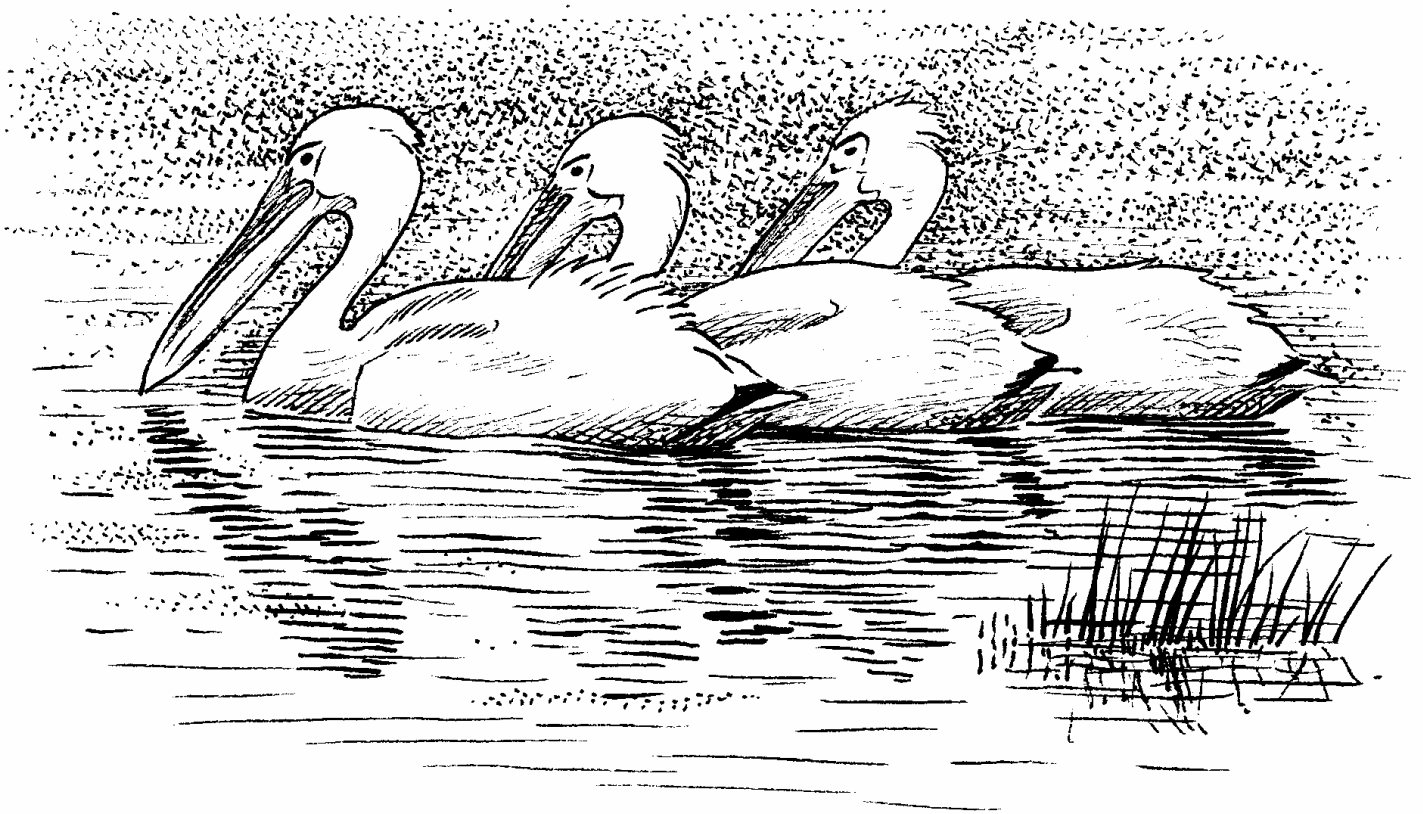


Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich NR7 0PX
Tel: 01603 300552 Evenings & weekends Fax: 01603 491586
www.honeyguide.co.uk E-mail: honeyguide@tesco.net



Danube Delta
31 May – 9 June 2003
14 – 21/23 June 2003

Danube Delta 2003
Cambridge RSPB local group
31 May – 9 June 2003

Holiday participants

Barbara Hughes
Peter and Joan Bull
Gill Devereux
Thea Cockcroft
Audrey Meaney
Anne Shearcroft
Sandra Clarke
Dan and Judy Bloom
Melvyn and Brenda Smith
Roger and Christine Sansom
John Durdin (guest of Ibis tours)

