

BULGARIAN MOUNTAINS and GREEK WETLANDS TOUR

29 April – 11 May 2012 (Tour code: BMGW)

Leader: Assen Ignatov

PRICE: £1,250 (Based on a group of eight or more, a smaller group will incur a supplement).

This is an opportunity to combine not only two countries in one tour, but two contrasting habitats. In Bulgaria the Pirin Mountains will provide pine forest birds and in Greece there will be visits to wetlands including Kerkini Lake and the Nestos and Evros Deltas, the latter is an important bottleneck for migratory birds. Why not join us for this new adventure?

Our tour leader, Assen Ignatov, works for the National Museum of Natural History. He is a very experienced and knowledgeable guide, as well as being a gifted artist and excellent photographer.

Bulgaria's beautiful scenery, friendly people and excellent wine and food are additional highlights. The BBFS offers you the benefits of its over thirty-five years' experience of organising tours to Bulgaria. For your financial protection our tour operators, Balkania Travel Ltd. are licensed by the UK Civil Aviation Authority and bonded both by the CAA, ATOL 4465, and IATA, number 91-2 7839. Hotels are comfortable (and well situated for birdwatching!) but not luxurious. The holiday is on a Half-Board basis. Final details and bird lists will be sent to participants with their tickets approximately two weeks before departure. Our tour price includes a donation to the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds or other Bulgarian conservation organisation.

Projected Itinerary (which may be subject to adjustment)

Sunday 29 April Flight from Heathrow to Sofia.
Drive south through the Struma valley to Melnik, Bulgaria's smallest town, for a three night stay. Some birdwatching stops on the way, possible birds at Kresna Gorge include Subalpine, Orphean, Barred and Olive-tree Warbler, Woodchat Shrike, and at Ilindentsi Hills Raven, Rock Nuthatch and Blue Rock Thrush.

Monday 30 April Visits to Rozhen Monastery, Rupite (the crater of an extinct volcano) and Hotovo. Possible birds today include Long-legged Buzzard, Levant Sparrowhawk, Great Reed and Cetti's Warbler, Bee-eater, Hoopoe and Rock Sparrow.

Tuesday 1 May Drive to Kerkini Lake in Greece. Around the lake you might see storks, Dalmatian Pelican, Pygmy Cormorant, Spoonbill, terns, birds of prey including Osprey, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Red-footed Falcon, Cetti's and Savi's Warblers, Penduline Tit.

Wednesday 2 May Visit Hursovo and Petrovo and drive to Gotse Delchev for a one night stay, looking out for pine forest birds such as Rock Thrush, Red-rumped Swallow, Serin, Yellowhammer, Nutcracker and Rock Bunting.

Thursday 3 May Drive back to Greece to explore the high parts of Falakro mountain(1700m) for woodpeckers, Nutcracker, pipits, Golden Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, possibly Rock Partridge and/or Hazel Grouse. During the afternoon drive to one of the largest bird sites in northern Greece – the Nestos river delta. If time we may stop on the way at Nestos river gorge (an IBA) for possible Griffon Vulture, Rock and Blue Rock Thrush, Bee-eater. Three night stay at Keramoti.

Friday 4 and

Saturday 5 May Two days exploring the Nestos Delta. We shall be looking for waterfowl, waders, terns, gulls and shearwaters. Possible birds include Spur-winged Lapwing, Collared Pratincole, Dalmatian Pelican, Ferruginous Duck, Lesser Grey and Masked Shrike, and Levant Sparrowhawk.

Sunday 6 May Visit to the Evros Delta, one of the best birding spots in northern Greece, an important bottleneck for migratory birds in spring and autumn. Possible birds include Spur-winged Lapwing, Glossy Ibis, Collared Pratincole, Masked Shrike and Great Spotted Cuckoo. Two night stay in Dadia.

Monday 7 May A day at Dadia Forest, one of the richest places for raptors (36 species) in Europe. We hope to see Black, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Booted and Golden Eagles, Red-footed Falcon and buzzards. Other possible birds: Bonelli's, Subalpine and Orphean Warblers, and Sombre Tit.

Tuesday 8 May Drive back to Bulgaria for a two night stay at Ivalovgrad with birdwatching stops along the way.

Wednesday 9 May Visit to Ivalovgrad dam and surroundings, looking for Honey Buzzard, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Black Kite, Rock and Ortolan Buntings, Barred Warbler, Black-headed Wagtail and Hawfinch.

Thursday 10 May Drive to Koprivshtitsa, with birdwatching stops on the way, possible birds include Isabelline Wheatear and even Imperial Eagle. Farewell Dinner and overnight stay.

Friday 11 May Drive to Sofia airport for your return flight.

OUR PRICES INCLUDE:

- Return scheduled flights from Heathrow to Sofia. See separate Note about Flights.
- Half Board.
- Accommodation in small, friendly (often family-run) hotels with en suite facilities on a twin bedded shared occupancy basis.
- Airport Taxes.
- Coach for transfers and excursions.
- Specialist Bulgarian leader.
- Donation to Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds or other Bulgarian conservation organisation.

- All reserve entrance fees.

NOT INCLUDED:

- Lunches (about £4 - 5).
- Travel Insurance (compulsory). Balkania Travel can advise.
- Drinks and personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement (£96).

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Please note that from 1st September 2011, Balkania Travel Ltd. will have a new address: Office 3.08 Avanta Harrow, 79 College Road, Harrow, Middlesex. HA1 1BD. The phone numbers will remain the same.