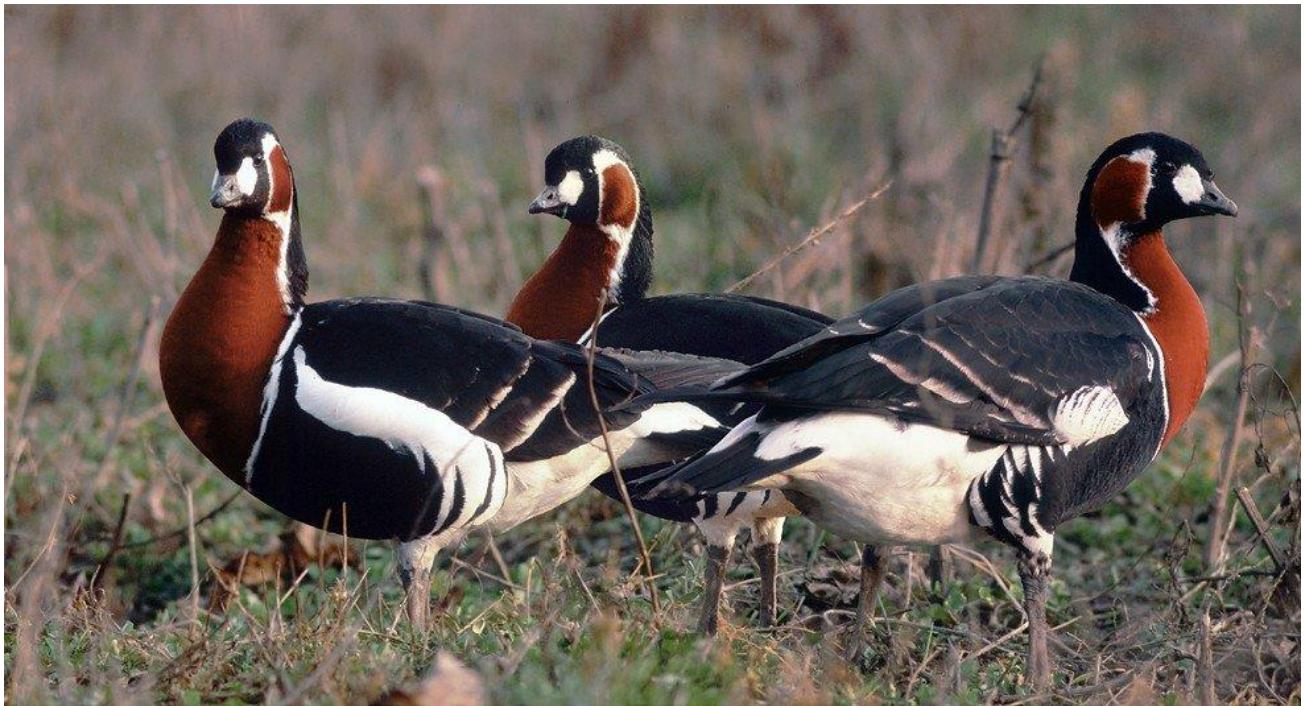




## BULGARIA: WINTER BIRDING WONDERLAND

4 - 11 FEBRUARY 2021



**Red-breasted Goose** is the chief target on this trip.

This tour encompasses the best of Bulgaria, and indeed eastern European birding, during the winter months. While winter birding lacks the sheer diversity of the spring tour, it brings with it the vast numbers of geese and other waterfowl that make use of this small area in Eastern Europe to overwinter. High among these are large numbers of **Red-breasted Geese**, a globally threatened bird, along with the likes of **Smew**, **White-headed Duck**, and both **Tundra** and **Whooper Swans**. Aside from the truly impressive numbers of waterfowl, the key specials of Bulgaria and indeed, most of Europe are still on the cards and should still be seen. These are **Grey-headed**, **Black**, **Syrian**, and **Middle-spotted Woodpeckers**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Rough-legged** and **Long-legged Buzzards**, **Calandra Lark**, **Sombre Tit**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, and **White-tailed Eagle**.

Other key advantages of this tour are:

- Short traveling and a high diversity and numbers of birds.
- All of the important observation points (lakes) are relatively small and easily accessible in winter conditions.
- The highest concentration of waterbirds - around Lake Burgas (up to 230 000 Geese) and Durankulak Lake (up to 250 000 Geese), compared to their area.
- The brackish and freshwater lakes situated near the Black Sea Coast attract a high diversity of birds – up to 150 species for the tour.

## **Itinerary (8 days/7 nights)**

### **Day 1. Arrival**

The tour begins in Varna, Bulgaria. We suggest arriving the previous day to allow for a smoother introduction to the tour, to try and account for any possible flight disruptions (highly unlikely), and to ensure you are well rested. In the morning we then transfer a short distance northward up the Black Sea coast to Kavarna, where we will base ourselves for the next three nights. We will have most of the day available to explore this north-eastern region of Bulgaria, which is the main wintering grounds for the sought-after **Red-breasted Goose** – typically making use of the various agricultural fields around to roost and feed within. We will concentrate on geese/waterfowl today as we get acquainted with the area. The scenery from the hotel is spectacular and not to be outdone, with the glittering blue sea and the nearby hills and valleys. Numerous flocks of geese can often be seen to fly or circle over the hotel as well.

