BIRDING TOUR BULGARIA AND ROMANIA: BIRDING THE BALKANS IN SPRING

13–25 MAY 2027
11–23 MAY 2028
11–23 MAY 2029

*The huge **Dalmatian Pelican** is usually seen well on this tour.*

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Overview

This birding tour encompasses the majority of species-rich Bulgaria, along with the mighty Danube Delta in neighboring Romania. It offers a good chance of finding several tough and localized European birds, along with providing some great scenery and culinary delights!

Bulgaria and Romania both sport bird lists of around 400 species (following International Ornithological Congress (IOC) v14.2 taxonomy as of August 2024) with the most productive time of year being spring, after the arrival of many sub-Saharan migrants. Our tour, being timed to witness the peak of this spring migration phenomenon, will also be combined with expert local guides and a comprehensive itinerary, and will result in a great bird list of around 200 species.

Some of the target birds for this trip include **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Ferruginous Duck**, numerous shorebirds (waders), and gulls (such as **Pallas's Gull**, **Caspian Gull**, and **Mediterranean Gull**), and many raptors, including **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, **Booted Eagle**, **White-tailed Eagle**, **Egyptian Vulture**, **Cinereous Vulture**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Lesser Kestrel**, and **Levant Sparrowhawk**.

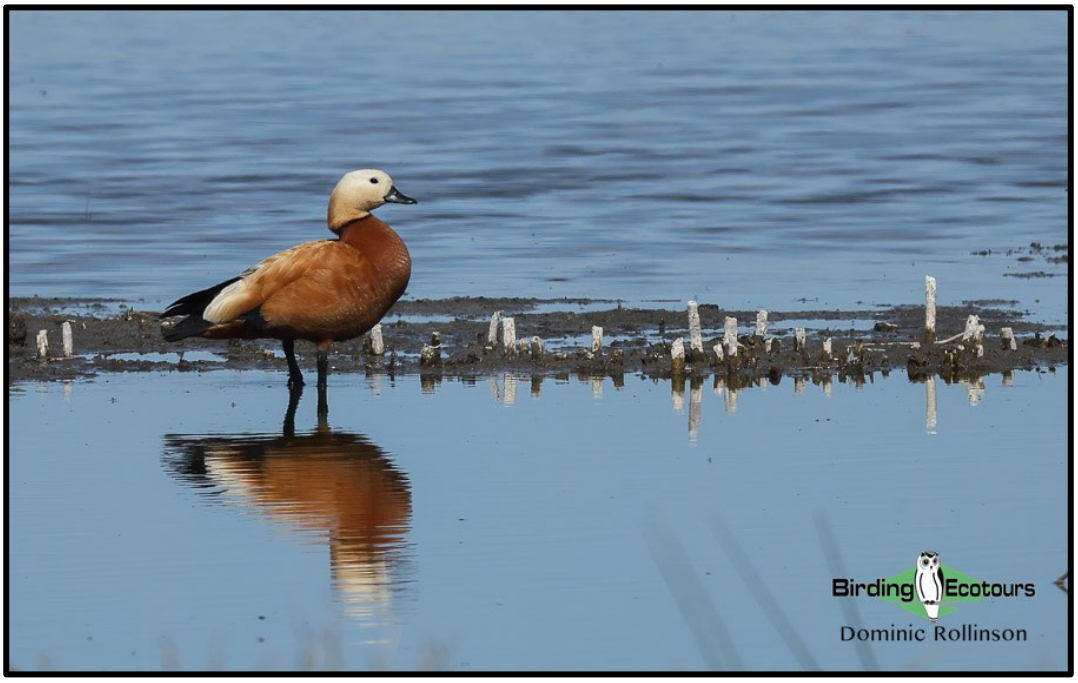
Other localized and highly sought-after species include the famous **Wallcreeper** (a monotypic family), **Masked Shrike**, **Western Rock Nuthatch**, **Sombre Tit**, **Pied Wheatear**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Olive-tree Warbler**, **Paddyfield Warbler**, **Semicollared Flycatcher**, and several woodpecker species.

