



Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Bulgaria's Western Rhodopes
27 June – 4 July 2024

Holiday participants

Steve and Kathy Kourik
Ann Greenizan
Julian Lawrence and Nicky Sutton

Susan Brown
Graham Phillips and Richard Halsey
Everard Daniel

Leaders

Vladimir (Vlado) Trifonov and Chris Durdin. Report by Chris Durdin.

We stayed at the Hotel Yagodina in Yagodina <https://yagodina-bg.com/en/>



Photos as attributed e.g. by Graham Phillips (GH), otherwise by Chris Durdin, all taken on the holiday.

Above: the group outside Hotel Yagodina. Below: roadside with *Morina persica*.
Cover, top: scarce copper and Rhodope lily. Bottom: scene in Shiroka Lata.



As on every Honeyguide wildlife holiday, we contributed to a conservation project. The conservation contribution of £40 per person, supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust, totalled £450. This was sent to Vlado to cover the costs of monitoring and management of the Rhodope lilies at the site we visited. The total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 is £154,022 (July 2024).

DAILY DIARY

Thursday 27 June: the way there

Why the 15:30 flight from Stansted was delayed wasn't entirely clear: a combination of summer season congestion at the airport and storms over Bulgaria, we were told. Instead we took off at 18:00, so by the time we'd put clocks on two hours and flown to warm and dry Plovdiv it was 11:30pm local time. The airport is compact, and it took very little time to clear passport control, collect bags and meet Vlado and driver Iliyan. It was soon Friday, an excuse to sing happy birthday to Richard. Just over two and half hours after leaving Plovdiv we arrived at Hotel Yagodina, given room keys by host Maria and we went straight to bed.

Friday 28 June: Yagodina

Given the late arrival we met for breakfast at nine o'clock, a nice mixture of pancakes, bread and/or cereal accompanied by local yoghurt, honey and jam. Mountain tea – a herbal infusion – was always available for breakfast (no black tea), plus various coffees from a machine.

An hour later we assembled for our local walk in Yagodina, during which Vlado mentioned that we travelled far less than any other group he'd been with – which was on account of there being so much to see. The temperature was ideal and there was no sign of the forecast rain, and perhaps not being too warm meant the butterflies were generally not fast-moving. That also applied to a big Roman snail but less so to blue ground-beetles, scurrying across the dirt road into cover. In the end we saw several of these, with a violet iridescence, and all very much on the move and a challenge for those chasing for a pic with a camera or phone. Marbled whites were plentiful; we looked at shiny rose chafers and red-and-black insects of three types: a bee-hive beetle, the shield bug *Graphosoma italicum* and a froghopper. We found four distinctive day-flying moths: black-veined white, speckled yellow, latticed heath and five-spot burnets.



Tricodes apiarus, a bee-hive beetle; black-veined moth; rustic ladder.

The rustic farm buildings were both attractive to us and to wildlife. There was a pair of black redstarts, the male of which was carrying one of the numerous crickets. Bricks were being transformed into a bee colony; twice we saw mud nests with an entrance that were the distinctive shape of red-rumped swallow nests; four young-looking tree sparrows were waiting to be fed, we presumed. Later we saw a red-rumped swallow, and at various times there were house and crag martins and barn swallows. Julian pointed out a male red-backed shrike in fine view on the corner of a farm building. Later, at lunchtime, there was another on one of the hotel's outbuildings which then moved to fence across the track.

It was Nicky who pointed out a distinctive, bright coppery butterfly on a willow in the middle distance. Happily, there was soon another nearby, then again tame as can be on a hairless catmint: scarce copper. In the meantime, we'd found various other species, including silver-studded blue, Essex skipper, clouded yellow, pearly heath and great banded grayling. A hobby flew through and of course there were lots of flowers, including fragrant orchids, rosettes of the saxifrage *Saxifraga stribyrni* and much more.

We had lunch back at Hotel Yagodina, quickly concluding that salads with bread and water were more than enough to eat, and we remarked on the very generous supply of tomatoes, a theme of meals all week.

We took a short drive through one of the local gorges and to a different track, an old road really, through some open woodland. A patch of dwarf elder at the start was especially rich, with hornet hoverfly, large skipper, several rose chafers, a bee chafer *Trichius gallicus* and the first of many nine-spotted moths. The road once took trucks and was built to access an accommodation hut in the hills, dating from the communist era, but now

was closing in. An open area had *Dorycnium pentaphyllum* and crown vetch, and other flowers we noted included the foxglove *Digitalis lanata* and wall germander. The limestone here was good for orchids: broad-leaved and red helleborine and many sac-flowered orchids. A black stork flew over, then two more. Eventually we reached the leaves of two lady's slipper orchids, though it looked like they hadn't flowered this year (and if they had, by now they would have been over). A few of the group heard a black woodpecker here.

We returned to Yagodina with time for a drink or a quiet time before dinner, at which Richard treated the group to wine to celebrate his birthday.



Nine-spotted moth and rose chafer on dwarf elder; foxglove *Digitalis lanata*.

Saturday 29 June – Stoykite and Devin

A few of us had a short walk in Yagodina before breakfast. The number of house martins with active nests felt like stepping back in time. We also saw the local red-backed shrike and a red-rumped swallow.

After an hour's drive we arrived close to Stoykite. Vlado is a national authority on one of the most spectacular local endemic plants, the Rhodope lily *Lilium rhodopaeum*, and Honeyguide has been funding his survey and monitoring work here for many years. Nonetheless, this is my first visit here (*writes Chris*), so quite a moment. The area is an attractive series of fairly steep sloping meadows, within sight of some of Stoykite's buildings. Most of the walk was on dirt tracks, and there was plenty to see: patches of betony, a slow-worm crossing the track, lots of flowering *Stachys alpina* and a corncrake calling, plus mistle thrush and yellowhammer.

