

Romania's Danube Delta & Carpathian Mountains

Naturetrek Tour Report

20 - 29 May 2017



Wolf & Bear



Poppy fields



White-tailed Eagle



Black-crowned Night Heron

Report compiled by Rob Murray
Images courtesy of Steven Whitmarsh & Rob Murray



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Rob Murray (leader), Florin Stavarache (local guide) & Sorin (driver)
With 12 Naturetrek clients

Summary

From high mountain scenery with Wallcreeper to sandy shores of the Black Sea with waders; from Dracula's Castle to a medieval hill fortress; from rumbustious Brown Bears and snarling Wolf to endearing Sousliks and elusive Wildcat, Raccoon Dog, Golden Jackal and European Mink, this trip immersed us in the wildlife and culture of Romania via a mosaic of distinctive and diverse habitats. We saw an impressive list of Eagles included Lesser Spotted, White-tailed, Short-toed and Booted. It was the immense numbers of individuals of many species of aquatic birds that impressed so much in the Danube Delta. The sky was never clear of birds with scores of pelicans, herons, cormorants and terns continually passing over. Yellow and White Lilies adorned the lakes, giving a colourful backdrop as we drifted past Red-necked and Great Crested Grebes feeding and displaying. Brackish water reedbeds to the south held Paddyfield Warblers. A granite quarry produced Pied Wheatears and a Rock Thrush. The Steppe zones supported good populations of Isabelline Wheatear and Lesser Grey Shrike, with Rose-coloured Starlings. It was open Oak woodland where we found Levant's Sparrowhawk and Sombre Tit.

Day 1

Saturday 20th May

The flight from Heathrow was delayed by a lengthy queue of planes waiting to take off. As we approached Bucharest we looked down upon classic examples of oxbow lakes and incised meanders. Ancient tracts of riverbeds could even be discerned across cultivated fields where long abandoned loops of the river left scars on the ground below us. The plane began its descent to Bucharest and was about to touch down on the runway when suddenly the pilot aborted the landing and took the plane rapidly upwards with a roar and protest from the engines. Many passengers were alarmed. A massive thunderstorm was bearing down upon the airport and fierce winds deterred the pilot from attempting to land. We circled the storm but it stubbornly refused to budge and a second attempt was also terminated. Finally, on the third pass, the plane touched down safely.

Florin and our driver Sorin were anxiously waiting for us so that the long drive to Zarnesti could begin without further delay. A break at a service station gave us an opportunity to use the facilities and familiarise ourselves with Romanian coins. There were numerous Field Crickets chirping on the grassy bank which were a challenge to sneak up on.

Our hotel was situated in the village of Zarnesti, in a quiet part of town. After a swift allocation of rooms, we hungrily piled into the attractive dining room for what turned out to be supper. There was no mood for post supper chatter as everyone retired early to bed after a gruelling day of travelling.

Day 2

Sunday 21st May

A few keen clients ventured out at dawn for a circuit of the village and a visit to the Stork's nest. Black Redstarts were also observed. After a hearty breakfast we made our own sandwiches and prepared to leave for a short bus ride to the entrance to the impressive Zarnesti Gorge. Two Dippers and the expected Grey Wagtails were spotted on the ascent to the barrier. As we alighted the bus many spikes of Bird's Nest Orchid were seen

thrusting up through the Beech leaf litter. A steep and towering rock face confronted us which looked a highly suitable place for Chamois. Sure enough we picked out 3 ambling over the precipices without regard to the danger a slip would lead to. A number of very special flowers were in bloom including Alpine Bells, Hungarian Snowbells and Leopard's bane. Mouse-eared Saxifrage smothered some rock faces. As we approached the shrine to a drowned young couple caught in a flash flood the steep and sheer rock faces appeared to be prime habitat for Wallcreepers. We searched and scanned diligently for quite a while before one was spotted flying between buttresses. It was spectacularly cooperative and unwittingly afforded us magnificent views by crossing the track and descending to a wall of rock adjacent to where we were standing at no more than 12 metres away. It poked and probed the minutest of crevices to extract hapless invertebrates at various stages of their life history. The flashes of red as it flicked its wings and the butterfly-like flight were much appreciated by a captivated audience. We enjoyed this bird for a full 45 minutes before the realisation that it was lunch time surfaced and we abandoned our vigil to return to the bus for our packed lunch. Two chance encounters with mammals delighted a few lucky people. A Chamois strolled across the path and a Red Fox ambled down the track jaws firmly clamped around an item of prey that appeared to be a mole.