Lesser Kestrel *is one of the many raptor species we should encounter in Bulgaria and Romania.*

During the tour we will visit several Important Bird Areas (IBAs), identified by BirdLife International as extremely valuable for birds. Some of these include Trigrad Gorge, Studen Kladenets volcanic region, Krumovitza, Lake Burgas, Atanasovsko Lake, Srebarna Nature Reserve, Cape Kaliakra, Durankulak Lake, the vast Danube Delta, and Lake Techirghiol.

If you want to extend your time in this wonderful part of Europe, why not join our **Romania Bird & Mammal Tour: Transylvanian Brown Bear Extension**, which runs after this tour. This short four-day extension is designed to complement the main tour, offering a chance to spend time with some of Europe's most iconic mammal species, as we spend two evenings in hides hoping to see **Brown Bear**, among other exciting species. During the days, we will target some of Europe's more secretive forest specialists and focus on improving views of anything not seen on the main tour, such as **Ural Owl**, **Black Woodpecker**, **Great Grey Shrike**, and **Wallcreeper**.

If you are unable to make the dates of this scheduled tour, please do get in touch and we would be happy to help build a custom tour with dates to suit you.



Ruddy Shelduck *is readily encountered in Bulgaria and Romania.*

Detailed Itinerary (13 days/12 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Sofia and travel to western Rhodope Mountains

Our tour will start in the midmorning in Sofia, where you will be met by your Birding Ecotours tour leader and local guide. If you cannot arrive in Sofia in time for the start of the tour, please plan on arriving the day before the tour starts, we can help with extra accommodation if required. Perhaps you would like to explore the beautiful and ancient city ahead of the tour.

Our first birding stop will be to visit Vitosha Mountain near Sofia, before beginning our journey southeast towards the western Rhodope Mountains. Target species at Mount Vitosha and the general area include **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Eurasian Bullfinch**, **Common Firecrest**, **Goldcrest**, and **Grey Wagtail**.

After our birding at Vitosha Mountain we will make our way through farmlands, perhaps looking for **Corn Crake** and various other migrants such as **Western Marsh Harrier** and **Red-rumped Swallow**. In the late afternoon we will begin a gradual ascent into the western Rhodope Mountains where we might find the likes of **Eurasian Green Woodpecker**, **Red** (Common) **Crossbill**, and **Crested Tit**.

Overnight: Osina area

*Coniferous forests will be birded for **Common Firecrest**.*

Day 2. Birding in Trigrad Gorge and the surrounding area

Today the focus will be birding Trigrad Gorge, which is famous for the few pairs of **Wallcreeper** that reside in this ideal habitat for the species. We will spend some time (it can often take a few hours) throughout the day, scanning the tall cliff faces for this bizarre and beautiful species, a highly sought-after monotypic family. Here we should also see **Alpine Swift**, **Pallid Swift**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Eurasian Crag Martin**, and **European Serin**.

We will spend the rest of the day in the region looking for **Crested Tit**, **Black Woodpecker**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Black Redstart**, **White-throated Dipper**, and other species in the conifer forests nearby. We may also be lucky enough to find **Northern Chamois**, an unusual-looking wild mountain goat.

Overnight: Yagodina (or similar)

Day 3. Trigrad Gorge and transfer to the eastern Rhodope Mountains

We will again visit the gorge for **Wallcreeper**, should we have missed it the previous afternoon. Otherwise, we will do some birding around the village, where various woodpeckers, tits, and finches can be expected. After lunch we will begin the transfer to the Krumovgrad area. Due to the nature of the mountain and rural roads, this is normally a drive of a few hours, which we will intersperse with numerous birding stops as we keep our eyes peeled for anything exciting.