The final leg meant walking up through an uncut meadow, with occasional wild boar rootings. Among the abundant false helleborine and bracken, there they were: scores of Rhodope lilies, some in perfect bloom, some past their best (a reason for coming here quickly this week). We heard about their rarity, isolation and conservation challenges, with undergrazing now a bigger issue than (at one time) overgrazing. It was difficult to see what made this part of the meadow complex different and suitable for the lilies: a lot of what we could see looked pretty similar. And everywhere, colossal numbers of crickets.



General view of the meadows at Stoykite: lilies against the sky.

On the way back we looked at *Sideritis montana*, lots of *Allium vineale* and saw both black-veined white moth and black-veined white butterflies. A fritillary was confirmed as spotted fritillary and mazarine blue settled on the track. We stopped to listen to a quail.

Lunch was booked at a café in Shiroka Lata, with most of us choosing a salad. There was time to check out the souvenirs on sale in the town, though no-one was tempted to buy a fridge magnet or wooden spoon today. As we walked back to where the bus was parked, a Hungarian glider butterfly settled on the pavement.

Our afternoon walk was in Devin Gorge, walking along the Struilitsa Ecotrail, a partly wooded and partly open path above the river to our left and limestone slopes to our right. Flowers soon found included the foxglove *Digitalis viridiflora* and the pink *Lychnis coronaria*. Vlado guessed that the *Lychnis* was of little note as probably common in the UK as a wild flower, which it isn't: instead it's familiar as a garden plant. *Campanula lanata* – a white bellflower, a Balkan endemic – was growing gripping a rock. In the same area, behind the campanula, five baby crag martins were perching in the gloom of an overhang, all this opposite a busy outdoor swimming pool.



Lunchtime café in Shiroka Lata, and the rock-hugging bellflower *Campanula lanata*.

There were various other interesting plants as we walked, such as *Allium flavum*, *Silene dichotoma* and masses of the pretty umbellifer *Orlaya grandiflora*. Several brimstones were on the wing, though these were somewhat trumped by a large poplar admiral that settled on the track. Tents of caterpillars on small-leaved lime were a puzzle: perhaps vapourer moth. At the furthest point there was a dipper on the river, several male beautiful demoiselles and goldenring dragonfly that must have been Balkan goldenring. Ann demonstrated stingless (or fen) nettle – a plant that is in the UK but poorly known. Vlado pointed out the rosettes of *Haberlea rhodopensis*, another Balkan endemic, though here it had finished flowering. As we neared the bus a scarce swallowtail flew past, and we photographed a lizard that although it was behaving like a wall lizard was actually a meadow lizard *Darevskia praticola*.

After dinner, Steve brought out his bat detector and four of us had a stroll in Yagodina. The Echo Meter recorded serotine (we saw these), noctule and Daubenton's bats.



Meadow lizard *Darevskia praticola*.

Sunday 30 June – Borino, Dospat and Zmeitsa

We puzzled over the swifts before breakfast, pale enough to be pallid swift – and I'd heard their slightly softer calls a previous day. Later Vlado contacted Dimiter from Neophron who confirmed that pallid swifts like the mountain towns here, whereas elsewhere they are more associated with coastal areas.

And then there were eight. Julian had missed yesterday with an upset tummy, and Steve was also affected today. We found an open pharmacy for extra supplies of Imodium and rehydration salts. The drive took us past lovely meadows with two particular points of note. One was fenced pockets areas of cultivation, mostly potatoes, with either wooden or electric fences to keep out wild boars. The other was large patches of giant hogweed, a new thing here in Vlado's experience, with no evidence of this invasive alien plant being controlled.

Our morning stop was within sight of the Pirin mountains and Rhodopes within Greece – one group member had a text saying, 'Welcome to Greece'. Where we parked there was a woman in traditional costume outside a small building, with others joining her. A small film shoot was in preparation: later, when we returned to the bus, there were three women and two men part way through a routine of traditional folk dancing for the camera's benefit, and coping well with the heat of the day.

An amazingly tame great banded grayling was happy on the ground – we had to be careful where we put our feet. We quickly found a corn bunting and red-backed shrike, a quail was calling and continued all morning, and there were the faint but distinctive notes of an ortolan bunting. This encouraged me to carry the telescope, though I didn't find the ortolan. We found wild gladiolus and Vlado pointed out an unfamiliar alder species *Alnus incana*, which had the added interest of alder tongue fungus galls, which Ann was alert to.



Traditional costume (AG); alder tongue fungus galls on an alder species *Alnus incana*; Arran brown and narrow-bordered five-spot burnet moths.

We heard golden orioles, both a male and the 'cat call' of a female, and eventually managed to see a bright male perching in the open, very briefly, on a Scots pine, then more glimpses as the two birds moved. The telescope was mainly useful for a very cooperative family of shrikes, and we saw the adult male feed a juvenile male. Richard was looking up and twice alerted us to a flying white stork. As we returned there was another stork in a meadow foraging for crickets, then several doing the same as we drove away, and one in the road. The telescope also came in useful for a close-up view of a common darter, so magnified that we could see the red dot of a parasitic mite near the base of one wing.

We drove to the Panorama Restaurant in Dospat for lunch. The panorama is over a huge reservoir – Dospat Dam – in a tectonic crack, in which there are fish farms for trout. So it's easy to guess what several of us had for our low food miles lunch. Before we ate, Vlado gave an overview of Bulgaria's regions and geography over a spread map. There were cormorants around the fish farms and flying crag martins and a drone outside the huge window.

Our afternoon walk was by a river near Smeitsa, with a nice mix of sunshine – for hundreds of butterflies – and shade, for us. Scores of beautiful demoiselles danced over the river. The butterflies took some puzzling over. One ringlet was probably silky ringlet, and another ringlet-like butterfly was Arran brown. Queen-of-Spain and silver-washed fritillaries were easier to ID. There were lots more green-flowered foxgloves (rather more yellow here), white *Silene roemerii* that was much liked by butterflies, as was the large Balkan endemic thistles *Cirsium appendicularum*. As we returned to the bus, Sue set off on foot to look for some possible orchids (without success), and it was such a slow track that we wondered if the bus would ever catch her, though we did, just before we reached the main road.

