



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

GENERAL INFORMATION



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

TOUR OUTLINE

On this Bulgaria and Romania birding tour we explore some of the best birdwatching sites in Europe, from the rocky highland gorges of the Bulgarian Rhodopes to the vast wetlands of the Danube Delta in Romania. Spring is the most productive time to visit the Balkans, as millions of migratory birds return from Africa to breed across Europe. Our tour is timed to coincide with this peak migration period, allowing us to experience outstanding birding across a wide range of habitats while targeting many localized and sought-after European species.

We begin the tour in Sofia, birding the highlands of Vitosha mountain for species like **Northern Nutcracker**, **Common Firecrest**, and **Ring Ouzel**. From here we continue into the spectacular Rhodope Mountains, exploring the cliffs of Trigrad Gorge, one of Europe's most reliable sites for the remarkable **Wallcreeper**, a stunning species representing its own monotypic family. Other possibilities include **Black Woodpecker**, **Crested Tit**, and **White-throated Dipper**, while the surrounding mountains hold **Northern Chamois**.

From the western Rhodopes we travel to the lower elevations of the Eastern Rhodopes, a region known for its dramatic scenery and excellent raptor diversity. Around Madzharovo and the Ivaylovgrad Reservoir, rocky slopes host **Western Rock Nuthatch** and **Blue Thrush**, while the Dolna Kula Valley thickets support **Chukar Partridge**, **Sombre Tit**, and **Eastern Subalpine Warbler**. Raptors such as **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, and **Cinereous Vulture** could be encountered anywhere in the region.

Continuing northeast we reach the wetlands of Bulgaria's Black Sea coast near Burgas and Pomorie, one of Europe's premier migration hotspots. These lagoons host a wide diversity of waterbirds and shorebirds (waders), including **Kentish Plover**, **Spotted Redshank**, and **Black-tailed Godwit**, alongside gulls and terns such as **Pallas's Gull**, **Slender-billed Gull**, and **Black Tern**. The reedbeds support species such as **Bearded Reedling** and **Eurasian Penduline Tit**, while nearby forests may produce **White-backed Woodpecker** and migratory flycatchers including **Collared**, **European Pied**, and **Red-breasted Flycatcher**. We then explore the coastal steppes around Cape Kaliakra and Durankulak Lake, excellent areas for raptors such as **Montagu's Harrier**, and grassland specialists like **Calandra Lark** and **Pied Wheatear**.

The tour concludes in Romania's Danube Delta, a UNESCO heritage site of important wetland ecosystems. Exploring the delta by boat allows us to access remote channels and reedbeds rich in birdlife such as a high diversity of ducks, herons, and terns. Highlights include **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Dalmatian Pelican**, and **White-tailed Eagle**, while reedbeds may reveal **Paddyfield Warbler** and the booming **Eurasian Bittern**, before we finish the tour in Bucharest.

DAILY ACTIVITIES, PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS, AND TOUR PACE

Our Bulgaria and Romania birding tour moves at a comfortable pace while visiting a variety of habitats across both countries. Travel days are broken up with regular birding stops to maximize opportunities for target species. The longest transfer during the tour is approximately four and a half hours which we break up with regular bird stops. Birding on foot mostly consists of short walks along quiet roads, and forest trails, but we will spend time scanning cliffs, slopes, and wetlands. We will also enjoy boat-based birding, allowing us into the quieter areas of the Danube Delta for a unique experience.

The tour is considered easy to moderate in terms of physical effort. Most birding will involve walking distances of 1–2 miles (1.5–3 kilometers) at a time, usually on relatively flat or gently sloping terrain, or on uneven terrain where we will walk slower.

Birding days typically begin between 05:30–06:30, as early mornings provide the best bird activity, particularly for forest species and singing passerines. After several hours of birding we will stop for lunch and a short rest during the quieter midday period before continuing birding again in the afternoon. Each evening we will return to our accommodation for dinner.