Danube Delta
14 – 21/23 June 2003

Holiday participants

Raymond Harrison	Richmond, Surrey
Geoff Knight and Celia Miller	Ipswich
Don & Jean Burn	Harpenden
John Sands	Kettering
Kit Carter	Oswestry

Cambridge RSPB local group
Mick and Dorothy Best
Maureen Willand
Andrew Camps
Colin Kirtland
Harold & Hilary Magnay

Leaders

Eugen Petrescu (birds)
Mihai Petrescu (botanist in Dobrogea)

There were two groups in spring/early summer 2003, with members of the Cambridge RSPB local group in the first week, plus an extension to the holiday for two days in Bucharest. The second week was a mix of Honeyguiders and more from the Cambridge area who couldn't be fitted into the first group, many of whom also had an extra two days in Bucharest. These are combined into this one holiday report.

Daily diary and bird list by Eugen Petrescu, translated by Octavian in the Ibis office.

Edited – with a light touch – by Chris Durdin.

Illustrations by Rob Hume. Cover: white pelicans

This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. The conservation contribution this year of £25 per person was given to the young ornithologists group in Tulcea, *Falco cherrug* (the saker falcon). From these two groups, plus an Ancient Tree Forum Study tour to Romania in October 2003, a total of £1000 was given this year. This brings the total given to the Romanian Ornithological Society (SOR) since 1999 to £2000, and to various conservation projects in Europe to £30,075 since the start of Honeyguide in 1991. A thank-you letter from SOR appears at the end of this report.

Danube Delta group 1 31 May – 9 June 2003

Saturday 31 May – Bucharest to Tulcea

On our way to Tulcea, after crossing the Danube and entering the Dobrogea, we made a short stop near the Hasarlik Lake. There a lot of herons were seen – Night Heron, Little Egret, Great White Egret, Purple Herons and especially a bittern – also we could see there Pochards and Ferruginous Ducks.

Sunday, 1 June

Parches-Somova, Jijila lake and Macin Mountains

Due to the low level of water, we preferred an area which is richer in birds; the Parches-Somova complex, Jijila lake and Macin Mountains. It was a very beautiful day and the landscape from Parches-Somova was a marvel for the group, by its unexpected mix of wetland area, steppe and hills. A lot of photos were done in Parches.

On the lake there were a lot of water birds as well as in the surrounding area were other kinds of birds, including Black-necked Grebe, White Pelicans, Pygmy Cormorants, Little Egrets, Great White Egrets, Purple Herons, Grey Herons, Glossy Ibis, Greylag Geese, Gadwalls, Garganeys, Ferruginous Ducks, Pochards, Mallards, Marsh Harriers, Long-legged Buzzards (hunting for susliks), Booted Eagles, Black-winged Stilts, Avocets, Common Terns, Whiskered Terns, Little Owl, Bee-eaters in colony (*below*), lots of Rollers and Hoopoes, Syrian Woodpecker (near the village Somova), Crested Larks, Skylarks, Isabelline Wheatears, Northern Wheatears, Tawny Pipits, Reed Warblers, Great Reed Warblers, Whitethroat, Penduline Tit, Bearded Tit, Golden Oriole, a lot of Red-backed Shrikes and Lesser Grey Shrikes, Rose-coloured Starlings, Reed Buntings, Ortolans and Corn Buntings.



It was hard to leave this surprising place, where a foreign investor intends to build a hotel complex, and headed towards Macin. On our way we had a stop at the Lake Jijila where we found along with the common water birds some Ruddy Shelducks and Shelducks.

In the Macin Mountains, in a mixture of rocky areas and forests with Mediterranean looks, we were able to see interesting birds: Honey Buzzards, Steppe Buzzards, Common Buzzards, Long-legged Buzzards, Booted Eagles, Levant Sparrowhawks, Stone-curlews, Tawny Pipits, many Isabelline Wheatears, Pied Wheatears, Rock Thrush, Blackbirds, Garden Warbler, heard a Barred Warbler, Woodchat Shrike (also Red-backed and Lesser Grey), Rose-coloured Starling, Spanish Sparrows, Tree Sparrows, Ortolans, Corn Buntings. It was also a chance to

spot rare plants from Dobrogea as well as lizards and land turtles (what we'd call tortoises - *Testudo graeca*). It was an interesting trip and the group returned to the pontoon tanned and happy.