England 2 Slovakia 1 in the Euros was on TV this evening as we ate dinner, which was bad news for those who don't like football and nail-biting stuff for those, like me, that do!

Tuesday 1 July – Chasing ghosts: walk to Yagodinska Cave, and the valley beyond

Nothing new to note before breakfast, though we saw that a patch of potatoes (electric fenced against boars) also had a crop of mountain tea, *Sideritis*.

We were on foot this morning, a marked trail through mostly coniferous forest – spruce, fir and pine – though some broad-leaved trees later on. A brief Vlado tutorial is worth noting: the cones on a spruce hang, on a fir they are upright. Cornelian cherry (or cornel, *Cornus mas*) was neither of these, though of particular interest as the hotel had provided a drink made from its berries for those who were a under the weather, and some had been sampling the sweet red drink this morning at breakfast.

An early good flower was creeping lady's tresses and during we walk we saw a lot of this old pine forest specialist, mostly in bud. But this was trumped by Vlado's find of the day: ghost orchid! This enigmatic flower, a saprophyte, has been sought by many but seen by few, and it was new to Vlado and everyone in the group. Actually there were two, adjacent plants, right by the trail, though still easy to overlook.

That wasn't all: toothed wintergreen was another goodie, as was yellow birdsnest. The supporting cast included broad-leaved and red helleborines, gone over birdnest and fly orchids and the distinctive leaves of both hepatica and asarabacca.



Four interesting flowers in leaf litter, all easy to overlook.
Ghost orchid, toothed wintergreen, yellow birdsnest, creeping lady's tresses.

We stopped to search a tit flock which included crested tits (tricky to see) and sombre tit (only seen by me). The Merlin app told us that the singing crest was a firecrest, though we didn't see it. But we did have views of a black woodpecker, firstly calling loudly then flying around and landing for a short time on a pine trunk. From its bright red head, it was a male.

The temperature under the trees had been ideal and when we arrived at the open area around Yagodinska Cave it felt like walking into a furnace, though you could get a blast of air conditioning standing outside the cave's entrance. We had lunch here, mostly salads again. The restaurant was on the other side of the river to a row of souvenir stalls, which we all browsed and mostly didn't buy from. A grass snake was hunting tadpoles in the river's shallows and several in the group had a fine view of a purple emperor butterfly that settled briefly (*photo on page 13*).



The Rhodope endemic *Geum rhodopaeum*; spurge hawkmoth caterpillars, an early instar.

The afternoon walk was a half-hour's drive away in a lovely open valley, flood meadows with a river running through them and surrounded by fir-covered slopes. What we didn't see here was bears: this was the place where there was a chance encounter by a previous Honeyguide group. It was fairly quiet for birds in the heat of the afternoon: grey wagtail, a fly-past dipper, red-backed shrike, the usual buzzards and hooded crows. A starling on a wire was a surprise and there was a sombre tit that again only showed to me. Some cloud helped with the temperature as we walked slowly downhill towards the bus. Roadsides were colourful with flowers, and two were of special note: the marsh orchids *Dactylorhiza cordigera*, and a bright orange geum, the Rhodope endemic *Geum rhodopaeum*. Baneberry *Actaea spicata* was another 'rare in the UK' species. We confirmed both large copper and large blue butterflies, and found caterpillars of spurge hawk-moth on *Euphorbia myrsinites*. A bright blue southern skimmer was a new odonata species.

After dinner we tried Steve's bat detector again, with underwhelming results: one serotine and one noctule detected. However, this was more than compensated for by a brief burst of nightingale and sightings of fireflies and glow-worms. Later we heard that Graham had walked beyond the village, up the hill, and seen and heard a nightjar.

2 July – Trigrad to Yagodina

Not much to report on the usual pre-breakfast stroll, though we did manage a good view of red-rumped swallow for Sue. We drove to Trigrad Gorge and stopped where everyone searches for the wallcreepers that were once regular here, then disappeared for a few years, and have returned. No luck today in the 30 minutes we spent, though we did see scores of alpine swifts and managed to find a single, last-lingering, *Haberlea rhodopensis* in flower, a good use for the telescope.

Today's seven-kilometre walk was from Trigrad village to Yagodina, starting with the brief distraction of a fridge magnet stall. It was a warm day, and the first third was generally uphill, though rich in wildlife and we took it slowly. In the village we found our first linnets, serins and house sparrows. The star flower was certainly *Morina persica* or Persian whorlflower, first seen beyond a fence then several by the path. This dramatic-looking flower has a distribution that stretches from here to the Middle East, as the name suggests.

Our track was on the opposite side of the valley to an old Roman road, dating from the Roman occupation. The supporting cast to the many whorlflowers included white *Berberoa incana* (a showy crucifer), a yellow mayweed *Cota (Anthemis) tinctoria*, the germander *Teucrium montanum*, a strange, thin bellflower *Asyneuma limonifolium*, the yellow yarrow *Achillea clypeolata* and the Balkan endemic scabious *Lomelosia (Scabiosa) rhodopensis*.

We moved into open woodland, mostly of fir/pine/spruce. We all heard and some saw a raven, and a grey-headed woodpecker called persistently for ages, staying equally persistently out of view. At last we all saw Apollo butterfly.



Brown bear footprints; *Morina persica*.

Then – bear footprints! They were in mud on the path, a mother and cub, Vlado explained, by their size. We were lucky that they were so clear as most puddles had only the tyre tracks of 4WD vehicles.

We ate our picnic in a nice meadow, roughly at the end of the first third, the uphill stretch, of today's walk, with a flat third and a downhill third to follow. Here we heard crested tits and saw a green huntsman spider on Ann's

camera. A silver-studded blue settled on me and then my watch strap and was so fixed there that everyone could photograph or observe it in detail, in particular seeing the diagnostic backward spur on a tibia.



Green huntsman spider (female); a confiding silver-studded blue.