SPECIES RECORDING (BIRD LISTS AND ANIMAL LISTS)

Ahead of the tour we will email you a detailed daily itinerary containing arrival and meeting instructions, and information about each day's activities. A printed version of this itinerary will also be provided on the first evening of the tour. Each night your tour leader will review the plans for the following day, including departure times, breakfast arrangements, key birding locations, and the species we hope to see.

The itinerary will also include a checklist of birds and other wildlife that may be recorded during the tour. Participants are welcome to use this list to keep their own notes throughout the trip. We follow the latest [International Ornithological Congress](#) (IOC) taxonomy for birds, while other wildlife follows [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN) taxonomy, ensuring that all checklists are consistent with current global standards.

Each evening we will review the day's sightings and compile a daily species list. Participation in this listing session is entirely optional. Birding Ecotours tour leaders also maintain eBird checklists for all birding activities during the tour, including both planned excursions and incidental sightings along the way. These checklists can be shared with participants who use [eBird](#). If you would like to receive these lists, please provide your eBird username to the tour leader at the [start](#) of the tour. After the tour you will receive a PDF trip report by email. This report will take the form of an illustrated diary summarizing the highlights of the trip and will include a complete checklist of all wildlife recorded.

PASSPORT, VISA, AND ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Most visitors do not require a visa to enter Bulgaria or Romania for short tourist stays. Many nationalities may enter Bulgaria visa-free for stays of up to 90 days within a 180-day period, including travelers from the [United States](#), [Canada](#), [the United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#) (click on any of the countries to see details on Bulgaria's immigration policies) and most EU countries. Check the Bulgarian immigration page [here](#) for more updated information on your specific requirements. Note that United States citizens holding dual nationality must enter and depart Bulgaria using their United States passport.

Both countries are members of the Schengen Area, which allows for free movement between participating countries once you have entered via Sofia, Bulgaria. See [this link](#) to Romania's official immigration page. Country-specific information on Romanian travel can be found [here](#) for US citizens, [here](#) for Canadian citizens, [here](#) for UK citizens, and [here](#) for Australian citizens, please check these websites for any recent changes to ensure you are suitably covered. Citizens of

countries not listed above should consult their own country's embassy or consulate website to confirm visa requirements and entry regulations. If a visa is required, please ensure that it is obtained well in advance of your travel dates.

Visitors should have at least one blank page available for entry and exit stamps. You may also be required to show proof of onward or return travel, evidence of sufficient funds to cover your stay and proof of accommodation (this will be provided to you before the tour, and we recommend having the information on hand). We recommend carrying a photocopy of your passport during the tour, stored separately from the original document in case of loss or damage. It is also advisable to keep digital copies of important travel documents (such as your passport, travel insurance, and emergency contact details) stored securely online or in cloud storage for easy access if needed.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

As per our standard [Terms and Conditions](#), we strongly recommend that you purchase comprehensive trip cancellation insurance to protect against unexpected events that might cause delays or interruptions to your travel. Your insurance should also cover illness, medical issues, accidents, repatriation, loss of luggage or valuable items, flight delays or cancellations, and medical evacuation. Failure to obtain adequate insurance could be costly should unexpected events occur. This is especially important on this tour, as we will visit remote areas where access to major medical facilities may be limited and medical evacuation to larger hospitals in cities such as Sofia or Bucharest may be necessary.

HEALTH, VACCINATIONS, AND MEDICAL CONDITIONS

We recommend that you are up to date with routine vaccinations before traveling to Bulgaria and Romania, including measles-mumps-rubella, tetanus, diphtheria, polio, chickenpox, seasonal flu, and COVID-19. In addition, Hepatitis A vaccination is commonly recommended for travelers visiting Europe. As we will occasionally be visiting rural areas, travelers may also wish to consult their doctor regarding tick-borne diseases, which do occur in Bulgaria and Romania, but not at rates greater than elsewhere in Europe.