Monday 2 June, Dobrogea

Tulcea-Bestepe-Murighiol-Enisala-Babadag forest

Again the landscape is a combination of wetland, steppe, loess hills (this is Bee-eaters' land), brackish lakes, lagoon and Babadag forest. The weather was very beautiful that day also and everybody could enjoy the show offered by the plentitude of Bee-eaters in colonies, plus the abundance of Rollers, Shrikes and Hoopoes which were seen along the road. New from the day before were Dalmatian Pelicans, Spoonbills, Black Storks, Short-toed Eagle, Hobbies, Red-footed Falcons, Kentish Plovers, Lapwings, Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwits had showed up. Everybody was thrilled to see at Saraturi–Murighiol the colonies of Mediterranean Gulls, Yellow-legged Gulls, Black-headed Gulls, Common Terns and Whiskered Terns as well as the abundance of ducks, herons and Black-winged Stilts.

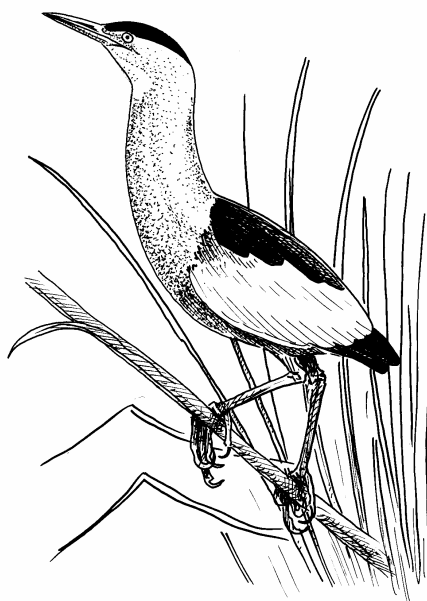
In Enisala we were able to spot the colony of Bee-eaters and species that use their old nests: Swifts, Rollers and two pairs of Little Owls. Up on the hill near the fortress we were able to observe the panorama of the huge Razelm lagoon and Babadag Lake. In the area there were several raptors, but lots of them in a big distance so identifying some of them remained just a wish. We were able to spot also very well Short-toed Eagle, Comon Buzzards, Long-legged Buzzards, Booted Eagle. The interested ones had the chance to acknowledge the rare plants from the rocky area in Enisala. In Babadag forest that day, we visited only two different areas of the balcanic forest, each with its own variety of rare plants and birds, since we planned to come back the next day. Here Nightingale, Song Thrushes, Icterine Warblers, Wood Warblers, Chiffchaff, Willow Warblers, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Jay, Hawfinch and Yellowhammer were seen and heard.

Tuesday 3 June, Dobrogea

Tulcea - Denis Tepe - Istria - Vadu

Our first stop was in Denis Tepe, where a lot of Calandra Larks, Tawny Pipits, Crested Larks, Shrikes (lesser grey and red-backed) and Wheatears could be seen and heard also a very good observation of Long-legged Buzzards. Nearby there was a Stork nest and at its base a colony of Spanish Sparrows was set. In a very short stop near the forest we saw: Woodlarks, Hoopoes, Blackcaps, Ortolans, Corn Buntings and Turtle Doves. Also on our way to Istria, flocks of Rose-coloured Starlings were seen.

At Istria, because of the dry year, there wasn't much water for the waders in the puddles near the road, but in the neighborhood lakes from (Istria and Nuntasi) we could see Pygmy Cormorants, a lot of White Pelicans and Dalmatian Pelicans, Little Bitterns (*right*), egrets, Purple Herons, Spoonbills, Ducks and Marsh Harriers flying all over the place. But the main attraction was the walk near the thicket and the very good observations of Paddyfield Warblers, Great Reed Warblers, Bearded Tits and Reed Buntings; the group was also happy to see Bluethroats in good observation conditions from a small distance. Also we could hear and see Marsh Warblers, Reed Warblers, Skylarks and hundreds of Wagtails (Blue-headed but especially Black-headed).