In the next section we heard a loud willow tit, though it didn't show, and had another view – albeit fleeting, of black woodpecker. There was a first live terrestrial mammal for Steve in the shape of a roe deer. Vlado found more yellow birdsnest, there were our best red helleborines so far and two spikes of martagon (Turk's cap) lily, one in flower, one in bud. Two more interesting flowers as we moved on included the thistle-like *Ptilostemon afer*, from the Balkans and Asia minor, and the white horehound *Marrubium frivaldskyanum*.

The last leg was through open meadows, where mistle thrushes appeared a couple times. Most of us took a short detour to see a small chapel, dedicated to St Mary, the restoration of which had been funded by Maria from Hotel Yagodina some years ago. The track to the chapel was like a rock garden of flowers; the inside was adorned with pictures of saints, some familiar to us, some Bulgarian. When we continued we were soon on the path we'd walked on the first morning, and a hobby flew over. We were back at 4:30 pm, and an app on Vlado's phone calculated we'd travelled the seven kilometres at one mile an hour.

After dinner, several walked to where Graham had been yesterday evening, despite the gathering clouds. We heard a nightjar, saw fireflies and then the rain started, though happily everyone had taken raincoats. Jules and Nicky detoured to see glow-worms, still glowing despite the rain.

3 July – Wallcreepers and Trigrad Gorge

It rained much of the night, before breakfast and during breakfast, so there was no early walk and a departure at 9:30 made sense, by which time the rain had stopped.



Watching for wallcreepers in Trigrad Gorge; digiscoped dot, a wallcreeper, honestly!

First stop was the same place at Trigrad Gorge, for what seemed like a fruitless search for a wallcreeper for the first 30 minutes. But, boy oh boy, it was worth the wait. Nicky was the first to see it, on the large cliff face opposite. Here this gorgeous red-winged bird fluttered and climbed. It moved to various cliff faces, then suddenly there were two and, briefly, three. It became apparent that one, at least, was going regularly to the

same spot. We walked through the road tunnel to where we were opposite that spot, then several times we observed a wallcreeper landing on a face of cliff that was roughly half pale, half dark, with a clear vertical line dividing the two. On that line was some vegetation, including *Habelea rhodopensis*, and behind that an irregularity where the wallcreeper would disappear from view, presumably into a nesting cavity. From here we walked to the café in the gorge (which served the worst cappuccino I've ever tasted), having briefly descended some steps to the Devil's Throat feature on route. From the café that same distinctive rock pattern was still within telescope view and the wallcreeper continued to come and go.

A black stork flew along the ridge, somewhere in the gorge someone heard a peregrine and both crag & house martins and alpine swifts flew over from time to time. We walked on up the gorge, stopping at a recently created garden, funded by the EU, displaying native plants and life-size models of local mammal species, with the added entertainment of buttons to press to produce the sound of a brown bear, wild boar, chamois etc.

Over the road from the garden, Julian noticed a toad and a leech in the river, and we soon found three yellow-bellied toads, with just a hint of yellow showing while they were the right way up. A grass snake of the striped form (two parallel pale lines running down its back) swam through, though we didn't see it catch any of the many tadpoles of, we assume, the yellow-bellied toads. Lunch was at a small restaurant here: despite a week's experience of ordering modestly, we still seemed to have too much food!

Rain continued to hold off, bar a few spits, and we spent what was left of the afternoon in another lovely valley, walking along a quiet road by a river. Yet again the roadsides were rich with wild flowers, including scores of Persian whorlflowers, many martagon lilies in bud, broad-leaved helleborines and a possible *Epipactis microphyllum*. The many fragrant orchids included one that was especially large and with completely white flowers. In bare areas under the coniferous trees there were yet more yellow birdsnests and more toothed wintergreen. There was a frustratingly brief glimpse of a distant golden eagle and a slightly better view of a nutcracker that flew high across the valley.

We returned via Trigrad, pausing for Everard to buy a wallcreeper fridge magnet to mark this morning's success. Back in Yagodina, we heard that it had rained here for much of the afternoon. Graham had opted out of today's day out and had wildlife news to share: chamois above the 'nightjar' meadow, crepuscular burnets and our first wall brown butterfly.



From Graham's day at Yagodina: crepuscular burnet moths, chamois, wall brown (GP).

Our usual evening checklists was followed by our final evening meal, during which our host Maria presented us all with souvenir wooden spoons or spatulas. Then we shared the holiday highlights noted below.

4 July – Yagodina to Plovdiv and home

A mostly cloudy but dry day for our departure, with almost a full day in Bulgaria ahead of us. Maria from Hotel Yagodina said farewell, we took group photos and left at 9:30. Our first stop was for coffee and loos at a garage.

Our main wildlife stop was a walk along a narrow path on a limestone slope somewhere beyond Stoykite (where we saw the Rhodope lilies). There were interesting finds almost immediately: a large spurge hawk-moth caterpillar, oddly on *Seseli*, an umbellifer; several 'zebra' snails and a new butterfly later identified as Ripart's anomalous blue. Flowers included *Dianthus deltoides*, Montpellier milk-vetch (in seed), cross gentian and the bugle *Ajuga laxmanii*. There were more creeping lady's tresses, though we were plainly too late for orchids. We reached a craggy area where four recently fledged kestrels were being attended by their parents. A rock bunting settled briefly on a dead pine. Apollo butterflies were on the wing for much of the time and, as we returned, there was a confiding individual nectaring on dwarf elder, perhaps because the weather had cooled. We ate our packed lunches on picnic tables by a peace display made of military tin hats.



Apollo; Ripart's anomalous blue; *Araneus circe*.

We had a final stop at Bachkovo Monastery, a tourist honeypot for good reasons, with attractive buildings and decorations. Here cicadas were calling, swallows and martins were nesting and there were some impressive trees, especially large oriental plane trees and a huge Metasequoia (dawn redwood or water fir, from China) planted in 1958. A rove beetle, that reminded us of a devil's coach-horse, was pinned down as *Staphylinus caesarus*. We moved from here to Asenovgrad for an early evening dinner – yes, more salad, with fried cheese parcels and liver slices that seemed to be restaurant specialities.