We slowly move out of the high mountains associated with the western Rhodope Mountains, into the lower lying reaches of the eastern Rhodope Mountains. Along these stops we can find species such as **Little Owl**, **Cirl Bunting**, **Black-headed Bunting**, **Woodlark**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, and the highly prized **Sombre Tit**.

Overnight: Krumovgrad

*Patches of woodland should produce **Sombre Tit**.*

Day 4. Birding Madjarovo and Ivaylovgrad reservoir

Today we will move to the Madjaraovo volcanic region and the area around Borislavtsi village, at the shore of the Ivaylovgrad reservoir, where the Arda river meanders through this stunning landscape. This will take us into prime rocky areas, holding specials such as **Western Rock Nuthatch**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Stork**, **Rock Bunting**, **Ortolan Bunting**, **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**, and a range of raptors including **Egyptian Vulture**. The thickets in these areas also play host to large numbers of warblers, and our targets will include the **Sardinian Warbler**, **Eastern Subalpine Warbler**, **Barred Warbler**, and **Eastern Orphean Warbler**.

This is the land of vultures, and we can expect to see **Griffon Vulture**, **Egyptian Vulture**, and the prized **Cinereous Vulture**, a huge bird, even by vulture standards. Other raptors present here include **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Black Kite**, and **Eurasian Honey Buzzard**. We also have a good chance of finding **Northern Raven** and various wheatears like **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear** and **Northern Wheatear**, shrikes including **Woodchat Shrike** and **Masked Shrike**, and the same gorgeous warblers mentioned above. **Alpine Swifts** grace the sky here, and the ubiquitous **Crested Lark** struts around on open patches of ground.

Overnight: Madzharovo, Eastern Rhodopes

Rock Bunting *– one of the several bunting species we are likely to see.*

Day 5. Birding the Dolna Kula valley and Studen Kladenec

Today we will visit the Dolna Kula rocky valley. The entire eastern Rhodopes region is absolutely spectacular for birding and also plays host to some incredibly scenic routes. This valley has more woodland and bush than other parts of the region and hosts virtually all the warblers occurring in Eastern Europe! Following up on their mixed and jumbled calls is the best way to locate them, and that is just what we will do. Some of our warbler targets today include **Eastern Olivaceous**, **Olive-tree**, **Sardinian**, **Eastern Subalpine** and **Eastern Bonelli's Warblers**.

Hawfinch inhabits the seeding trees here and great emphasis will be placed on finding **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Chukar Partridge**, as this must surely rank as one of the best sites in Europe for them. **Black Stork** breeds on inaccessible ledges in this area. Various species of bunting, including **Cirl Bunting**, **Black-headed Bunting**, **Ortolan Bunting**, and **Corn Bunting** occupy prominent song perches.

Common Cuckoo, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, **European Roller**, and **Common Nightingale** litter the trees along the river, and **Sombre Tit** is another quality inhabitant here. This is also a good area to get to grips with **European Turtle Dove**, which is becoming less common around Europe due to a rapid population decline. Various hirundines can also be expected here, such as **Barn Swallow**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, and **Common House Martin**.

In the afternoon we will continue our birding around the Studen Kladenec area. This is yet another beautiful location where we can look for birds of prey, warblers such as **Eastern Subalpine Warbler** and **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler**, **Sombre Tit**, **Ortolan Bunting**, **Woodlark**, and others. After dinner we may search for **Eurasian Scops Owl** near the hotel.

Overnight: Madzharovo, Eastern Rhodopes

Day 6. Travel to Pomorie, birding on the way

We will have an early morning start as we commence our journey northeast, to reach the southern Black Sea coast on the eastern boundary of Bulgaria, where we will be staying at a local hotel for the next two nights. We will, of course, be looking out for birds along the way and we have a few birding stops lined up. Some of these may yield the likes of **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Lesser Kestrel**, **Olive-tree Warbler**, and **Masked Shrike**. Other possibilities could include **Spanish Sparrow**, **Booted Eagle**, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, **European Bee-eater**, **Black-headed Bunting**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, and **Montagu's Harrier**.