We were taxied to Bran via the scenic route skirting the edge of town off the main roads. Views of the surrounding mountains were panoramic. We emerged in the town of Bran but continued past this Draculean haunt down the valley and wound our way upwards to a viewpoint. The vista was beautiful with brooding clouds above the Brucegi range and fair-weather cumulus over the Piatra Craiului. Here we found a colony of Green-winged Orchids and a deceased Northern White-breasted Hedgehog. In Bran the group split to pursue individual interests. Some opted to enter the castle grounds; others toured the interior. Some went off in search of a museum; the profusion of tacky gift stalls thronging around the approaches to the castle provided amusement for others. A Great Spotted Woodpecker's nest with red-capped youngsters peering from the hole held the attention of the remainder of the group in the park. Spotted Flycatcher, Nuthatch and Serin were the pick of the birds seen. We reassembled at the bus at 5.30pm and returned to the hotel just 30 minutes later.

Day 3

Monday 22nd May

After a sustaining breakfast featuring a wide range of choices, we bundled into the bus and headed off to Coltii Chilieii. This footpath winds steeply up towards a monastery, but we sauntered along it, pausing frequently to look out for birds, flowers and animal tracks. It rained for most of the morning but that didn't spoil our enjoyment of this picturesque landscape. The tracks were rather muddy, but passable. A Grey-headed Woodpecker called but we couldn't locate it. Then the raucous calls of a Nutcracker attracted our attention towards the summit of a pine tree. Sure enough, the Nutcracker was sitting aloft and we saw it plucking a cone off at its base. Next we had outstanding views of a pair of Firecrests. Then a vociferous Black Woodpecker bounded across the tree tops. Green-winged Orchid was common here and interesting flowers such as Coral Root, Gentians, Flax and Thyme were also found. Elder-flowered Orchids were seen in patches higher up the trail. Inevitably a scrubby clearing held a pair of Red-backed Shrikes, and Tree Pipits entertained us with their incessant parachuting displays. The wet weather deterred all butterflies from flight except for a few Small Heaths. Not everyone made it to the cave beyond the monastery, but those that began the descent early were content to sit and admire the scenery whilst waiting for the rest of us.

We returned to the hotel for lunch at 1.30pm after a very pleasant walk. A short siesta was much appreciated before we set off for the Strombei Valley at 3.30pm. Just beyond Sinca Noua village there were marshy fields full

of Ragged Robin. A Lesser Spotted Eagle rose from the ground and flew off to a distant tree. A second one perched in a dead tree and allowed us prolonged views as it preened and surveyed its kingdom. We wandered up the track, marvelling at the flower-rich meadows of Yellow Rattle, False White Helleborine and Marsh Orchids. A trackside, water filled ditch was home to a number of Yellow-bellied Toads, some of which were calling. A Corn Crake called briefly and about five Hawfinches flew back and forth before one obligingly perched close enough to be appreciated.

At 6pm we met the ranger and he escorted us to the bear hide. Bear tracks were spotted in the mud. Before we had even crossed the river, we could see Bears on the wooded slopes and there were some already in the clearing. The ranger kept them at bay and we settled into the hide. More Bears came from the depths of the dark, dank woodland and began tearing at the offal and pig carcasses laid out for them. We hadn't long been settled into our seats when a Wolf stepped gingerly into the arena. It was clearly ill at ease and restless, wandering to and fro and keeping its tail firmly down and between its legs. It had a snarling contest with a Bear, but conceded to its greater bulk. It scavenged some offal but then retreated to a safer distance as more Bears descended the slopes and entered the clearing. At first there were five Bears feeding in view at one time and we thoroughly enjoyed observing their antics and interactions. Gradually they dispersed and the deep forest enveloped their dark shapes, but others emerged to replace them so that activity never fell to zero in the clearing. There was constant entertainment throughout the duration of our stay. The Wolf returned to the carcass intermittently and different Bears trundled in, bringing the total seen this evening to twelve individuals. Two Red Foxes joined the feast, one of which had no brush. Two Common Buzzards suddenly appeared and engaged in battle; then a Raven came down to feed. Once biscuits had been added to the menu, a Jay descended to pilfer a few. After two hours of sustained observation we were ushered out of the hide and back to the awaiting bus. The pent up feelings of elation burst out as everyone had been entranced by the continuous spectacle of so many carnivores in such close proximity. Roe Deer was noted as we drove back down the valley, then darkness fell and we returned to base feeling buoyed up by our success today.

