



**GEORGIA: PRIVATE SPRING BIRDING AND CULTURAL TOUR
REPORT**

31 MARCH - 10 APRIL 2023



Bearded Vulture is one of many highly prized species in the Greater Caucasus mountains of Georgia (photo Alexander Rukhaia).

Overview

Our 11-day tour of Georgia began on the 31st of March 2023, in the glamorous city of Batumi, and concluded on the 10th of April 2023 in Tbilisi. Our trip around this beautiful country gave us many exciting species, including **Caucasian Snowcock**, **Caucasian Grouse**, **Güldenstädt's Redstart**, **Red-fronted Serin**, **Great Rosefinch**, **Citrine Wagtail**, **Common Crane** (*Archibaldii* subspecies), **Bearded Vulture**, **Alpine Chough**, **Turkestan Short-toed Lark**, **Mountain Chiffchaff**, **Krüper's Nuthatch**, **Western Rock Nuthatch**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Siberian Stonechat**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, and **White-throated Dipper**. A total of 136 bird species were recorded during the tour (three of these were “heard only”), with complete species lists at the end of this report.

I would like to thank Urban, Nancy, Wendy, and Karen for their company during the tour and of course Alex, our Georgian guide, for his excellent knowledge, logistics and planning, from start to finish. Not only did he make the trip a success, but he also ensured I received the correct medical attention when I fell ill and sadly could not finish the tour — for that I will always be grateful.



Güldenstädt's Redstart is one of the star species of Georgia and we enjoyed great views on this tour (photo Alexander Rukhaia).

Detailed Report

Day 1, 31st March 2023. Arrival in Batumi

The first day of our tour would see us arrive in Batumi at 09:40am. From here we met our driver and transferred to our hotel for a short rest after our early start. With the weather from Istanbul following us here we limited our activities to cultural ones in the city, with visits to the Batumi Archaeological Museum and the city's cathedral. We finished with a traditional Georgian meal at a vineyard outside the city.

Day 2, 1st April 2023. Birding Batumi and Chorokhi River Delta

Today we would explore some great birding locations around the city of Batumi. After breakfast we visited the famous Shuamta raptor watchpoint. Immediately it was obvious that raptors would be migrating north today as large kettles of **Common (Steppe) Buzzard** and **Black Kite** began to form over the coast. With these were also a few **Lesser Spotted Eagle** which stood out in the flocks, even at distance. One surprise species was a group of four **Common Crane** moving north at distance. Around the watchpoint a **Mountain Chiffchaff** was heard singing but sadly did not show.



Bluethroat was a great addition to our list in the Chorokhi River Delta on the Black Sea coast of Georgia.

After lunch we headed to the south edge of Batumi to the wonderful Chorokhi River Delta. This myriad of ponds, pools, and reedbeds around the Chorokhi River is an incredible migrant trap and

many birds were seen here. Standout species included **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Siberian Stonechat**, **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Bluethroat**, **Red-crested Pochard**, **Black-throated Loon (Diver)**, **Hen Harrier**, and an early **Willow Warbler**. The backdrop of the sky above Batumi filled with birds of prey provided a spectacle that few places on earth can match.

After a long day in the field, we returned to Batumi for dinner.

Day 3, 2nd April 2023. Kutaisi with birding on route

Today we would head north towards the city of Kutaisi, one of the longest-inhabited cities in Europe. En route we would stop at Maltakva beach for some birding. This was a productive stop which gave us **Garganey**, **Greater Scaup**, **Common Scoter**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Kentish Plover**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Slender-billed Gull**, and migrating raptors like **Western Marsh Harrier** and **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** coming in from the sea.

After a picnic lunch we continued to Kutaisi where we would spend the night. Unfortunately, our Birding Ecotours guide, would be forced to leave the tour due to poor health, despite his best efforts to rejoin the tour in the following days. Fortunately, our fantastic local guide Alex continued the tour and provided the remainder of this trip report.

Day 4, 3rd April 2023. Borjomi and Akhaltsikhe

Today we would head south towards the region of Javakheti in southern Georgia. After a long drive through difficult mountain roads, we arrived at Borjomi where we explored the old part of the town and the central park. Birds seen here included **Northern Raven**, **Coal Tit** and **Eurasian Nuthatch**.

As the weather turned, we made a hasty retreat for our hotel in Akhaltsikhe. The poor weather continued, so we ordered a traditional meal at the hotel and enjoyed a bottle of Velvet Scoter wine, produced to support the conservation of this rare duck species in Georgia.

Day 5, 4th April 2023. Rabati Castle and Vardzia Cave Town

Today would be another day of culture as we visited the beautiful Rabati Castle and Vardzia Cave Monastery. Despite being cultural visits, we also enjoyed some great birds, including **Common Whitethroat**, **Black Redstart**, **Rock Bunting**, **Western Rock Nuthatch**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Siberian Stonechat**, and **Red-fronted Serin**.

In the evening we stayed at the quaint Valodia's Cottage, which included great quantities of homemade wine and fabulous food.

Day 6, 5th April 2023. The road to Kazbegi via Khanchali and Bughdasheni Lakes

Today would be a real adventure as we traveled all the way from Georgia's southern border with Turkey, to its northern border with Russia. En route we stopped at the managed reserves of Khanchali and Bughdasheni Lakes. These productive birding spots gave us one of the world's rarest birds, the Transcaucasian subspecies of **Common Crane** (*Grus grus archibaldii*). Also seen

here were **Greylag Goose, Common Shelduck, Ruddy Shelduck, Armenian Gull, White Stork, Western Marsh Harrier, Black Redstart, and Siberian Stonechat.**

The wind was really picking up now, so we decided to continue our journey and after a long day we arrived in the breath-taking mountains of Kazbegi.