From there it was a short hop to Plovdiv Airport which, being in the lowlands, was as reminder that the Rhodope Mountains are relatively cool in summer. We repacked and most of us waited outside rather than queue for bag drop. This proved fruitful for birdwatching. On the approach to the airport, a turtle dove dropped into a sunflower crop and collared doves flew past, and now we added bee-eater, roller, Spanish sparrow, little owl and crested lark to the holiday's tally. The outgoing flight was an hour late departing though about a half of that was made up on the flights out and back, so we were about half an hour late arriving at Stansted, just in time to hear about the historic outcome of UK's general election.



Outside and inside Bachkovo Monastery.

The best bits: these are the holiday highlights nominated by group members.

Julian	Prescription arriving; Sue's 'who-hoo' for orchids; colour of meadows; wallcreeper, the characters.
Nicky	Golden oriole; mass of crickets in the Rhodope lily meadow; wallcreeper.
Richard	Golden oriole; meadows; wallcreeper.
Graham	Scarce copper; start of walk to lilies, clouds of insects evoking memories of childhood; nightjar.
Ann	Vast array of invertebrates on first days.
Everard	Apollo and coppers; wallcreeper and shrikes; orchids & lilies; Vlado.
Sue	Sounds of crickets approaching the meadows; the waxiness of Rhodope lilies; walk through the forest and ghost orchids.
Steve	Meadows alive with a mass of wildlife; fireflies.
Kathy	Seeing the golden oriole; the abundance of crickets and wild flowers.
Vlado	Protected nature and habitats; wallcreeper.
Chris	Rhodope lilies; Persian whorlflowers; red-backed shrikes; abundance of everything (including tomatoes, said Richard.)

WILDLIFE LISTS

BIRDS

Cormorant	Dospat Dam reservoir
Heron	
White stork	Several around Borino.
Black stork	One near Trigrad
Sparrowhawk	One recorded.
Common buzzard	The commonest raptor, seen almost every day
Golden eagle	One distant view.
Kestrel	Small numbers most days
Hobby	Seen on two days, including close to Yagodina.
Peregrine	Heard in Trigrad Gorge.
Corncrake	Heard at Stoykite.
Quail	Heard at Stoykite and Borino.
Yellow-legged gull	Distant gulls probably this species at Plovdiv Airport
Feral pigeon	In towns and villages.
Collared dove	Seen as we approached Plovdiv Airport.
Turtle dove	Seen as we approached Plovdiv Airport.
Little owl	Plovdiv Airport.
Tawny owl	Heard at Yagodina.
Nightjar	In the meadows above Yagodina.
Common swift	Numerous, and in Yagodina
Pallid swift	Yagodina
Alpine Swift	Large flock over Trigrad Gorge.
Bee-eater	Plovdiv Airport.
Roller	Plovdiv Airport.
Green woodpecker	Heard most days
Grey-headed woodpecker	Heard on the Trigrad to Yagodina walk, confirmed by Merlin.
Great spotted woodpecker	Heard only.
Black woodpecker	Seen on the walk to Yagodinska Cave, and again on the Trigrad to Yagodina walk.
Nuthatch	Heard only.
Crested lark	Plovdiv Airport
Crag martin	Common in suitable rocky habitats
Barn swallow	Common everywhere
Red-rumped Swallow	Three nests and seen at Yagodina.
House martin	Common; breeding in villages and on cliff faces
Grey wagtail	Common in rivers.
White wagtail	Common around water and in villages.
Dipper	Frequent in all upland rivers.
Wren	Heard only.
Robin	Heard regularly, seen occasionally.
Nightingale	A brief burst of song one evening in Yagodina.
Black redstart	A feature of towns and villages, including Yagodina.
Blackbird	Fairly common
Song thrush	Frequently heard in the mountain forests
Mistle thrush	Seen occasionally around upland forest habitats
Blackcap	Common in forest areas, especially near streams, and around the villages
Chiffchaff	Common in mountain forests; still singing.
Firecrest	Not seen well; the only crest confirmed by Merlin.
Marsh tit	Heard
Willow tit	Heard on the Trigrad-Yagodina walk
Crested Tit	Surprisingly scarce; heard only on St. Iliya
Sombre tit	Glimpses on two occasions.
Coal tit	Heard in conifer forests.
Blue tit	Fairly common
Great Tit	Common
Wallcreeper	Three in Trigrad Gorge, including visiting what was probably a nesting hole.
Golden oriole	Calling loudly and seen well, though briefly, at Borino.
Red-backed Shrike	Very common in upland agricultural habitats and scrub; including from the hotel.
Jay	In the forests
Magpie	While travelling.
Nutcracker	Two seen, one making a long flight.
Hooded crow	Common
Raven	Seen in small numbers several day
Starling	A few sightings only.
House Sparrow	Common in some towns and villages, including Trigrad and Devin
Tree Sparrow	Replaces house sparrows in some villages, such as Yagodina

Spanish sparrow	Plovdiv Airport.
Chaffinch	Common
Serin	With linnets by Trigrad village.
Greenfinch	Heard only.
Goldfinch	Fairly common
Linnet	Small numbers in several places.
Yellowhammer	Present, and reasonably abundant, in agricultural uplands
Ortolan bunting	A singing male at Borino, not seen.
Corn bunting	In agricultural areas
Rock bunting	A male at the stop on the return journey



Yellow-bellied toad, digiscoped; red-backed shrike (ED)

MAMMALS	
Wild boar (rootings);	Chamois
Brown bear (footprints)	Badger (latrines)
Marten sp (prints and scats)	Fox (heard)
Serotine (seen and recorded on bat detector)	Roe deer
Daubenton's bat (recorded on bat detector)	Noctule (recorded on bat detector)
REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS	
Meadow lizard	Grass snake
Marsh frog (heard)	Yellow-bellied toad; green toad (roadkill)
DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES	
Broad-bodied chaser <i>Libellula depressa</i>	Common darter <i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>
Goldenring sp, probably Balkan goldenring <i>Cordulegater heros</i>	Beautiful demoiselle <i>Calopteryx virgo</i>
Southern skimmer <i>Orthetrum brunneum</i>	
MOTHS	
Spurge hawkmoth (caterpillars)	Speckled yellow
Hummingbird hawkmoth	Burnet companion
Narrow-bordered 5-spot burnet	Chimney sweeper
Transparent burnet	Latticed heath
6-spotted burnet	Common heath
Crepuscular burnet	Forester sp
Nine-spotted moth	Black-veined moth
Puss moth (caterpillars)	Small magpie
White furcula moth (caterpillars)	