Day 4

Tuesday 23rd May

We began the long journey to Tulcea at 8.30am, and it would be 6.30pm before we reached the mooring of our flotel on the Danube. Our first break was at a MOL garage beside an oil well where Crested Larks were probing amongst the gravel in the compound of the well. Corn Buntings were singing and a Yellow Wagtail of the race *superciliaris*, part of the Black-headed group and bound for south-east Russia, showed well. A Short-toed Eagle flew over.

For the following few hours we wound our way across a vast, flat plain. After this the birding hotted up! There were Rollers and Bee-eaters to enjoy. The next stop was at Amaru Lake where we encountered a taste of what was to come in the Delta. Whiskered Tern, Little Bittern, a range of herons and Glossy Ibis were seen well. Norfolk Hawker and Emperor Dragonflies patrolled the margins. Just before the village of Pitulicea, by the river, were embankments riddled with Bee-eater excavations and a few were in attendance.

A break at a service station in Slobozia unexpectedly produced some birds. On adjacent waste ground we watched a pair of Red-backed Shrikes, Black Redstart and Pheasant. Not bad for a petrol station! As we crossed a bridge over the River Danube a fisherman was waving some small fish at the traffic, hoping for a sale. The outskirts of the town of Tanderei displayed opulent houses with extravagant frontages built, allegedly, with ill-

gotten wealth. A roadside stop beside an immense lake called Hasarlac introduced us to more water birds. Croaking Great Reed Warblers sat up high in the still air, high above the multitude of Marsh Frogs whose calls they mimicked. Purple Herons paraded before us and Little Bitterns were regularly flying around giving good views. On the marsh behind us some Spoonbills were feeding and Ruddy Shelducks were resting. Over-flying Pygmy Cormorants were new birds for several people. Oleaster trees, False Acacia and Silver Lime grow here in profusion and serve the bees well. A little further on we passed a rookery where Red-footed Falcons were utilising old nests to rear their own young. There were Lesser Grey Shrikes here too.

On time, at 6.30pm, we arrived at Tulcea on the banks of the Danube. We joined our floating hotel and after a welcome drink of cherry brandy, we settled into our cabins and dinner was soon served. The flotel remained moored at the quayside for the night.

Day 5

Wednesday 24th May

The day began bright and sunny and stayed that way to give us a pleasant day. The first area of exploration of the immense network of waterways in the delta is known as mile 36 channel. Many species were in full song so the engine was cut and we drifted in silent appreciation of the chorus. Thrush Nightingales burst into song as we passed by but not one revealed its location. It was a similar story with Icterine Warbler, Olivaceous Warbler, Collared Flycatcher and Blackcap. The channel is lined with White Willow (*Salix alba*), Narrow-leaved Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and False Indigo (*Amorpha fruticosa*). Birds were constantly passing over and the species list grew rapidly. A Muskrat swam off after being seen by a select few.

As we turned off the main channel to cruise down a narrower, reed-fringed waterway known as the Sireasa Channel we began to encounter high numbers of aquatic birds. White Pelican, Glossy Ibis, Pygmy and Great Cormorants, Great and Little Egrets, Grey and Purple Herons, and Squacco and Night Herons were continually passing over or springing up from the river margins as we passed. We were delighted to see the rare Dalmatian Pelican at close range. Whiskered and Common Terns were abundant, especially in the sheltered lagoon area where Yellow Water Lilies and Water Soldier grow in profusion. This was also the habitat favoured by the exceptionally attractive Red-necked Grebes who readily consorted with Great Crested Grebes without interaction. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was seen in a dead tree, but at this stage Grey-headed was only heard. In this zone the trees are coated with Wild Vine (*Vitis sylvestris*). It was even smothering the wooden towers that resemble bird hides but were the remnants of military look-out post from the Communist era. Two White-tailed Eagles stood firm on the boughs of waterside trees despite our proximity. They gave splendid photographic opportunities.

