



**BULGARIA: WINTER BIRDING
WONDERLAND**

4 - 11 FEBRUARY 2021



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

This tour encompasses the best of Bulgarian, 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**.



*We should find smaller numbers of **Red-breasted Geese** among the many **Greater White-fronted**.*

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.
- Huge concentrations of waterbirds – around Lake Burgas (up to 230 000 Geese) and Durankulak Lake (up to 250 000 Geese).
- 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 to 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 its 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



The huge Eurasian Eagle-Owl is usually seen on this tour.

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 (330 feet) into the clear depth 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



Grey-headed Woodpecker — one of the many woodpeckers we should encounter on this tour.

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



*The various lakes and bays hold decent numbers of **White-tailed Eagle**.*

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
Dates:	4 - 11 February 2021
Start:	Varna, Bulgaria
End:	Sofia, Bulgaria
Prices:	€1798 per person sharing (6 – 8 participants) (2021) €2240 per person sharing (4 – 5 participants) (2021)
Single Supplements:	€149 (2021)

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