BUTTERFLIES		
Large Skipper	Essex Skipper	Swallowtail
Scarce Swallowtail	Apollo	Large White
Small White	Green-veined White	Orange Tip
Wood White	Black-veined White	Clouded Yellow
Berger's Clouded Yellow	Brimstone	Purple Emperor
Poplar Admiral	White Admiral	Hungarian Glider
Painted Lady	Peacock	Comma
Small Tortoiseshell	Queen-of-Spain Fritillary	Silver-washed Fritillary
Marsh Fritillary	Spotted Fritillary	Nicker's Fritillary
Heath Fritillary	Speckled Wood	Wall Brown
Woodland Grayling	Great Banded Grayling	Ringlet
Silky Ringlet	Meadow Brown	Pearly Heath
Chestnut Heath	Small Heath	Marbled White
Arran Brown	Silver-studded Blue	Common Blue
Mazarine Blue	Balkan Copper	Scarce Copper
Small Copper	Large Blue	Ripart's Anomalous Blue
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	Green Hairstreak	



Eurydema ornata, pale morph; *Cercopis vulnerata*, a black-and-red froghopper on a *Verbascum*; purple emperor (all AG).

OTHER INVERTEBRATES

Sightings are listed if they were identified to species or at least to genus.

Mollusca – Molluscs

Arion ater large black slug

Helix pomatia Roman snail

Zebrina detrita a stripey snail

Arachnida – Spiders

Micrommata virescens Green huntsman spider

Araneus circe an orb-web spider

Orthoptera – Grasshoppers and Crickets

Psorodonotus fieberi a large, fat, brown bush-cricket

Isophya sp. a plump bush-cricket

Poecilimon thoracicus a bush-cricket

Psophus stridulus rattling grasshopper

Isophya speciosa a wingless green bush-cricket

Asiotmethis limbatus a large brown grasshopper

Tettigonia virridissima great green bush-cricket

Metrioptera roeselii Roesel's bush-cricket

Neuroptera – Lacewings and Ant-lions

Libelloides macaronius an ascalaphid or owl-fly

Hemiptera – Bugs

Pyrhocoris apterus fire bug

Cercopis vulnerata a black-and-red froghopper

Dolycoris baccarum hairy shield-bug

Codophila varia a shield bug

Graphosoma italicum "Millwall Bug"

Eurygaster testudinaria tortoise shield-bug

Cicada sp cicada

Eurydema ornata

Lygaeus saxatilis a ground bug

Hymenoptera – Bees, Wasps, Ants and Sawflies

Polistes sp. a paper wasp

Formica rufa wood ant

Xylocopa violacea violet carpenter-bee

Bombus lapidarius red-tailed bumblebee

Diptera – Flies

Volucella zonaria hornet hoverfly

Coleoptera – Beetles

Carabus violaceus violet ground-beetle

Tricodes apiarus a bee-hive beetle

Carabus intricatus blue ground-beetle

Agapanthia cynarae a longhorn beetle

Staphylinus caesarus a rove beetle

Monochamus sartor a black, spotted longhorn

Cetonia aurata rose chafer

Trichius gallicus southern bee chafer

Mylabris (=Hycleus) polymorpha an oil or blister beetle

Stictoleptura fulva tawny longhorn beetle

GALLS

Diploles rosae robin's-pincushion gall on dog rose

Taphrina alni alder tongue fungus

Aulagromyza coenigera a fly mine on honeysuckle

Harmandia tremulae a gall midge on aspen

Eriophyes tiliae nail galls on lime, gall mite

Eriophyes leisoma gall midge on lime

Adelges laricis aphid gall on larch



Snail *Zebrina detrita*; *Mylabris polymorpha*, an oil or blister beetle, on chicory; latticed heath, a distinctive day-flying moth.