We chugged along past Nebunu Lake which is a strictly protected area, barring entry. Lesser Emperor dragonflies and Beautiful Demoiselles were common here. The first of three Grass Snakes was found swimming at a considerable distance from the bank. Next we turned into the Sontea Channel and soon after made a right turn into the Carciovata Channel. The best bird here was a female Red-backed Shrike actually in the reedbed. A left turn brought us into Radacinos Lake which we crossed to gain access to the huge Fortuna Lake, which supports throngs of Yellow and White Water Lilies. In the exposed open water of the shallow lake it felt cool. There is a wide vista from here across to the Bestepe Hills. Turning right now brought us into the Cranjeala Channel. A Golden Jackal was detected in the long grass and riverside scrub. It stood and glared at us before slinking away. This channel is bordered by large, dead trees which were attractive to Rollers and Tree Sparrows.

A Hoopoe fluttered along the riverbank in a staccato rhythm. The next turn right effected our rendezvous with the 'mother ship' lying in wait in the broad Salina Channel.

After lunch, all three vessels sailed off together. Although this manoeuvre seemed unlikely to provide much by way of sightings, it did, in fact, lead to an unexpected and thrilling encounter with a Wildcat which was walking on the scrub-draped bank. Taking to the water again in the small boat, we headed for the Crisan Channel which runs past the village. The soil is very sandy here and has encouraged the growth of Tamarisk and Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*). It was a real thrill to see a Raccoon Dog at close range as it foraged on the riverbank beneath the trees. It made no obvious signs of recognition of our proximity and carried on with its search for a snack. A couple of European Pond Terrapins basked on a log in the sunshine.

At Crisan we made our final turn into the Old Danube Channel where the 'mothership' was anchored. It felt cold on top deck as the sun had descended, but that didn't deter Savi's Warblers from reeling their hearts out, nor a trisyllabic Cuckoo from causing much laughter as it stuttered its way through 'cu-cu-cu cuckoo'.

Day 6

Thursday 25th May

The rising sun's fiery rays reflected off the pale reed bases, which glowed warmly as the day sprang to life. Savi's Warblers resumed their demonstrative reeling and, at last, one was located and seen well as it grasped a reed stem and turned its head from side to side with beak widely gaped to throw the sound in all directions. A Bittern boomed the base notes to a fluty dawn chorus of Golden Orioles' sweet vocalisations. Suddenly a trail of bubbles ran out along the ripple-less surface of the channel just behind our moored flotel. The whiskered snout of an Otter broke surface and it drew in a fresh breathful of cool morning air. It swam across the channel and began foraging in earnest for a hapless fish. Two more Otters emerged to join the hunt for breakfast. The whip-like calls of a Spotted Crake were too brief to locate the source.

We departed at 8.30am to explore the Magearu Channel, which is narrower and fringed with yellow and white Water Lilies and flowering Water Soldier. A pair of Rollers were stationed in a dead tree beside their nest hole, but attention was diverted from them towards an elongated mammal, clearly a mustelid, which was swimming across the channel. It was a European Mink, one of the rarest and most difficult of animals to see. This was a very exciting moment! Further down the waterway a Bluethroat was heard singing. It was soon located, but didn't remain in view close enough to be fully appreciated by everyone. We had an interesting lesson about distinguishing between Yellow-legged and Caspian Gulls, and concluded that the loafing gulls by the boat contained representatives of both species.

At the junction with Channel Letea we disembarked and sauntered along a sandy ridge to a salty lagoon. Here we enjoyed excellent views of Collared Pratincole, Little Stint, Ruff, Kentish Plover, Little Ringed Plover and three Caspian Terns. A fortunate few saw a Golden Jackal bound away across the open flats. The village beckoned and as we followed the rustic path, we encountered a Syrian Woodpecker carrying a beak full of insects into its nest site. All of its diagnostic features were noted. Life in the village of Letea appeared tough, but the roughly built homes were enhanced with plots of sweet smelling carnations and other bright flowers in well-tended gardens.

Our boat had been moved to a pontoon at the end of the village to obviate the need to retrace our steps. As we weighed anchor a pair of Red-footed Falcons were spotted. They mated and sat close to each other giving us

exceptional views. A Squacco Heron was grappling with a huge Marsh Frog and showed great reluctance to flee at our approach. A half-completed Penduline Tit's nest was the next attraction.

