

BULGARIA



"Raptors are a real highlight with exciting species such as Eastern Imperial, Lesser-spotted and Short-toed Eagles, Eleanora's and Red-footed Falcons, Levant Sparrowhawk, Long-legged Buzzard, Black, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures – wherever we are it is worth keeping our eyes on the skies." Roy Atkins

Dates Sat 20 - Sun 28 May 2017
 Price £2,295
 Deposit £450 Single Supp £250

Leaders Roy Atkins plus local guide
 Flights British Airways, scheduled
 Outbound: Morning, Heathrow-Sofia
 Inbound: Afternoon, Sofia-Heathrow
 Weather Generally very pleasant with plenty of sunshine but the chance of a shower or even rain in the mountains (12°-25°C), can be cool at dusk
 Walking Easy walking on level ground but bring waterproof walking shoes or boots
 Meals All included from lunch on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9
 Insects Mosquitos can be a nuisance in a few places so bring repellent
 Accom Twin and single rooms all ensuite in all hotels and lodgings, including Wild Farm and village houses for our last 3 nights. Wild Farm accommodation will be allocated on a first come basis.
 Group 12

Just some of what we hope to see:

Black Vulture	White Pelican
Lesser Spotted Eagle	Pygmy Cormorant
Eastern Imperial Eagle	Syrian Woodpecker
Long-legged Buzzard	Middle-spotted Woodpecker
Levant Sparrowhawk	Paddyfield Warbler
Red-footed Falcon	Olive-tree Warbler
Eleanora's Falcon	Pied Wheatear
Eagle Owl	Isabelline Wheatear
Caspian Gull	Semi-collared Flycatcher
Glossy Ibis	Masked Shrike
Black Stork	Rose-coloured Starling
Dalmation Pelican	Black-headed Bunting

Beautiful landscapes and fantastic birds – our round trip takes you to the best places, from the Eastern Rhodope Mountains to the Black Sea Coast, with steppes and wetlands in between

- Pelicans, Pygmy Cormorant, Glossy Ibis, storks and egrets
- Spectacular Eastern Rhodope Mountains
- Imperial Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Levant Sparrowhawk
- Variety of habitats - steppes, mountains and wetlands
- Most westerly Pied and Isabelline Wheatears and Paddyfield Warbler
- Masked Shrike, Olive Tree Warbler and Rose-coloured Starling
- A great holiday for the butterfly and dragonfly enthusiast

We'll fly to Sofia where we shall meet up with our local guide before heading to our hotel in the historic town of Tryavna.

2-3 Tryavna lies in the Central Balkan National Park and is surrounded by beautiful forests. A morning walk might add some higher elevation species to our list, such as Black Redstart, Coal Tit and Common Crossbill. It will take 5-6 hours to reach our next destination, Durankulak. Our lodge is situated on the shore of the famous Lake Durankulak, thus offering great opportunities to bird from the balcony before dinner: Spanish Sparrow, Black-headed Bunting and the black-headed race of Yellow Wagtail are garden birds here, while Bee-eater, Hobby, Calandra Lark and Little Owl can also be seen from our lodge.

Lake Durankulak is one of the western-most breeding sites of Paddyfield Warbler and while

looking for these lovely songsters, we might find many other species such as Ferruginous Duck, Pygmy Cormorant, Glossy Ibis and Whiskered and Black Tern. Further south is Lake Shabla, where we shall scan the shallow waters for waterfowl. In the past we have found Ruddy Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard, Collared Pratincole and Terek Sandpiper here.

It is a short drive from Durankulak to the steppe country above the spectacular cliffs of Cape Kaliakra. Here and at nearby Yailata, are the most western populations of Isabelline and Pied Wheatears.

We'll search for well camouflaged Stone Curlews and hope to see Rose-coloured Starling. The powerful song of Calandra Larks will be ringing in our ears and amongst them are smaller numbers of Short-toed Lark. On the cliff top stands a ruined castle, from where we can scan the sea,



"If you want to catch up on some east European birds this is the place - White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Ruddy Shelduck and Pygmy Cormorants, Lesser Grey and Masked Shrikes, Paddyfield and Olive Tree Warblers, Pied and Isabelline Wheatears and gorgeous Black-headed Buntings - the bird list is fantastic - oh and the butterfly list can be incredible too!" Roy Atkins



in search of Yelkouan Shearwaters and skuas, while Mediterranean Shags nest down below. Alpine Swifts nest on the cliff face and there is always a chance of a passing Bottlenose Dolphin.