*Our tour will be given a splash of exotic color as the skies fill with **European Bee-eaters** arriving from their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa.*

Time permitting, in the afternoon (or over the next couple of days) we will visit some wetlands around the town of Burgas, just north of our base in Sozopol, where many waterbirds can be expected. Specials here include **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Little Bittern**, **Great Crested Grebe**, **Purple Heron**, **Squacco Heron**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Eurasian Penduline Tit**, **Common Kingfisher**, and various warblers, including **Sedge Warbler**, **Cetti's Warbler**, and **Great Reed Warbler**.

Overnight: Sozopol

Day 7. Birding the wetlands around Pomorie and Burgas

Before breakfast we often make an early visit to Strandzha Nature Park, where the main prize is **White-backed Woodpecker**. This species is, however, tricky to locate at this time of the year. We will bird the forested areas of the park, where we might also find **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Eurasian Treecreeper** and **Willow Tit**.

The remainder of the day will be spent focusing on the waterbirds in the immediate Pomorie/Burgas area, one of the top migration hotspots in Europe, with an impressive variety of birds in every season. The main habitats include saltpans, freshwater lakes, and woodland fringing the lakes. We expect to see many shorebird species today, together with raptors, herons, and warblers, forming an interesting mix of birds.

*We should encounter many different gull species, such as the striking **Pallas's Gull**.*

Some of the exciting shorebird species we expect to find include **Common Redshank**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Ruff**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Kentish Plover**, **Dunlin**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Common Greenshank**, and **Collared**

Pratincole. **Temminck's Stint** and **Broad-billed Sandpiper** are rare visitors, but at this time of year almost anything is possible.

Various gulls and terns are also expected, including **Little Gull**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Slender-billed Gull**, **Yellow-legged Gull**, and **Black-headed Gull**, while on the tern front, we will look for **Common Tern**, **Sandwich Tern**, **Black Tern**, **Little Tern**, and **White-winged Tern**. We will also search for waterbirds like **Pygmy Cormorant**, a range of herons, **Spotted Crake** (always tricky to see though), **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Western Yellow Wagtail**, **Great White Pelican**, **Mute Swan**, **Eurasian Teal**, and others.

The reedbeds will be scoured for **Eurasian Penduline Tit**, **Bearded Reedling** (another monotypic family), and various warblers. The woodlands surrounding some of the wetlands here are home to resident specials such as **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, and **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, and migrants like **Collared Flycatcher**, **European Pied Flycatcher**, and **Red-breasted Flycatcher**. Interestingly, these three flycatchers all overwinter in incredibly different areas, yet all arrive here to breed. **European Pied Flycatcher** spends the winter in West Africa, **Collared Flycatcher** in Southeast Africa, and **Red-breasted Flycatcher** in West Asia (e.g. India). It is an interesting point to ponder as we watch these tiny and gorgeous birds here.

Overnight: Sozopol

Red-footed Falcons *are usually seen in good numbers on this tour.*

Day 8. Travel to Kavarna and birding around Burgas

Should we have missed any key species the previous day, we will again go birding around the nearby saltpans this morning, before transferring to the town of Kavarna on the northern Black Sea coast. During the journey we will visit a highly productive section of forest located in the Balkan

Mountain range. Here, targets will include **Semicollared Flycatcher**, **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, and **Wood Warbler**, along with various tits and woodpeckers, including **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**.

This is a great area in winter and on our **Birding Tour Bulgaria: Black Sea and Vitosha in Winter** tour we will spend four days here, observing overwintering **Red-breasted Geese** (and many other species). During spring, the birding here involves different species but is also great.

We will likely spend most of the day making the journey northwards, birding along the way. We will stop at various lakes and wetlands where we will search for **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Northern Lapwing**, **Kentish Plover**, **Little Bittern**, **Glossy Ibis**, and many other widespread migrants that are making their way back to their breeding grounds.

