



**BIRDING TOUR BULGARIA AND ROMANIA:
BIRDING THE BALKANS IN SPRING**

10 – 22 MAY 2024

11 – 23 MAY 2025

11 – 23 MAY 2026



Western Rock Nuthatch is a beautiful species and a real highlight of any trip to Bulgaria.

www.birdingecotours.com



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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) v13.2 taxonomy as of July 2023) 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 terns (such as **Caspian Tern**, **Black Tern**, and **White-winged Tern**), and many raptors, including **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, **Booted Eagle**, **White-tailed Eagle**, **Egyptian Vulture**, **Cinereous Vulture**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, and **Levant Sparrowhawk**.

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



*Lake Burgas is an excellent location for the Near Threatened (BirdLife International) **Dalmatian Pelican**.*

During the tour we will visit several Important Bird Areas (IBAs) identified by BirdLife International as extremely valuable for birds. These include Trigrad Gorge, Studen Kladenets volcanic region, Krumovitza, Lake Burgas, Atanasovsko Lake, Srebarna Nature Reserve, Malak

Preslavets Marsh, Cape Kaliakra, Durankulak Lake, the vast Danube Delta, and the remote Macin Mountains National Park.

If you want to extend your time in this wonderful part of Europe then why not join our **Birding Tour Greece: Spring Birding Adventure** and **Birding Tour Greece: Lesvos in Spring Extension** tours, which both run before this tour. These fabulous birding trips are designed to follow on from each other and offer a wonderful range of birds, habitats, and experiences in one of Europe's oldest countries. Some of the highlights of these tours include **Rüppell's Warbler**, **Cretzschmar's Bunting**, **Rock Partridge**, **Alpine Chough**, **Spur-winged Lapwing**, **Krüper's Nuthatch**, **Cinereous Bunting**, **Eleonora's Falcon**, and **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin**.

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.



Wallcreeper is the only member of the monotypic Tichodroma genus and highly prized among birders around the world, especially family listers, as this species is also a monotypic family.

Itinerary (13 days/12 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Sofia and travel to Trigrad

Our tour will start at 10am after your morning arrival at Sofia airport, where you will be met by your Birding Ecotours tour leader and local guide. On leaving the airport we will visit Vitosha mountain near Sofia before beginning our journey southeast to Trigrad. Target species in the Trigrad area include **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Red (Common) Crossbill**, **Eurasian Bullfinch**, **Common Firecrest**, **Goldcrest**, and **Grey Wagtail**.

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.

Overnight: Trigrad

Day 2. Birding in Trigrad Gorge and the surrounding area

The Trigrad Gorge is famous for the few pairs of **Wallcreeper** that reside in this ideal habitat for the species. We will spend some time in the afternoon scanning the rocks for this bizarre and beautiful species, a highly sought-after monotypic family. Here we should also see **Rock Dove**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Grey Wagtail**, and **Eurasian Crag Martin**.

Here we should also see great birds like **Alpine Swift**, **Pallid Swift**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Grey Wagtail**, and **Eurasian Crag Martin**. We will spend the rest of the day in the region looking for **Crested Tit**, **Black Woodpecker**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Black Redstart**, and other species in the conifer forests nearby. With luck we may spot the elusive **Hazel Grouse**.

Overnight: Trigrad



Patches of woodland should produce Sombre Tit.

Day 3. Trigrad Gorge and Krumovgrad

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 Krumovgrad. 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**, various woodpeckers, and the highly prized **Sombre Tit**.

Time permitting after our arrival in Krumovgrad (close to the northern Greece border), we will plan to do some local birding in the late afternoon. This will take us into prime rocky areas, holding specials such as **Western Rock Nuthatch**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Stork**, **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 spectacular **Sardinian Warbler**, **Eastern Subalpine Warbler**, **Barred Warbler**, and **Eastern Orphean Warbler**.

Overnight: Krumovgrad



***Black-headed Bunting** — one of the many bunting species to be seen on this trip.*

Day 4. Birding Madjarovo and Ivaylovgrad reservoir

Today we will visit 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 habitat is similar to the previous afternoon but holds larger numbers of raptors.

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 on Day 4. **Alpine Swifts** grace the sky here, and the ubiquitous **Crested Lark** struts around on open patches of ground.

Overnight: Krumovgrad



Egyptian Vulture is one of a number of raptor species we expect to see.

Day 5. Birding the Dolna Kula valley and Studen Kladenec

Today we will visit the Dolna Kula rocky valley. The entire Krumovgrad 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.

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 the 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 will search for **Eurasian Scops Owl** near the hotel.

Overnight: Krumovgrad

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**, **Corn Bunting**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, and **Montagu's Harrier**.

In the afternoon we will visit some wetlands around the town of Burgas, just south of our base in Pomorie, 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: Pomorie



*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.*

Day 7. Birding the wetlands around Pomorie and Burgas

Today we will spend the day 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 salt pans, freshwater lakes, and woodland fringing the lakes. We expect to see many shorebird species today, together with woodpeckers, raptors, herons, and warblers, forming an interesting mix of birds.