It was 3pm when we returned to the mother ship for a late lunch, but coffee and biscuits had sustained us from late morning. After lunch we sailed along Dunarea Veche and noted two Dalmatian Pelicans perched on a log. Then we navigated Channel Bogdaproste and sailed into the wind across Lake Bogdaproste. This was most interesting because we unexpectedly connected with a Pallas's Gull in full summer plumage. That was another real treat. Taking the small channel to La Amiaza Lake brought us beautiful and graceful Black Terns dipping to pluck insects off the surface film. Opting to take the short channel to Trei Lezere Lake was fortuitous as we stumbled upon two dangling nests of Penduline Tits. One was occupied despite being incomplete. We could see the bird clearly at the entrance. The lake itself had masses of Water Chestnut plants and Water Soldier floating at the surface near to the exit.

Turning left into Lopantna Channel produced very little but in Eracle Channel we moored briefly for a spot of frog catching. A red, plastic top dangled from a fishing rod lured Frogs into an awaiting net. They were hauled up and scrutinised for diagnostic features enabling them to be assigned to species. This is not an easy task! We caught up with the 'mother ship' and boarded in time for dinner.

Day 7

Friday 26th May

Dawn brought a few keen observers to the upper deck to scan principally for Otters. One was seen briefly. A Lesser Grey Shrike amongst the Phragmites was a surprise. The planned route today was to continue along Eracle Channel to Virsina Lake, which we crossed and then turned left into Stapoc Channel. This led us to Razboinita Channel, then to our lunchtime rendezvous with the mother ship moored in Sontea Channel.

Channel 36 took us back to the main channel and on to Tulcea. Little Bittern, Savi's Warbler and White-tailed Eagle started us off, and then all of the, by now, very familiar species of herons were seen in good numbers. Both Red-necked and Great Crested Grebes were squatting on nests within the Lily pads. White Pelicans soared above; a flock of 70 and one of 57 being particularly impressive. We cruised through a wide variety of habitats ranging from the broad main channel to willow-lined, weed-choked, narrow channels and Water Lily-smothered lakes. The exceptionally clear water revealed a substrate festooned with shells and dense shoals of fish. Birds were again constantly passing over. A White-tailed Eagle was being mobbed by four comparatively tiny assailants which turned out to be Marsh Harriers dwarfed by the immensity of the eagle. The shallow Virsina Lake is well vegetated with Yellow and White Water Lilies and an extensive spread of Water Soldier. Once in Stapoc Channel, Rollers became conspicuous as they sat on the abandoned electricity wires. A White Stork's nest was visited as we watched by both adults, and the little wagging heads of chicks peered over the edge. The nest is of ecological importance as a base for breeding House Sparrows, Jackdaws and Starlings who had nests within the complex of sticks. A Grass Snake swam determinedly across the channel and several European Pond Terrapins were basking on logs in the sunshine. At last we caught a glimpse of an Olivaceous Warbler singing in a bush. Dalmatian Pelicans were cruising over singly at various points of our cruise. A pair of Grey-headed Woodpeckers seemed to find the concrete bases and indeed iron columns highly attractive. They were clamped to the sides giving us excellent views, free from the hindrance of branches. As we turned into Razboinita Channel with its profusion of Yellow Flag and purple-flowered Russian Comfrey, the lucky few at the front of the boat spotted an Otter.

After lunch we lounged on the top deck for the long sail back to Tulcea down Channel 36. A Booted Eagle leisurely flying overhead was the pick of the sightings on this final stretch of our exploration of the Danube. We docked at 6.30pm and after a stroll along the quayside as far as the exhibit of a 1930's steam engine, we returned for dinner and our last night on the boat.

Day 8

Saturday 27th May

We left the floating hotel at 8am and boarded the bus to begin a full day of birding. Steppe countryside was our first habitat today. The Deniz Tepe Hill rises above the plain and has rocky outcrops scattered over the short grassland. As we drove down the approach track, typical open country birds were soon in evidence. Tawny Pipit, Isabelline Wheatears tending recently fledged young, Northern Wheatear, Corn Bunting and gorgeous Black-headed Bunting had us looking in all directions. A few Ortolan Buntings teased us a little by continually flying out of binocular range. Spanish Sparrows were nesting in the pylon framework. It was raining but we continued to explore the foothills by walking up the trail to the left. A Hoopoe was calling from the top of a stanchion and we could see it lowering its head as it "ooped". A Pied Wheatear was spotted on a rock at the top of the hill, but it didn't remain on view for long. Suddenly a low but fast flying flock of Rose-coloured Starlings sped past and over the col. Shortly afterwards another flock followed the same track. There were about 30 birds involved in this movement. Two European Hares bounded away as we decided to go no further and returned to the bus. Brief views of Calandra Lark were enjoyed by some of the group.