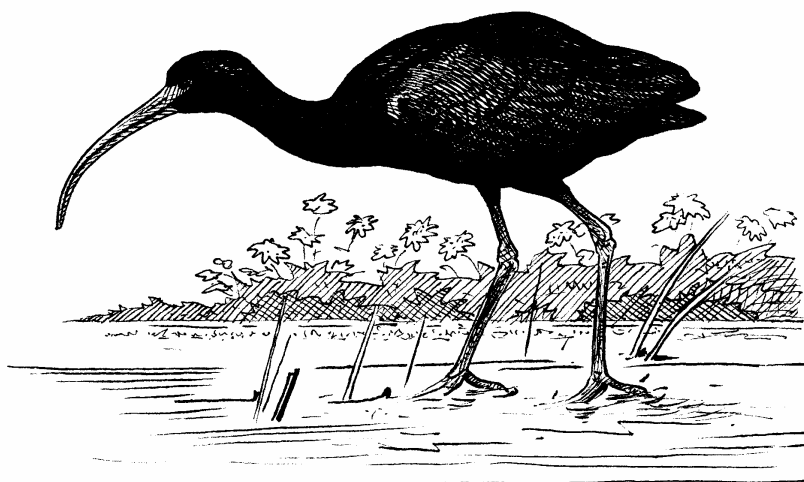
We had our lunch there also and could make excellent observations of Paddyfield Warblers, which were present everywhere around us. The sky was full of hundreds of Sand Martins. Also Collared Pratincoles and other waders had been seen but the best observation conditions for waders was at Vadu, where on some ponds the colonies of Collared Pratincoles (hundreds), Redshanks, Black-winged Stilts, Avocets, Common Terns, Little Terns and Whiskered Terns had been seen. Here also were nesting the Kentish Plovers. Other species of Waders that were still migrating were observed like: Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers and Black-tailed Godwit.

At Vadu also we went to the sea coast, an excellent beach with species of rare plants from the red list, lots of shells and snails. Everybody was thrilled and along the bird species already seen, they spotted Turnstones and Sandwich Terns. After the joyful meeting with the Black Sea on a beautiful day, we headed back to Tulcea, but near Vadu at Corbu we made a final stop at a rookery where a colony of 70 pairs of Red-footed Falcons was seen. We ended our day with the observations of these marvelous falcons.

Wednesday 4 June, Danube Delta Tulcea-Sireasa-Sontea-Furtuna-Gorgova-Caraorman

The group left by motorboat through the Delta, while the Pontoon was tugged on the Sulina Channel to be met around 14:00 near Gorgova.

Right when we entered the Delta we stopped our engine to hear the birds' song. This year Thrush Nightingale has nested in the area even more than the previous years so there was a good possibility to be heard. We could see and hear everywhere Redstarts, Garden Warblers, Blackcaps, Icterine Warblers, Long-tailed Tits, Orioles but our biggest astonishment was the extraordinary abundance of Kingfishers flying in front of the motorboat, or staying on the roots of the willows or fishing in their spectacular style. Water birds (egrets, herons and ducks) could be seen in close distance along the channels, on the side of the small lakes, their abundance created a lot of amazement and enchanting. The big number of birds wasn't the only reason of joy but also the spectacular landscapes. The small lakes covered with water lilies, water chestnuts, large areas of reed and bulrush, willow forests and high banks with luxuriant vegetation had created a unique atmosphere.



We stopped by, near a smaller lake, an ideal place for Ferruginous Ducks and Garganeys and we met a few Goldeneyes with chicks, rare birds in Danube Delta. The crowd of Great White Egrets, Squacco Herons, Glossy Ibis (*above*) and Pygmy Cormorants thrilled the group who had the feeling they were in a tropical country. We saw with ease Red-necked Grebes, Little Grebes, Black-necked Grebes. We also did some stops to see woodpeckers: Black Woodpeckers, Grey-headed and Great Spotted. Everybody was able to observe them clearly and from a close distance. Along the road we saw hundreds of pelicans flying as well as in the

water fishing in big flocks. We took photos (landscapes, birds). The weather was very nice even though some clouds were here and there. In that day we were able to see White-tailed Eagles (7 or 8 individuals) adults as well as immatures. Big lakes Nebunu, Baclanesti and Furtuna were filled with birds.

We headed towards Gorgova on the narrow channels and reached it at 14⁰⁰ to get aboard the pontoon for lunch. Even though the trip by motorboat through the delta was a long one, nobody is complaining, everybody is satisfied. From now on the trip by the pontoon is much easier. A tropical summer rain begun, but we were having our lunch inside. We headed to Caraorman. The rain stopped pretty quickly, now on the deck relaxed we can watch the birds and admire the landscape. Near Caraorman, flocks of Black-tailed Godwits, Glossy Ibis and ducks had been seen. In the ponds near the lake and on the Caraorman Channel we spotted waders (Greenshanks, egrets and herons). We didn't insist much on the village since we were supposed to visit the Letea village the next day.