Ticks and mosquitoes may be present in some habitats, particularly in lowland wetlands like the Danube Delta. We recommend taking precautions such as using insect repellent, wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts when appropriate, and checking for ticks after spending time in grassy or wooded habitats.

Please consult your doctor or travel health specialist before traveling for the most up-to-date advice on vaccinations and health precautions. Official guidance can also be found on the CDC website (see guidance [here](#) for Bulgaria and [here](#) for Romania) or your country's government travel health website. As per our general [Terms and Conditions](#), please inform us when registering for the tour of any relevant medical conditions. Be aware that many hospitals and clinics may require payment upfront before treatment is provided, so comprehensive travel insurance is strongly recommended to cover potential medical costs or evacuation during the tour.

SAFETY, DANGEROUS ANIMALS

Bulgaria and Romania are generally very safe and welcoming destinations for travelers. Crime levels are relatively low (See a comparison to countries you know [here](#)) but petty theft can occasionally occur in busy tourist areas. Please keep a close watch on your personal belongings such as bags, wallets, cameras, and optics, particularly in cities such as Sofia and Bucharest. If traveling independently before or after the tour, we recommend avoiding walking alone late at night in unfamiliar areas, keeping valuables secure, and using licensed taxis or private transfer services.

While **Brown Bears** and **Grey Wolves** do occur in both Bulgaria and Romania, a sighting would be incredibly lucky as these are shy animals, and our guides will ensure that we always keep a safe distance where possible. In rural areas and villages we could encounter stray dogs, which you should avoid touching or interacting with. During the tour we will visit protected reserves, so please remain on designated paths and follow your guide's instructions to minimize disturbance to wildlife and sensitive habitats.

FOOD AND WATER

Tap water is generally safe to drink in Bulgaria and Romania, particularly in cities and hotels. While in rural areas or birding in remote regions however, we recommend that participants drink bottled water. Drinking water will be available during the tour, and refillable water bottles will be provided to help reduce plastic waste.

Mealtimes will generally follow normal eating hours but may occasionally be flexible depending on our birding schedule and travel plans. Early morning birding sessions may require a packed breakfast, or a simple snack before heading out (which will be followed by a larger breakfast later in the morning). Breakfast and dinner will usually be taken at our accommodation or nearby restaurants, while lunch will be at local restaurants, cafés, or as a packed lunch depending on the schedule. If you need to eat at specific times due to medication or personal preference, we recommend bringing some snacks such as cereal bars, protein bars, nuts, or dried fruit.

Food during the tour will typically be a mix of traditional Balkan cuisine and international dishes, with plenty of options available in restaurants and hotels. Meals often include fresh vegetables, salads, grilled meats, soups, breads, cheeses, and seasonal produce. Fish is also commonly available, particularly in coastal areas. Vegetarian options are widely available, though choices may occasionally be more limited in smaller rural towns and we will generally search for the best options available. Overall, food standards throughout the tour are good and should cater to most dietary preferences. If you have specific dietary requirements or food allergies, please inform us in advance so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

CURRENCY

The official currencies used during this tour are the Euro (EUR) in Bulgaria and the Romanian leu (RON) in Romania, and both countries primarily use their local currencies for everyday transactions. While some tourist establishments may accept foreign currencies, paying in the local currency usually offers better value in both countries.

We recommend carrying a small amount of local cash for personal purchases, particularly in smaller towns or rural areas where card payments are not always accepted. Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted in hotels, restaurants, and shops in larger towns and cities and can be used to withdraw local currency from ATMs, while American Express is less commonly accepted. Local currency should preferably be withdrawn from ATMs or exchanged at major airports such as Sofia International Airport, but can also be withdrawn in towns and cities along the tour route if absolutely necessary. A small amount of cash will be useful for personal purchases, snacks, souvenirs, and gratuities. As with any travel destination, please remain vigilant when using ATMs or handling cash in busy public areas.