Before arriving at our accommodation in Kavarna we will scan some tall cliffs near town, where we hope to find roosting **Eurasian Eagle-Owl**.

Overnight: Kavarna

*Cape Kaliakra usually holds good numbers of migrants such as **Alpine Swift**.*

Day 9. Birding Cape Kaliakra and various wetlands around Kavarna

We will likely start the day with a trip to Cape Kaliakra Nature Reserve and Bolata for a completely different suite of birds. Here we can expect to see **Calandra Lark**, **Greater Short-toed Lark**, **Eurasian Skylark**, **Tawny Pipit**, **Pied Wheatear**, and many other migrants passing through the area. A scan of the sea can reveal various seabirds, including **Black-throated Loon** (Diver), **Yelkouan Shearwater**, **Parasitic Jaeger** (Arctic Skua), and the local subspecies of **European Shag** (*desmarestii*).

Next, we will head to the productive Durankulak Lake, along with possible visits to Shabla Tuzla Lake and the Kamen Bryag rocky steppes. Target species for the day include **Montagu's Harrier**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Squacco Heron, Purple Heron**, **Caspian Tern**, **Gull-billed Tern**, **Great White Pelican**, **Paddyfield Warbler**, and **Bearded Reedling**.

We will also make another attempt at the larks, should we have missed any this morning, and will have another opportunity for pipits, including **Red-throated Pipit**. We should also be able to find some other great birds, like **Eurasian Stone-curlew**, **Rosy Starling** (erratic and often difficult to pin down), **Levant Sparrowhawk**, **Common Reed Bunting**, **European Stonechat**, **European Pied Flycatcher**, and **Isabelline Wheatear**.

Overnight: Kavarna

Pygmy Cormorant *is common in the Danube Delta.*

Day 10. Travel to the Danube Delta, Romania, birding en route

Today we will travel to the massive Danube Delta in neighboring Romania. During the journey we will likely visit Sinoe and Techirghiol Lakes. These lakes in the southeast of Romania offer a great range of habitats, including vast reedbeds, shallow lagoons, and sand bars. Birding these lakes will allow us to search for a range of species, including **Pallas's Gull**, **Caspian Gull**, **Paddyfield Warbler**, **European Bee-eater**, and various shorebird and duck species. The surrounding farmlands host species such as **Grey Partridge**, **Common Pheasant**, **Short-toed Eagle**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Red-footed Falcon**, **Calandra Lark**, **Tawny Pipit**, **Black-headed Bunting** and so many others.

We will likely arrive in the late afternoon (by boat) at our accommodation, situated on an island in the Delta, where we will stay for the next two nights. The area around our hotel can be quite

productive for birding, with migrants such as **Common Cuckoo**, **Common Redstart**, and **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** often present.

Overnight: Uzlina Island

Day 11. Birding the Danube Delta

The Danube Delta's impressive network of channels and lakes will be explored for the day by boat, which often allows us close-up views of many of our target species. We will also bird fishponds, associated flooded meadows, woodlands, and small pans, situated throughout the delta.

Birds of prey here include **White-tailed Eagle**, **Eurasian Hobby**, **Red-footed Falcon**, and **Western Marsh Harrier**, while wildfowl species will be evident, such as **Greylag Goose**, **Common Shelduck**, **Mute Swan**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Eurasian Teal**, **Garganey**, and **Gadwall**. Other waterbirds are numerous, and we should be able to find **Black Stork**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Great White Pelican Pygmy Cormorant**, **Red-necked Grebe**, **Great Crested Grebe**, all the European species of egrets and herons, and **Glossy Ibis**.

Garganey *is one of the many waterfowl species we should see on this tour.*

The flooded meadows should hold shorebirds like **Black-winged Stilt**, **Pied Avocet**, **Common Snipe**, **Green Sandpiper**, and terns including **Caspian Tern**, **Black Tern**, **Whiskered Tern**, and **White-winged Tern**.