PLANTS NiF = not in flower

FERNS & HORSTAILS		
<i>A. ruta-muraria</i> Wall-rue		<i>Polypodium vulgare</i> common polypody
<i>A. trichomanes</i> Maidenhair Spleenwort		<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> Bracken
CONIFERS		
<i>Abies alba</i> Silver Fir	<i>Juniperus communis</i> Juniper	<i>Pinus nigra</i> Black Pine
<i>Picea abies</i> Norway Spruce		<i>P. sylvestris</i> Scots Pine
HIGHER PLANTS		
Aceraceae – Maple family		
<i>Acer campestre</i>		Field Maple
<i>A. pseudoplatanus</i>		Sycamore
Apiaceae – Carrot family		
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>		Ground-elder
<i>Chaerophyllum aureum</i> NiF		Golden Chervil
<i>Eryngium campestre</i>		Field Eryngo
<i>Heracleum mantegazzianum</i>		Giant Hogweed
<i>Heracleum sibiricum</i>		'Green' Hogweed
<i>Laserpitium siler</i>		Laserwort
<i>Orlaya grandiflora</i>		White Laceflower
<i>Pastinaca hirsuta</i>		Hairy Parsnip
<i>Seseli rigidum</i>		a Rhodopean Moon-carrot
Aristolochiaceae – Birthwort family		
<i>Asarum europaeum</i>		Asarabacca
Asclepiadaceae – Milkweed family		
<i>Vincetoxicum hirundinaria</i>		Swallow-wort
Asteraceae – Daisy family		
<i>A. clypeolata</i>		Yellow Yarrow
<i>A. millefolium</i>		Yarrow
<i>Anthemis tinctoria</i>		Yellow Chamomile
<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>		Mugwort
<i>Arctium minus</i>		Lesser burdock
<i>Carduus thoermeri</i> (= <i>C. nutans</i>)		
<i>C. corymbosa</i>		Clustered Carline-thistle
<i>Centaurea affinis</i>		
<i>Centaurea nervosa</i> (= <i>C. phrygia</i>)		A knapweed
<i>C. triumfettii</i>		Squarrose Knapweed
<i>Cirsium appendiculatum</i>		Balkan Thistle
<i>C. ligulare</i>		
<i>Erigeron acris</i>		Blue fleabane
<i>Hieracium pannosum</i> (v woolly)		
<i>Inula aschersoniana</i>		
<i>Inula oculus-christi</i>		
<i>Mycelis muralis</i>		Wall-lettuce
<i>Petasites hybridus</i>		Butterbur
<i>Tanacetum corymbosum</i>		a white tansy
<i>Telekia speciosa</i>		Large Yellow Ox-eye
<i>Tragopogon pratensis</i>		Goat's-beard
<i>Tripleurospermum</i> sp		
<i>Tussilago farfara</i>		Colt's-foot
Betulaceae – Birch family		
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>		Alder
<i>Alnus viridis</i>		Green Alder
Boraginaceae – Borage family		
<i>Anchusa barrelieri</i>		False Alkanet
<i>Echium vulgare</i>		Viper's-bugloss
Brassicaceae – Cabbage family		
<i>Alyssum murale</i>		
<i>Arabis</i> sp		
<i>Berteroa incana</i>		
<i>Cardamine impatiens</i>		Narrow-leaved Bittercress
Campanulaceae – Bellflower family		
<i>Asyneuma limonifolium</i>		
<i>Campanula lanata</i>		
<i>C. patula</i>		Spreading Bellflower
<i>C. persicifolia</i>		Peach-leaved Bellflower
<i>C. trachelium</i>		Nettle-leaved bellflower
<i>Trachelium rumelianum</i>		Throatwort
Caprifoliaceae – Honeysuckle family		
<i>Lonicera xylosteum</i>		Fly Honeysuckle
<i>Sambucus ebulus</i>		Dwarf Elder
<i>S. nigra</i>		Elder
<i>Viburnum lantana</i>		Wayfaring-tree
Caryophyllaceae – Campion family		
<i>Arenaria rhodopaea</i>		Rhodope Sandwort
<i>Dianthus giganteus</i>		Large Pink

<i>D. petraeus</i>	Rock Pink (white)
<i>Lychnis coronaria</i>	Rose Campion
<i>Petrorhagia prolifera</i>	Kholrauschia
<i>Silene dichotoma</i>	Forked Catchfly
<i>S. roemeri</i>	
<i>S. vulgaris</i>	Bladder Campion
Celastraceae – Spindle family	
<i>Euonymus latifolius</i>	
Cistaceae – Rock-rose family	
<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	Rock-rose
<i>Helianthemum oelandicum</i>	Hoary rock-rose
Clusiaceae – St. John's-wort family	
<i>Hypericum cerastoides</i>	Aaron's Beard
<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	Perforate St John's-wort
Cornaceae – Dogwood family	
<i>Cornus mas</i>	Cornelian-cherry
<i>C. sanguinea</i>	Dogwood
Corylaceae – Hazel family	
<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	Hornbeam
<i>C. orientalis</i>	Eastern Hornbeam
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel
<i>Ostrya carpinifolia</i>	Hop-hornbeam
Crassulaceae – Stonecrop family	
<i>Sedum acre</i>	Biting Stonecrop
<i>S. album</i>	White Stonecrop
Cuscuaceaea – Dodder family	
<i>Cuscuta sp</i>	Dodder
Dipsacaceae – Teasel family	
<i>K. drymeia</i>	Hungarian Widow-flower
<i>Morina persica</i>	Prickly Whorlflower
<i>Scabiosa rhodopensis</i>	Rhodopean Scabious
Euphorbiaceae – Spurge family	
<i>Euphorbia amygdaloides</i>	Wood Spurge
<i>E. cyparissias</i>	Cypress Spurge
<i>E. myrsinites</i>	Rock Spurge
Fabaceae – Pea family	
<i>Anthyllis vulneraria ssp. bulgarica</i>	Kidney-vetch
<i>Chamacytistus hirsutus</i>	Clustered Broom
<i>Coronilla varia</i>	Crown Vetch
<i>Dorycnium herbaceum (D. pentaphyllum)</i>	Prostrate Canary-clover
<i>Genista carinalis</i>	a tiny broom
<i>G. januensis</i>	Genoa Broom (winged)
<i>Lathyrus niger</i>	Black Pea
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Bird's-foot-trefoil
<i>Melilotus albus</i>	White Melilot
<i>Melilotus officinalis</i>	Ribbed Melilot
<i>Onobrychis sp</i>	a sainfoin
<i>Ononis spinosa</i>	Spiny restharrow
<i>Robinia pseudacacia</i>	False Acacia
<i>Trifolium ochroleucon</i>	Sulphur Clover
<i>T. pratense</i>	Red Clover
<i>Vicia cracca</i>	Tufted Vetch
Fagaceae – Beech family	
<i>Fagus sylvatica ssp. moesiaca</i>	Beech
Geraniaceae – Crane's-bill family	
<i>Geranium lucidum</i>	Shining Crane's-bill
<i>G. macrorrhizum</i>	Rock Crane's-bill
<i>G. pyrenaicum</i>	Pyrenean Crane's-bill
<i>G. robertianum</i>	Herb-Robert
<i>G. sanguineum</i>	Bloody Crane's-bill
Gesneriaceae – African-violet family	
<i>Haberlea rhodopensis</i>	Rhodopean Haberlea
Globulariaceae – Globularia family	
<i>Globularia cordifolia</i>	Matted Globularia
Iridaceaea – Iris family	
<i>Gladiolus illyricus</i>	Field gladioli
Juglandaceae – Walnut family	
<i>Juglans regia</i>	Walnut
Lamiaceae – Mint family	
<i>Acinos arvensis</i>	Basil-thyme
<i>Marrubium frivaldskyanum</i>	
<i>Mentha longifolia</i>	Horse Mint
<i>Micromeria dalmatica</i>	
<i>Prunella laciniata</i>	Cut-leaved self-heal
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Self-heal

