Eryngo	<i>Eryngium campestre</i>	Pag Island
Wild Carrot	<i>Daucus carota</i>	Starigrad-Pelenica
Alpine Snowbell	<i>Soldenella alpina</i>	Mangart
Spring Sowbread	<i>Cyclamen repandum</i>	Bohinj Lake
Purple Cyclamen	<i>Cyclamen purpurescens</i>	Cerknica
(Sea Lavender)	<i>Limonium ferulaceum</i>	Pag Island
Wild Privet	<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>	
Yellow Centaury	<i>Centaureum maritimum</i>	Starigrad-Pelenica
Spring Gentian	<i>Gentiana verna</i>	Mangart
Larger Bindweed	<i>Calystegia sepium</i>	Cerknica
Alpine Forgetmenot	<i>Myosotis alpestris</i>	Mangart
Viper's Bugloss	<i>Echium vulgare</i>	
Pale Bugloss	<i>Echium italicum</i>	Starigrad-Pelenica
Blue Bugle	<i>Ajuga genevensis</i>	Bohinj Lake
Hedge Hyssop	<i>Gratiola officinalis</i>	Cerknica (endemic)
Common Hemp-nettle	<i>Galeopsis tetrahit</i>	
Wild Thyme	<i>Thymus polytrichus</i>	
Clary	<i>Salvia sclarea</i>	
Mediterranean Woundwort	<i>Stachys cretica</i>	
Betony	<i>Stachys officinalis</i>	Bohinj Lake
Bittersweet	<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>	
Thorn-apple	<i>Datura stramonium</i>	Starigrad-Pelenica (Introduced)
(Mullein)	<i>Verbascum sinuatum</i>	
Large Yellow Foxglove	<i>Digitalis grandiflora</i>	Cerknica
Alpine Bartsia	<i>Bartsia alpinum</i>	Mangart
Leafless-stemmed Speedwell	<i>Veronica aphylla</i>	Mangart
Grey Field Speedwell	<i>Veronica polita</i>	Pokljuka
Yellow Veronica	<i>Paedarota lutea</i>	Mangart
Verticillate Lousewort	<i>Pedicularis verticulata</i>	Mangart
Yellow Rattle	<i>Rhinanthus major</i>	Pokljuka

Common Cow-wheat	Melampyrum pratense	Pokljuka
Small Cow-wheat	Melampyrum sylvaticum	Pokljuka
Matted Globularia	Globularia cordifolia	Mangart
Alpine Butterwort	Pinguicula alpina	Mangart
Hoary Plantain	Plantago media	
Common Valerian	Valeriana officinalis	
Marsh Valerian	Valeriana dioca	Cerknica
Field Scabious	Knautia arvensis	
Dark Rampion	Phyteuma ovatum	Pokljuka
Round-headed Rampion	Phyteuma orbiculare	Pokljuka
Clustered Bellflower	Campanula glomerata	Bohinj Lake
Nettle-leaved Bellflower	Campanula trachelium	Plitvicka
Spreading Bellflower	Campanula patula	
Hemp Agrimony	Eupatorium cannabinum	Cerknica
One-flowered Fleabane	Erigeron uniflorus	Mangart
Carpathian Catsfoot	Antennaria carpatica	Mangart
(Cudweed)	Filago eriocephalus	Pag Island
Edelweiss	Leontopodium alpinum	Mangart
(Fleabane)	Inula hirta	Paklenica Gorge
(Spiny Fleabane)	Pallensis spinosa	Pag Island
Lavender Cotton	Santolina chamaecyparissus	Pag Island
Arnica	Arnica montana	Pokljuka
Field Marigold	Calendula arvensis	Cerknica
Purple Coltsfoot	Homogyne alpina	Mangart (rare in Britain)
Marsh Ragwort	Senecio aquaticus	Cerknica
Yellow Melancholy Thistle	Cirsium erisithatus	
Illyrian Scotch Thistle	Ononpordum illyricum	Pag Island
Spanish Oyster Plant	Scolymus hispanicus	Pag Island (and elsewhere)
Goatsbeard	Tragopogon pratensis	Bohinj Lake
Chicory	Cichorium intybus	Widespread
Orange Hawkweed	Hieracium aurantiacum	Pokljuka
Flowering Rush	Butomus umbellatus	Cerknica
Martagon Lily	Lilium martagon	Bohinj Lake
Orange Lily	Lilium bulbiferum	Pokljuka
May Lily	Maianthemum bifolium	Pokljuka
Round-headed Leek	Allium sphaerocephalon	Pag Island
Common Spotted Orchid	Dactylorhiza fuchsii	Pokljuka
Red Vanilla Orchid	Nigritella rubra	Mangart
Fragrant Orchid	Gymnadenia conopsea	Pokljuka
Frog Orchid	Coeloglossum viride	Mangart
Lesser Butterfly Orchid	Platanthera bifolia	Bohinj Lake
Small White Orchid	Gymnadenia albida	Pokljuka
Red Helleborine	Cephalanthera rubra	Cerknica (extremely rare in Britain)
Small-leaved Helleborine	Epipactis microphylla	Plitvicka
Dark Red Helleborine	Epipactis atrorubens	Bohinj Lake (extremely rare in Britain)