WEATHER/CLIMATE

Bulgaria and Romania experience a temperate continental climate, with warm springs, hot summers, and cold winters. Our tour takes place in May, the best time of year for birding in the Balkans, when temperatures are generally mild to warm and migratory birds are returning from their wintering grounds in Africa. Spring conditions are usually comfortable for birding, although weather can be variable. As bird activity is usually highest during the cooler parts of the day, most birding will take place in the early morning and late afternoon.

In Bulgaria, temperatures during May are typically pleasant, with daytime average temperatures ranging from 59–70°F (15–21°C) in most areas. Nights and early mornings can be cooler, especially in mountainous regions such as the Rhodope Mountains, where temperatures can drop to around 32°F (0°C), whereas maximum May temperatures generally don't exceed 77°F (25°C). In Romania, spring temperatures are similar but often slightly milder, with daytime averages ranging from 63–72°F (17–22°C), with lows around 54°F (12°C) and highs around 75°F (24°C). Rain showers are possible throughout the tour, particularly in mountainous areas, but these are usually brief and interspersed with sunny periods.

ELECTRICITY AND COMMUNICATION

Power plug sockets in both Bulgaria (see [here](#)) and Romania (see [here](#)) are Type C and Type F, which are used throughout most of continental Europe. The standard voltage is 230 volts (V) and the frequency is 50 hertz (Hz). Visitors from countries using different plug types will likely need a travel adapter. If your home country uses a voltage between 220–240 V (such as the UK, most of Europe, Asia, and Africa), your electronic devices should work without a voltage converter. However, if the voltage in your country is 100–127 V (such as in the United States, Canada, and parts of South America), you may need a voltage converter for certain appliances.

All accommodation used during the tour provide electricity and Wi-Fi, though connection quality may vary depending on location. Internet access is typically reliable in larger towns and cities such as Sofia, Burgas, and Bucharest, but may be slower or less consistent in remote areas, particularly when we are staying near nature reserves or in the Danube Delta.

Mobile coverage is generally good across both countries, with 'Vivacom' offering the best coverage in Bulgaria, and 'Orange' having the best coverage in Romania. Participants may wish to purchase a local SIM card or eSIM before the tour; these are easily activated through your phone's settings or the provider's mobile app.

TRANSPORTATION AND LUGGAGE

Transportation during the tour will be in a comfortable 9-seater minibus, which will serve as our main vehicle while traveling between birding sites in Bulgaria and Romania. This allows for flexible birding with regular roadside stops and space for optics and daypacks. During our time in the Danube Delta, we will enjoy boat-based birding from a small motorboat, through its network of channels, lakes, and reedbeds, allowing close views of wetland species such as ducks, herons, and pelicans from the comfort of a shaded boat. While the boats do not have onboard toilets, breaks will be planned accordingly.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation during this Bulgaria and Romania birding tour will consist of a mix of comfortable hotels, guesthouses, and nature lodges located close to our main birding areas. In the Rhodope Mountains, we stay in small mountain hotels that provide easy access to the spectacular nearby gorges and forests. In the Eastern Rhodopes, our base will be a stunning guesthouse near Madzharovo, ideally positioned for exploring the region's excellent raptor and warbler habitats.

Along Bulgaria's Black Sea coast, accommodation in Sozopol and Kavarna places us close to important coastal wetlands and steppe habitats near Burgas, Cape Kaliakra, and Durankulak Lake. Later in the tour we stay within the remarkable Danube Delta, where our lodge on Uzlina Island provides direct access to the delta's channels, lakes, and reedbeds for boat-based birding excursions. Our final night is near the wetlands around Vadu, offering opportunities for some last-minute birding before our transfer to Bucharest.

All accommodation used during this tour feature private en-suite bathrooms with hot water, 24-hour electricity, and Wi-Fi. Laundry services are available at several accommodations along the tour route.