<i>Salvia verticillata</i>	Whorled Clary
<i>Scutellaria altissima</i>	Tall Skullcap
<i>Sideritis scardica</i>	Mountain Tea
<i>S. montana</i>	Ironwort
<i>Stachys alpina</i>	Alpine Woundwort
<i>S. officinalis</i>	Betony
<i>S. recta</i>	Yellow Woundwort
<i>Teucrium chamaedrys</i>	Wall Germander
<i>Teucrium montanum</i>	a germander
<i>Thymus</i> sp.	Thyme
Liliaceae – Lily family	
<i>Colchicum autumnale</i> NiF	Meadow Saffron
<i>Lilium martagon</i>	Martagon Lily
<i>L. rhodopaeum</i>	Rhodope Lily
<i>Muscari comosum</i>	Tassel Hyacinth
<i>Paris quadrifolia</i> NiF	Herb Paris
<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i> NiF	Solomon's-seal
<i>Veratrum lobelianum</i>	False-helleborine
Linaceae – Flax family	
<i>Linum bienne</i>	Pale Flax
Oleaceae – Olive family	
<i>Fraxinus ornus</i>	Manna Ash
Monotropaceae	
<i>Monotropa hypopitys</i>	Yellow birdsnest
Onagraceae – Willowherb family	
<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i>	Rose-bay Willowherb
Orchidaceae – Orchid family	
<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>	Pyramidal Orchid
<i>Cephalanthera rubra</i>	Red Helleborine
<i>Coeloglossum viride</i> NiF	Frog Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza cordigera</i>	Heart-flowered Marsh-orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza saccifera</i>	Sac-flowered Orchid
<i>Epipogium aphyllum</i>	Ghost Orchid
<i>Epipactis helleborine</i>	Broad-leaved Helleborine
<i>Goodyera repens</i>	Creeping Lady's Tresses
<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>	Fragrant Orchid
<i>Neottia nidus-avis</i>	Birdsnest Orchid
<i>Ophrys insectifera</i>	Fly Orchid
<i>Platanthera chlorantha</i>	Greater Butterfly-orchid
Orobanchaceae – Broomrape family	
<i>Orobanche</i> sp	a broomrape, not identified
Papaveraceae – Poppy family	
<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>	Common Poppy
Plantaginaceae – Plantain family	
<i>Plantago media</i>	Hoary Plantain
<i>P. subulata</i>	Awl-leaved Plantain
Platanaceae – Plane family	
<i>Platanus orientalis</i>	Oriental Plane
Plumbaginaceae – Sea-lavender family	
<i>Armeria rumelica</i>	A thrift
Poaceae – Grass family (v incompl;te)	
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking-grass
<i>Stipa pennata</i>	Feather-grass
Polygalaceae – Milkwort family	
<i>Polygala major</i>	Large Milkwort
Primulaceae – Primrose family	
<i>Primula vulgaris</i> NiF	Primrose
Pyrolaceae – Wintergreen family	
<i>Orthilia secunda</i>	Serrated or Toothed wintergreen
Ranunculaceae – Buttercup family	
<i>Actaea spiralis</i>	Baneberry
<i>Aquilegia vulgaris</i>	Columbine
<i>Hepatica nobilis</i> NiF	Hepatica
<i>Ranunculus montanum</i>	
Rosaceae – Rose family	
<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	Agrimony
<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	Meadowsweet
<i>F. vulgaris</i>	Dropwort
<i>Fragaria vesca</i>	Wild Strawberry
<i>Geum rhodopaeum</i>	
<i>Potentilla argentea</i>	Hoary Cinquefoil
<i>P. borisii-regis</i>	King Boris's Cinquefoil
<i>P. erecta</i>	Tormentil
<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>	Salad Burnet
<i>S. aucuparia</i>	Rowan

Rubiaceae – Bedstraw family	
<i>Cruciata laevipes</i>	Crosswort
<i>Galium verum</i>	Lady's Bedstraw
Salicaceae – Willow family	
<i>Populus tremula</i>	Aspen
<i>Salix alba</i>	White Willow
<i>Salix caprea</i>	Goat Willow
<i>Salix fragilis</i>	Crack Willow
Saxifragaceae – Saxifrage family	
<i>Saxifraga sempervivum</i>	Evergreen Saxifrage
<i>S. stribyri</i>	
Scrophulariaceae – Figwort family (including toadflaxes, though these are now classified with plantains Plantaginaceae)	
<i>Digitalis lanata</i>	Grecian Foxglove
<i>D. viridiflora</i>	Green Foxglove
<i>Euphrasia</i> sp.	Eyebright
<i>Linaria genistifolia</i>	Balkan Toadflax (yellow)
<i>Melampyrum sylvaticum</i>	Wood Cow-wheat
<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	Yellow Rattle
<i>Scrophularia heterophylla</i>	
<i>Verbascum longifolium</i> ssp <i>pannosum</i>	
<i>Verbascum nobile</i>	Noble Mullein
<i>Veronica anagallis-aquatica</i>	(Blue) Water Speedwell
Solanaceae – Nightshade family	
<i>Hyoscyamus niger</i>	Henbane
Tiliaceae – Lime family	
<i>Tilia cordata</i>	Small-leaved Lime
Urticaceae – Nettle family	
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Stinging Nettle
<i>U. galaeopsifolia</i>	Stingless Nettle
Valerianaceae – Valerian family	
<i>Valeriana montana</i>	Dwarf Valerian
<i>V. officinalis</i>	Common Valerian
Violaceae – Violet family	
<i>V. tricolor</i>	Wild Pansy



From left to right: hop-hornbeam *Ostrya carpinifolia* compared with eastern hornbeam *Carpinus orientalis*, *Marrubium frivaldskyanum*, a white horehound; ironwort *Sideritis montana*.



Dactylorhiza saccifera; a very white fragrant orchid; broad-leaved helleborine; *Dactylorhiza cordigera*; cross gentian.