Some of the exciting shorebird species we expect to find include **Common Redshank**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Ruff**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **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 can also be 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, **Little Crake**, **Spotted Crake**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Western Yellow Wagtail**, **Great White Pelican**, **Mute Swan**, **Eurasian Teal**, and others.



*We should encounter many different gull species such as this **Yellow-legged Gull**.*

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 like **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **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: Pomorie Поморие

Day 8. Travel to Kavarna and birding around Burgas

Should we have missed any key species the previous day, we will 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 the overwintering **Red-breasted Geese** (and many other species). During spring, the birding here involves different species but is also great. This northeast corner of Bulgaria must rate as one of *the* best bird holiday destinations in all Europe.

During the journey, numerous observations along the road will be made. This is a good route for raptors, with species including **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **European Honey Buzzard**, **Common Buzzard**, **Eurasian Hobby**, and **Red-footed Falcon** all possible. We will visit a **European Bee-eater** colony, and we will also try for species such as **Sombre Tit**, **Woodlark**, **Woodchat Shrike**, and various woodpeckers.



*A gorgeous **Red-breasted Flycatcher** foraging in woodland during the summer breeding season.*

After lunch, we will visit the 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 we will also search for **Eurasian Eagle-Owl**. 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*).

Overnight: Kavarna

Day 9. Birding Durankulak Lake, Shabla Tuzla Lake, and Kamen Bryag

Today a day trip will lead us to the productive Durankulak Lake, along with 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**, **Bearded Reedling**, and **Spotted Crake**.

We will also make another attempt at the larks, should we have missed any of them yesterday, 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**, **Levant Sparrowhawk**, **Common Reed Bunting**, **European Stonechat**, **European Pied Flycatcher**, and **Isabelline Wheatear**.

Overnight: Kavarna



Yelkouan Shearwaters may be seen while scanning out to sea from Cape Kaliakra.

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

Today we will travel to the Danube Delta in neighboring Romania. During the journey we will visit Sinoe Lake. This lake on the south edge of the Danube Delta offers a great range of habitats, including vast reedbeds, shallow lagoons, and sand bars. This 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.

We will likely arrive in the late afternoon at our accommodation, situated on an island in the Delta, where we will stay for the next three nights.

Overnight: Uzlina Island



*We will hope for good views of **Spotted Crake** during the tour.*

Day 11. Birding the Danube Delta

Fishponds, associated flooded meadows, woodlands, and small pans, situated on a neighboring island, will be the exciting areas we will be birding today as we walk around this fantastic species-rich area.

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

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**, **River Warbler**, **Garden Warbler**, and **Moustached Warbler**, plus the skulking but beautiful **Thrush Nightingale**. 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



Red-footed Falcons migrate north from their southern African wintering grounds to breed in central and northern Europe. We will be looking out for them during the tour.

Day 12. Birding Danube Delta to Macin Mountains National Park

Following our great stay in the Danube Delta we will depart this wonderful area for our final birding destination at Macin Mountains National Park.

This volcanic mountain is one of the oldest in Romania and, owing to its habitat diversity, holds many exciting species. The number of raptor species here is huge, and we will keep our eyes peeled for **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, **Booted Eagle**, **European Honey Buzzard**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Montagu's Harrier**, and **Levant Sparrowhawk**.

Other possible species during the day include **Eurasian Stone-curlew**, **European Roller**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Eurasian Wryneck**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Sombre Tit**, **Lesser Grey Shrike**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, and **Ortolan Bunting**, among many others.

This area also hosts colonies of the scarce, Endangered (IUCN) **European Souslik** (also known as European Ground Squirrel). After finishing our birding, we will eventually make our way back to Tulcea, where we will spend the final night of the tour enjoying another traditional meal and selecting the all-important ‘bird of the trip’.

Overnight: Hotel Lebada, Tulcea



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

Day 13. Transfer to Bucharest for departure

This is a non-birding day, and we will transfer from Tulcea to Bucharest, where the tour will conclude at midday in time for your late afternoon or early evening flights out of Bucharest. While waiting for your flight, the local guide and Birding Ecotours tour leader will be on hand to answer any questions relating to the trip list or identification of species seen on the tour.

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

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 international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	13 days
Group Size:	4 - 8
Dates:	11 - 23 May 2024 11 - 23 May 2025 11 - 23 May 2026
Start:	Sofia International Airport, Sofia, Bulgaria
End:	Bucharest International Airport, Bucharest, Romania
Prices:	€4,720 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants OR €3,920 based on 6 – 8 participants (2024) €5,239 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants OR €4,351 based on 6 – 8 participants (2025) €5,815 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants OR €4,830 based on 6 – 8 participants (2026)
Single Supplements:	€430 (2024) €477 (2025) €529 (2026)

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
Birdwatching site entrance fees, travel permits, and Danube boat tours.
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 – 95°F (25 – 30°C), while coastal areas and the Danube delta will be more mixed, but generally cooler at around 64 – 77°F (18 – 25°C). Nighttime temperatures throughout the tour will range between 57 – 64°F (14 – 18°C).