Siberian Stonechat is a striking bird and was seen regularly throughout the tour (photo Alexander Rukhaia).

Days 7-8, 6th-7th April 2023. The Kuro Gorge and Terek River Valley

For the next two days we explored the mighty Kuro Gorge and Terek River Valley around Stepantsminda. This is the land of some truly special birds and here we were able to enjoy **White-throated Dipper, Caucasian Snowcock, Caucasian Grouse, Golden Eagle, Alpine Accentor, Gldenstadt's Redstart, Wallcreeper, Bearded Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Black Kite, Red-billed Chough, Alpine Chough, Ring Ouzel, and Great Rosefinch,** all amongst stunning scenery.

Our non-birding activities included a visit to the Gergeti Trinity Church, a breath-taking building surrounded by vast mountains, and the Ananuri Fortified Church complex. After two incredible days in the mountains, we headed back towards Tbilisi.

Day 9, 8th April 2023. Jvari Monastery, Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, and Koroji Pine Woods

Today the weather was not on our side and as such we had to make alternative plans. Our day began with some birding at breakfast where we enjoyed great views of **Little Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron** in a nesting colony near our hotel.

After breakfast we headed to Jvari Monastery near the town of Mtskheta. The weather became even worse as we arrived but despite this, we explored this beautiful building. Our next stop was Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. The weather here was calmer and after a short wait due to the Sunday service we were allowed to explore the cathedral. After a fantastic lunch we headed to Kojori Pine Woods where our number one target, **Krüper's Nuthatch**, gave itself up with ease, allowing us to have fantastic views.

Day 10, 9th April 2023. David Gareji Monastery, Kumisi Lake, and Ponichala Forest Park

Our final full day saw us head south to the border with Azerbaijan. This semi-desert environment holds yet another historical wonder, the David Gareji Monastery. This fascinating monastery, hewn from rock, is truly a stunning place to spend time. Before we reached the monastery, we made a spontaneous stop at the KFT winery. By a stroke of luck, we were invited to join a wine tour. After seven different wines, brandy and a shot of chacha we took a more relaxed view on birding for the rest of the day.



*We enjoyed great views of **Isabelline Wheatear** while in Georgia.*

After finally reaching the monastery, we managed some birding, with **Chukar Partridge**, **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Northern Goshawk**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Eurasian Skylark**, **Siberian Stonechat**, and **Corn Bunting** all on the list.

After lunch we visited the equally picturesque Kumisi Lake, south of Tbilisi, for our penultimate birding of the tour. Here we were able to locate species such as **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Black-necked (Eared) Grebe**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**,

Turkestan Short-toed Lark, Crested Lark, Isabelline Wheatear, and up to 40 Citrine Wagtails.

Our final stop was the Ponichala Forest Park, where **Syrian Woodpecker** was the main target and we duly added it to our list.

Our final dinner was enjoyed in Tbilisi where we also watched live Georgian dancing and singing.

Day 11, 10th April 2023. Departure from Tbilisi

Today we departed from Tbilisi airport, reflecting on a wonderful tour in this fascinating country.

Bird List - Following IOC (12.1)

Birds ‘heard only’ are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
Pheasants & Allies (Phasianidae)	
Caucasian Grouse	<i>Lyrurus mlokosiewiczi</i>
Caucasian Snowcock	<i>Tetraogallus caucasicus</i>
Chukar Partridge	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Rails, Crakes & Coots (Rallidae)	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Little Crake	<i>Zapornia parva</i>
Cranes (Gruidae)	
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus archibaldii</i>
Grebes (Podicipedidae)	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
Oystercatchers (Haematopodidae)	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Stilts, Avocets (Recurvirostridae)	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Laridae)	
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Armenian Gull	<i>Larus armenicus</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Loons (Gaviidae)	
Arctic Loon (Black-throated Diver)	<i>Gavia arctica</i>
Storks (Ciconiidae)	
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Cormorants, Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)	
Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Owls (Strigidae)	
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Hoopoes (Upupidae)	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Middle Spotted Woodpecker (H)	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>
Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>
Black Woodpecker (H)	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
European Green Woodpecker (H)	<i>Picus viridis</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrhocorax graculus</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Tits, Chickadees (Paridae)	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Larks (Alaudidae)	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Turkistan Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala heinei</i>
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Bushtits (Aegithalidae)	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Leaf Warblers & Allies (Phylloscopidae)	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Mountain Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus sindianus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Sylviid Babblers (Sylviidae)	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>
Nuthatches (Sittidae)	
Krüper's Nuthatch	<i>Sitta krueperi</i>
Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Wallcreeper (Tichodromidae)	
Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Treecreepers (Certhiidae)	
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Starlings, Rhabdornis (Sturnidae)	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Thrushes (Turdidae)	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Güldenstädt's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythrogastrus</i>
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Dippers (Cinclidae)	
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)	
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Accentors (Prunellidae)	
Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae)	
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Great Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rubicilla</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Red-fronted Serin	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>
Buntings (Emberizidae)	
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
Total seen	133
Total heard only	3
Total recorded	136

Mammal List

The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following IUCN
Red List: NT = Near Threatened

Common Name	Scientific Name
Goat-Antelopes (Caprinae)	
Eastern Tur - NT	<i>Capra cylindricornis</i>
Total	1