The wooded riverbanks should hold the dazzling **Common Kingfisher** and woodpeckers including **Syrian Woodpecker** and the reedbeds might give up a new suite of warblers, including **Savi's Warbler**, **Sedge Warbler**, and **Moustached Warbler**. These are all very vocal species but

extremely skulking, so will usually require patience to come out of their reedbed habitats for a view.

Overnight: Uzlina Island

Day 12. Birding Danube Delta to Vadu

Following our great stay in the Danube Delta, we will depart this wonderful area for our final birding destination at Vadu. Here, the area's expansive wetlands represent some of the country's finest birding.

We will likely take most of the day slowly working our way back southwards, as we bird various lakes, wetlands and farmlands for any missing species, which may include **Moustached Warbler**, **Paddyfield Warbler**, or **Rosy Starling**. The area also hosts colonies of the scarce, Endangered (IUCN) **European Ground Squirrel** (also known as European Souslik).

We will ensure we are in Vadu by the mid-afternoon to enjoy some fantastic wetland birding, to cap off our Balkans birding adventure. The wetlands here are usually full of waterfowl, herons, shorebirds, various other waterbirds, and warblers, including **Eurasian Teal**, **Garganey**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Eurasian Bittern** (we're likely to hear them booming here and see them as they fly low over the reedbeds), **Squacco Heron**, **Purple Heron**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Collared Pratincole**, **Savi's Warbler**, and **Paddyfield Warbler**. **Bearded Reedlings** are often seen here too, as they flit between the vast reedbeds.

*The often-elusive **Eurasian Bittern** can occasionally put on quite a show.*

We will spend the night on the edge of Vadu town, overlooking wheatfields, from which **Common Quail** are often heard calling (although they are normally very tricky to lay eyes on)!

Overnight: Vadu

Day 13. Transfer to Bucharest for departure

This is mostly a non-birding day, as we transfer from Vadu to Bucharest, where the tour will conclude at midday, in time for your late afternoon or early evening flights out of Bucharest (please do not book flights any earlier than 3pm).

If you would like to spend some time in the wonderful city of Bucharest, we can easily help organize extra accommodation for you.

Overnight: Not included

*Returning migrants such as **Eastern Subalpine Warblers** are a highlight of this spring tour.*

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. In addition, we sometimes must use a different guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.

Tour Details

Duration:	13 days
Group size:	4–6
Dates:	13–25 May 2027 11–23 May 2028 11–23 May 2029
Start:	Sofia International Airport, Sofia, Bulgaria
End:	Bucharest International Airport, Bucharest, Romania
Prices:	€ 5,363 per person sharing – based on 4–6 participants (2027) € 6,170 per person sharing – based on 4–6 participants (2028) € 6,550 per person sharing – based on 4–6 participants (2029)
Single supplements:	€ 371 (2027) € 460 (2028) € 500 (2029)

Price includes:

All accommodation (Day 1 until Day 12 as described above, or similar)
Meals (from lunch on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 13)
Drinking water – please bring a refillable water bottle
Expert tour leader
Local bird and wildlife guide fees
Full day boat tour around the Danube Delta
Birdwatching site entrance fees and travel permits
All ground transport and tolls/taxes while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Flights to Sofia International Airport, Sofia, Bulgaria
Flights from Bucharest International Airport, Bucharest, Romania
Expenditures due to flight cancellations/delays or other causes beyond our control (force majeure)
Visa fees if visa required
Departure tax
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our tipping guidelines blog)

Useful information

Your guide will be driving you in a comfortable vehicle during this spring tour. The tour does not require a great deal of walking or steep hiking to see most of the birds, although there are opportunities for some longer hikes if you wish.

The weather in Bulgaria and Romania at this time of year is generally dry and warm to very warm. Inland Bulgaria will have daytime temperatures of 77–95ºF (25–30ºC), while coastal areas and the Danube delta will be more mixed, but generally cooler at around 64 – 77ºF (18–25ºC). Nighttime temperatures throughout the tour will range between 57–64ºF (14–18ºC).