4-5 Driving south we shall make a stop at the unique riverine forests of the Kamchia Reserve, where we'll look for Black and Grey-headed Woodpecker, White-tailed Eagle and Honey Buzzard. Further south, we explore the Oak woodland near Goritza, looking for Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Semi-collared Flycatcher and Short-toed Treecreeper.

By late afternoon we'll reach our accommodation near Bourgas. From here, we'll visit the extensive wetlands exploring the lakes, flooded meadows and marshlands of one of Europe's richest birding areas. We should see White Pelicans, Pygmy Cormorants and Dalmatian Pelicans, while the shallow lagoons of Atanasovsko and Pomorie attract shorebirds including Kentish Plover and Black-winged Stilt, plus we'll check through the passage waders in search of Broad-billed and Marsh Sandpiper. Mediterranean, Slender-billed and Little Gull can all be seen here, along with Gull-billed and other terns.

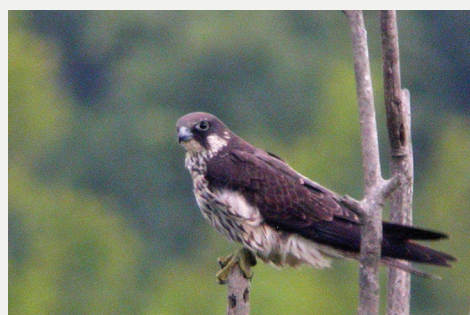
Nearby the reed-fringed Mandra Lake is also full of birds with Squacco, Purple and Night Herons, White-winged Black Terns and Savi's and Cetti's Warbler. Golden Orioles flash between the Poplar trees, from which Penduline Tits collect the fluffy seeds to build their intricate hanging nests. Glossy Ibis, Ruddy Shelduck, Spoonbill and many other species are all possible here.



6-8 We head west through beautiful scenery to the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. Raptors include Black Kite, Booted and Short-toed Eagle and Long-legged Buzzard. Roadside fence posts and wires are dotted with Rollers, Bee-eaters and Black-headed Buntings. Later we stop in the Sakar Mountains, located in the southeast of Bulgaria, where Imperial Eagle has its stronghold.

This is a great area for raptors, with Lesser-spotted, Booted and Short-toed Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk and Long-legged Buzzard all possible. We'll look for Olive-tree Warbler, Semi-collared Flycatcher, and Masked Shrike. We spend two full days in the volcanic landscape of the Eastern Rhodope Mountains, where beautiful flower meadows hold countless butterflies and dragonflies, including rare treats such as Freyer's Purple Emperor, Blue Argos, Little Tiger Blue and the mighty Odalisque! We'll visit feeding tables where Griffon, European Black and Egyptian Vulture feed on carcasses, along with White-tailed Eagle and sometimes Imperial Eagles coming in to join the throng. Black Storks nest nearby and the scrubby bushes and rocky landscape are home to Chukar, Black-eared Wheatear, Orphean, Eastern Olivaceous, Sardinian and Subalpine Warbler, Sombre Tit, Western Rock Nuthatch and Ortolan and Black-headed Bunting. Pallid Swift and Red-rumped Swallow nest in the gorges, as does Blue Rock Thrush.

9 If time allows, we'll enjoy more birding enroute to Sofia to catch our flight back to London.



Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** On arrival in Sofia we transfer to our hotel for our first night in the historic town of Tryavna
1 night at Hotel Familia, Tryavna
- Days 2-3** Exploration of the Central Balkan National Park, before moving on to the shores of Lake Durankulak and the spectacular cliffs of Cape Kaliakra
2 nights at Birding Lodge, Lake Durankulak
- Days 4-5** Heading south we'll visit the forests of the Kamchia Reserve, before making our way to our next base; Burgas and birding in Atanasovsko, Pomorie and Mandra Lake
2 nights at Hotel Mirana, Burgas
- Days 6-8** Drive to the Eastern Rhodope Mountains and Sakar Mountains within the southeast of Bulgaria for some great raptor watching
3 nights at Wild Farm and village houses, Madzharovo
- Day 9** Return to Sofia for our flight to Heathrow

Balazs Szigeti: White Pelicans
Roy Atkins: Pygmy Cormorants, Eleanora's Falcon
Simon Eaves: Little Bittern
Mark Denman: Freyer's Purple Emperor
Roy Cowley: Black-eared Wheatear