Overnight: Guest House Nash Dom, Kavarna Каварна

### **Day 2. Kavarna and Kaliakra**

After breakfast we will visit the Kaliakra Nature Reserve, together with the Bolata Valley and the village of Kamen Bryag. The main habitat around here is steppes, or grassy plains. The grassy plains are interspersed with scrub and small stunted trees. The area is also traversed by surprisingly deep valleys. The coast is rocky, with vertical cliffs falling away from over 100 meters into the clear depths of the Black Sea. Here we will have more opportunities to observe **Red-breasted Goose**. We should also see **Eurasian Wren**, **Dunnock**, **Short-eared Owl**, **Greater White-fronted Goose**, **Calandra Lark**, **Crested Lark**, and many other species. After lunch we will make our final visit of the day to the Topola cliff, where we hope to see **Eurasian Eagle-Owl**.

Overnight: Guest House Nash Dom, Kavarna Каварна

### **Day 3. Durankulak Lake and surroundings**

A trip to Durankulak Lake and its surrounding areas will take up our day. A large sandy beach separates the lake from the sea. The lake with its extensive reedbeds and open water is one of the most important wetlands for breeding and migrating birds. Here one can observe the greatest concentrations of the globally threatened **Red-breasted Goose** in Europe (up to 53 000 individuals in 2013) and of **Greater White-fronted Goose** (at times up to 250 000 individuals). Other interesting and likely sightings are also the globally threatened **Lesser White-fronted Goose, Long-legged Buzzard, Rough-legged Buzzard, Calandra Lark**, and other species.

Overnight: Guest House Nash Dom, Kavarna Каварна

### **Day 4. Kavarna to Pomorie**

Today we transfer to the southern Black Sea coast. We will cross the Stara Planina Mountain (Balkan mountain range), which at this last part of it sweeps down and touches the sea. Our first short stop for the day will be at the forests of the Baltata National Reserve near Albena, where we will search for **Grey-headed** and **Black Woodpeckers**. The next stop is for our lunch break at a local restaurant at the village of Goritsa. On the hills on the upside of the road there are oak forests. Interesting birds around here are, **Great Spotted, Middle Spotted, Lesser Spotted, and European Green Woodpeckers** and **Short-toed Treecreeper**. Our last stop before arrival is at the village of Banya, where we can observe various **Buntings (Black-headed, Cirl, Corn, Ortolan), Brambling, Sombre Tit, and Woodlark**. In the late afternoon we will be arriving at the town of Pomorie, where we will be based for three nights at a local hotel.

Overnight: Pomorie Поморие

### **Day 5. Pomorie**

After breakfast at the hotel our birding will begin at the nearby salt works – Atanasovsko. We are going to visit the freshwater Lake Vaya as well. Year-round dozens of rare and interesting species of birds can be seen here. Those of greater interest during the winter season are **Dalmatian Pelican, Pygmy Cormorant, White-headed Duck** (all three are globally threatened species), **Smew, Eurasian Bittern, and Great Egret**. Large numbers of various shorebirds can also be expected, such as **Pied Avocet**, various sandpipers and plovers, and the likes of **Water Pipit** and **Eurasian Penduline Tit**.

Overnight: Pomorie Поморие

### **Day 6. Pomorie and Burgas**

After breakfast we will continue our observations in the Burgas region. We will visit the protected areas Lake Mandra, Bay of Chengene Skele, and Foros Bay, which are inhabited by a number of locally and globally endangered species. During this day we expect to see a similar suite of species as on day 5, together with **Pallas's Gull, Whooper Swan, Tundra Swan, and White-tailed Eagle**.

Overnight: Pomorie Поморие

### **Day 7. Pomorie to Sofia**

After some morning birding we transfer to Sofia. During the transfer we will stop en route for any possible species still missing, such as **Sombre Tit**. We will arrive in the afternoon and, providing time is available, will explore the foothills of the Vitosha Mountain National Park.

Pine-clad slopes adorn this large massif, and the specials here are **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Red Crossbill**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Common Firecrest**, **Goldcrest**, and various woodpeckers.

Overnight: Vitosha Витоша

### **Day 8. Departure**

After an early breakfast we will climb up to an altitude of about 2000 meters and explore the Vitosha Mountain National Park. Here we will again search for **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Red Crossbill**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Common Firecrest**, **Goldcrest**, and various woodpeckers, along with other species such as **Rock Bunting**, **Eurasian Bullfinch**, **Golden Eagle**, and **Willow and Coal Tits**. Following lunch we will transfer to the Sofia airport, where the tour ends.

*Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.*

**Duration:** 8 days/7 nights

**Group size:** 4 – 8

**Date:** 4 - 11 February 2021

**Start:** Varna, Bulgaria

**End:** Sofia, Bulgaria

**Price:** €1798 per person sharing (6 – 8 participants)  
€2240 per person sharing (4 – 5 participants)

**Single Supplement:** €149

#### **Price includes:**

All ground transport

All accommodation

Full-board – with packed lunch where necessary

English-speaking guide

Reserve entrance fees

#### **Price excludes:**

Personal insurance

Alcoholic beverages

Gratuities

Laundry

All items of a personal nature

International flights