WHAT TO BRING:

Clothing

Lightweight, breathable clothing is recommended for daytime birding, particularly in open habitats and along the Black Sea coast and Danube Delta, where temperatures can be pleasantly warm. Neutral or muted colors are ideal for birdwatching. Sun protection such as a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen is also recommended.

Early mornings and evenings can be cooler, especially in higher elevation areas such as the Rhodope Mountains, so layered clothing is the most suitable. A light sweater, fleece, or jacket will help keep you comfortable during early starts. Long pants are useful not only for cooler temperatures but also for protection against insects and ticks in forested or grassy areas.

Spring weather in the Balkans can be unpredictable, and brief showers are possible. We recommend bringing a lightweight waterproof jacket or rain shell. Bringing lightweight hiking boots or sturdy walking shoes for birding, and comfortable shoes or trainers for travel and relaxing is most suitable.

Equipment

Binoculars, a camera, or both, are highly recommended for all Birding Ecotours trips. Cameras are especially recommended if you wish to document your sightings, as many species seen on this trip are striking and photogenic. A small daypack is essential for carrying binoculars, water, field guides, and other personal items while in the field. A walking stick or hiking pole may be helpful for participants who prefer extra stability on uneven ground or longer walks.

Although we will not be doing a lot of night birding during the tour (we may try for **Eurasian Scops Owl** and **Eurasian Eagle-Owl**), a flashlight or headlamp can be useful for moving around accommodation at night, or in case of occasional power outages. A small personal first aid kit is also useful for treating minor cuts, blisters, or insect bites

FIELD GUIDES

Collins Bird Guide (Svensson, Mullarney, and Zetterström) – Widely regarded as the standard field guide for birds in Europe, this guide provides excellent illustrations, clear range maps, and detailed identification text. It is highly suitable for both beginner and experienced birders and is considered one of the best resources for identifying European bird species in the field.

Europe's Birds: An Identification Guide (Hume, Still, Swash, and Harrop, 2021) – A modern and comprehensive guide covering all bird species recorded in Europe. The book features high-quality photographs, up-to-date taxonomy, and concise identification text, making it a useful companion both in the field and when reviewing sightings after birding.

Field Guide to Mammals of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, Third Edition (Stéphane Aulagnier) – A comprehensive and well-illustrated guide covering the mammals of the region. It includes detailed identification text, distribution maps, and high-quality illustrations, making it an excellent reference for identifying mammals that may be encountered during the tour.

Reptiles and Amphibians of Europe (Speybroeck, Beukema, Bok, and Van der Voort, 2016) – An excellent and comprehensive guide to the reptiles and amphibians of Europe, featuring detailed photographs, range maps, and identification text. It is particularly useful for those interested in identifying the diverse herpetofauna that can be found across the Balkans and southeastern Europe.

USEFUL APPS AND WEBSITE RESOURCES

Merlin – This mobile app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology can help identify birds by sight (photos) and sound (recordings), making it a useful tool during the tour. The app's database continues to expand with new regional information and recordings. We recommend downloading the Europe bird pack before the trip so you can identify species likely to be encountered during birding in Bulgaria and Romania

eBird – The eBird website and mobile app provide an enormous amount of information on bird distribution, recent sightings, and birding hotspots. The app also allows you to keep track of your own bird lists during the tour. Through the Macaulay Library, eBird provides photo, video, and sound recordings for almost every bird species in the world, making it an excellent resource when birding in Eastern Europe.

Aves Vox – This app allows users to download bird songs and calls directly from the xeno-canto sound library onto their mobile device. It can be a useful reference for learning the calls of European species before the tour or reviewing bird vocalizations encountered in the field.

IOC World Bird List – This website provides the latest updates on global bird taxonomy, including newly described species, taxonomic splits, and lumps. It is widely used by birders and researchers worldwide and serves as the taxonomic standard used for bird lists on many international birding tours.