In view of the inclement weather we decided to by-pass the Babodag Forest as no raptors would be flying. Instead we made straight for the Black Sea coast near Vadu, which was further south and more or less rain-free. Just before Babodag town there was a substantial Bee-eater colony in a wall of sandstone. Rollers were also in attendance.

The narrow road to Vadu passed some fields where freshly cut hay had been baled and at least 30 Red-footed Falcons were circling above or hovering. This was a spectacular sight. The first lagoon by the derelict mineral extraction factory supported an interesting variety of birds. Avocet and Black-winged Stilt were joined by Little Stint and two Curlew Sandpipers, one of which sported its breeding finery. The adjacent lagoon was a swirling mass of about 1000 Little Gulls, mainly in first-summer plumage, but with a few adults mixed in. It was a magnificent spectacle. Red-crested Pochards were new for the trip, as were the Paddyfield Warblers that were singing from the reed tops and giving excellent views: they prefer the shorter reeds. The most seaward lagoon had sandbanks with nesting Avocets and throngs of Common Terns. Collared Pratincoles stayed well out on the marsh.

As we drove down the sandy, bumpy track to the sea we passed swards of Loose-flowered Orchids whose very tall spikes were most conspicuous. A line of poles offshore provided perches for Great White Pelicans and Cormorants. A Dalmatian Pelican also flew over. Souseliks emerged from their burrows once the rain had stopped. We saw a youngster leaping about and a few adults standing upright on their hind legs like miniature Meercats.

We made a short detour on the way back to Tulcea to admire a 14th century castle and its impressive view across Lacul Razelm. It was of great interest to see how the geomorphology of the vicinity had changed since the building of this fortification. The sea formerly lapped at the base of the hill upon which it was built, but a sand

bar cut off the tide and land was reclaimed. We could have spent much longer here to learn of its history but it would be 8pm by the time we reached the hotel in Tulcea, so we had to depart.

Day 9

Sunday 28th May

Our first stop this morning was to the west of Tulcea near to the village of Parches. A rough track wound around a hillside cloaked in short grasses and wild flowers which concealed the burrows of endearing Sousliks. These ground squirrels stand erect like miniature Meercats and scamper off if they are alarmed. One wasn't quick enough to avoid falling prey to a Booted Eagle which swooped down and seized it. As the eagle plucked at the hapless Souslik, Magpies and Hooded Crows descended to attempt to steal fragments from it. Steep sandbanks formed a perfect residence for hole-nesting species. Bee-eaters and Rollers cavorted above and a Kingfisher flashed past. It had presumably claimed an area of the bank to excavate its own burrow amongst the equally vividly coloured Bee-eaters and Rollers. It was a thrill to witness the aerial display of Rollers who rolled and tumbled from a height to plunge into the sand pits. Twisting and looping in the air ensured that their bright iridescence gleamed in the sunlight. Tree Sparrows noisily flitted along the rim of the chasm whilst the high pitched ping of Penduline Tits and reeling of Savi-s Warblers seeped into our consciousness from across the marsh below. The view from this colline was far reaching across marshland and terraced hillsides. Scanning the sky from such a location is certain to be profitable. A flock of 53 Great White Pelicans circled in a thermal and drifted off without so much as a wingbeat.

The Somava Forest flanks gently rolling hills with Oak, Hornbeam and Wild Pear. These were the dominant species in this heavily grazed area. Immediately we encountered three Sombre Tits calling and flying between trees. Under the bridge spanning a modest stream, the unoccupied nest of a Red-rumped Swallow clung precariously to the roof. An Ortolan Bunting, fresh from its ablutions, selected a perch at head height on which to rest whilst it preened and dried out. A pair of Levant Sparrowhawks had no sooner started to circle in the lower spirals of a thermal, hoping to gain height, when a pair of Hobbies lunged at them viciously and successfully drove them away. A Long-legged Buzzard and a Lesser Spotted Eagle crossed the air space to which our attention had been drawn by the battle of the raptors. Another sizeable flock of Great White Pelicans flew over with the minimum expenditure of energy and effort. There were in excess of 100 in the flock.

It was an hour's drive to the Macin Mountains which rise to 467 metres and are composed of granite, which is still quarried today in some areas. On the way we stopped to buy bags of freshly picked cherries and saw the Frontier Police stopping and checking vehicles for illegally caught fish. Our approach to the mountains was via the village of Greciz which is 10 kilometres from Macin town. Upon arrival it was deemed time for lunch so we selected a shady area beneath some trees and tucked in. Fortunately, one of us remained vigilant and perceived another Levant Sparrowhawk and a Honey Buzzard, followed by Booted and Short-toed Eagles. Isabelline Wheatears abound in this Steppe-like habitat and have to share it with Sousliks. One Isabelline Wheatear chased a Souslik for some distance, dive-bombing it as the bewildered Souslik fled for its life.

The final port of call for today was a mainly disused quarry complex known as Turcoaia. Granite blocks were strewn in rubble heaps and perched upon one such outcrop stood a magnificent singing Rock Thrush. It stayed on view in the same vicinity for simply ages. Nearby were six Pied Wheatears with their strikingly black and white plumage. The appearance of a Long-legged Buzzard on the skyline temporarily diverted attention away from the star attractions. The huge Sand Martin colony at the entrance to the quarry was a hive of activity. As we

descended in the bus past a newly planted vineyard, a Red Fox stood its ground and looked back at us over its shoulder in the classic fairy-tale pose of this sly opportunist. We arrived back at the hotel early for once!

Day 10

Monday 29th May

Opportunities for birding today were restricted to what could be seen with the naked eye from the bus, as we journeyed back to Bucharest on the brightest, hottest and sunniest day of the trip. The usual fare of Bee-eater, Roller, White Storks on nests, Red-footed Falcon, Booted Eagle and assorted oddments were noted. Even a Roe Deer was spotted in a vineyard. The usual road to the airport was gridlocked so we avoided the delay by going into Bucharest and approaching the airport from a different direction. Apart from the Parliament buildings and the National Theatre, we didn't see very much of the city.

British Airways were still suffering from computer difficulties so the flight to London was delayed by about one and a half hours. Once back in the UK another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	May									
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				✓	✓		✓		✓	
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>						2		✓		
4	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>				5						
5	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓			1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>								1		
8	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>				5						
9	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>								5		
10	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				1	✓	✓	✓		✓	
11	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>				2	✓	✓	✓	2	3	
12	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>										
13	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	3			1	1	4			2	1
14	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>					✓	✓	✓			
15	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		5	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				7	✓		✓	✓		
19	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>						H				
20	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>				✓		✓	✓			
21	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			
22	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	1			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
23	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	3		1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1
24	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
25	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		1
26	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓		
29	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	May									
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		1	2		1				1	
32	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>				1					1	
33	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>			2						1	
34	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>							1		2	1
35	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>									3	
36	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1		1	1			1	
37	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
38	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>					4	1	3			
39	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>									3	
40	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1	7	✓		1		1		
41	Corn Crake	<i>Crex crex</i>			H							
42	Spotted Crake	<i>Porzana porzana</i>						H				
43	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
44	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
45	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				3	1	✓		✓		
46	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>						4		✓		
47	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
48	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>						2		4		
49	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>						4		4		
50	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>								✓		
51	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>						✓		✓		
52	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>								2		
53	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>						✓		✓		
54	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>						20		✓		
55	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
56	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>								✓		
57	Pallas's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus</i>						1				
58	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>						✓				
59	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	2			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>						3				
61	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>				2	✓	✓	✓	✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	May									
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
62	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>					1			1		
64	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>					1	7				4
65	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>					1		4			
67	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	1		1		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
68	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>				5				4	4	
69	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		H	1	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	1			1						
72	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>		5								
73	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					✓		✓		✓	
76	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>				✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
77	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>				2	✓	1	2	✓	✓	
78	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>									1	
79	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>					1	2	H			
80	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>						1			1	
81	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		5	1			1	H		1	
82	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>			1				1		H	
83	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>			1		1	2	5			
84	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1	1	3	3	1	3	2	2	1	1
85	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>				1		2	1	50		2
86	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	
87	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>			8	6	2	1		✓	✓	
88	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>				3	1		1	✓	✓	1
89	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>				H	3	✓	✓		✓	
90	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓						
91	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
92	Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>			3							
93	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May									
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
94	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	1	1	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		3	2							
97	Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>		2	4							
98	Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>									3	
99	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		1								
100	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>				1	✓	✓	✓			
101	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	5		✓	✓	✓		✓	
102	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>						2	H		H	
103	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>					H	H	1			
104	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>									1	
105	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>								✓	✓	
106	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>				2				✓		
107	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>								✓		
108	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
109	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
111	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>					✓					
112	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>						1				
113	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H	1		H	H	H			
114	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		2								
115	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>				6	✓	✓	✓	✓	H	
116	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>						2	2			
117	Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>								2		
118	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>					H	3	H	H		
119	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>							1			
120	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>					1		H			
121	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>					3H	1	1			
122	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			H		H	H	H			
123	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>			H		H	H	H			
124	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				H						
125	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			2							

	Common name	Scientific name	May									
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
126	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H	H							
127	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H								
128	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		2	1							
129	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>		1								
130	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>					H					
131	Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>				15					30	
132	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
133	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1	2	✓						✓	✓
134	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>		✓								
135	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	H	1	3							
136	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			2							
137	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		2	1		2					
138	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		H								
139	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>							1			
140	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>					H					
141	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>					H					
142	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>										
143	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		4		1						
144	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>					1	H				
145	Common Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>										1
146	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>									✓	✓
147	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>									✓	✓
148	Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>									1	6
149	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		2								
150	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
151	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>									✓	✓
152	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		5		1	✓	✓			1	✓
153	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>				1				1	✓	
	Black-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>				✓					✓	
154	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		6	4							
155	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		4	2	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
156	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>									3	

	Common name	Scientific name	May										
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
157	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			✓								
158	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	H			1		H	
159	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			5		2						
160	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓								
161	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>									✓		
162	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓		1					✓	
163	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		3									
164	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>			✓	✓					✓	✓	✓
165	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			2								
166	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>									✓	2	
167	Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>									2		
168	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>							5	4			

Mammals

1	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>			3								1
2	European Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>			12								
3	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>					1	1					
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		1	2								1
5	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>									3		
6	Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>		3									
7	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>						3	3				
8	Musk Rat	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>					1						
9	Souslik	<i>Spermophilus citellus</i>									5	✓	
10	Northern white-breasted Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus roumanicus</i>		1D									1D
11	Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>			1								
12	Raccoon Dog	<i>Nyctereutes procyonoides</i>					1						
13	Wildcat	<i>Felis sylvestris</i>					1						
14	European Mink	<i>Mustela lutreola</i>						1					

Amphibians

1	Yellow bellied Toad	<i>Bombina variegata</i>			✓								
2	Marsh/Pond/Edible Frog	<i>Pelophylax sp</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	May									
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
3	Fire bellied Toad	Bombina bombina				H		H				

Reptiles

1	Grass Snake	Natrix natrix persa				3		3				
2	Slow Worm	Anguis fragilis			1							
3	European Pond Terrapin	Emys orbicularis					2	5				
4	Sand Lizard	Lacerta agilis									1	

Butterflies

1	Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓								
2	Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>		✓	✓							
3	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
4	Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>									✓	
5	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>				✓						
6	False Comma	<i>Nymphalis vaualbum</i>			✓							
7	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>						✓			✓	
8	Woodland Grayling	<i>Hipparchia fagi</i>			✓							
9	Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tagis</i>		✓								
10	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamis</i>		✓	✓	✓						
11	Wood White	<i>Leptidia synapsis</i>		✓	✓							
12	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓								
13	Marsh Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>			✓							

Moths

1	Speckled Yellow	<i>Pseudopanthera macularia</i>		✓								
2	Latticed Heath	<i>Chiasmia clathrata</i>		✓								
3	Yellow Shell	<i>Camptogramma bilineata</i>									✓	

Dragonflies & Damselflies

1	Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>			✓							
2	Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>				✓						

	Common name	Scientific name	May										
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
3	Norfolk Hawker	<i>Anax isoceles</i>			✓							✓	
4	Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Agrion virgo</i>				✓							
5	Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>			✓				✓				
6	Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma najas</i>							✓				
7	Variable Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion pulchellum</i>							✓				
8	White-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum albostylum</i>						✓					
9	Dark Spreadwing	<i>Lestes macrostigmata</i>									✓		