Thursday 5 June, Danube Delta

Old Danube - Magearu Channel - Letea - Mila 23 - Lopatna - Versina

The pontoon was stopped on the Old Danube, near the Magearu Channel, 12 km away from Letea. Since we couldn't use there the pontoon, we had our breakfast early in the morning and headed with the motorboat through one of the most beautiful channels of the Delta. The itinerary was very interesting not only by its large number of birds that we had the chance to see but also by the interesting vegetation and true beauty of the landscapes. On some portions, the channel is merely an old lake filled with white and yellow water lilies, reed islands floating and guided by the wind, sometimes blocking the channel. On these islands composed of the dead and living roots of the reed, other plants are growing also, creating interesting plant associations. The presence of ferns is a living proof that this vegetation islands are floating. There is no place where the reed is growing so well as it does here, and these islands created in tens of years, they are also an ideal habitat for nesting Ferruginous Ducks, Little Crakes and other crakes.

We stopped close to a bigger island like this, to study it better. On the willows from the river banks there was an impressive number of Night Herons and on the water lilies tens and tens of Squacco Herons catching frogs and among the reed islands and flying over the channel hundreds of ducks, most of them Ferruginous Ducks. Three pairs of Hobby could be seen very well, nesting, only the males have fled when we came near. All over the place Purple Herons could be seen. When we stopped we were able to hear Savi's Warbler, Great Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers singing. Unfortunately we weren't lucky to see any Crakes.

We got closer to Letea, the most isolated and picturesque place of the Danube Delta, which is surrounded by waters and a belt made out of water lilies where the traditional fishermen's boats were moored. Having its houses with the roofs made out of reed, the village looks like it is coming from the past times. It is primitive but especially picturesque and the people are communicative and hospitable. Since the group (conquered by the village) insisted, we admired the Letea forest from distance and explored the village instead. The houses were photographed as well as the yards and the peoples; finally we made a visit of a house of some inhabitants who greeted us with cheese pies, red eggs and a wine from their own garden (there was a feast). Everybody was very eager to see and photograph the old agricultural tools still used in the small peasant farm. They were amazed because they saw this farm where the self-sufficient economy is done.

At 14^{:00} we reached the pontoon and on our way to Mila 23 we ate our lunch. After dinner, very comfortable set in our chairs, from the upper deck of the pontoon the group were admiring the scenery and doing birdwatching. Of note was a good observation of White-tailed Eagles. From Mila 23 we entered the Eracle Channel towards Lopatna, in a beautiful and wild place, away from the village, where the pontoon had moored for the night. About 17^{:30}, in splendid light, we started to explore the surroundings by boat. We could see from our

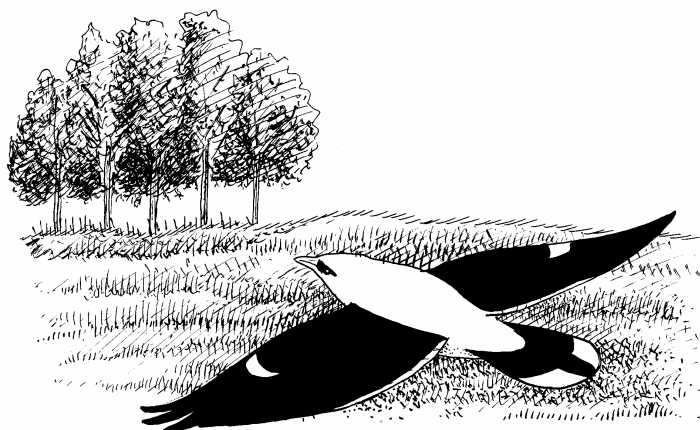
boat a mixed colony of a few hundred Pygmy Cormorants, Cormorants, Little Egrets, Night Herons, Squacco Herons, Glossy Ibis and Spoonbills. We entered a wild area, filled with vegetation where during a concert performed by the tens of thousands of frogs we admired a superb sunset. We could hear also this performing when we returned on the pontoon during the night.

Friday 6 June, Danube Delta

Lopatna - Trei Iezere - Bogdaproste - Mila 23 - Sontea – Sireasa - Tulcea

We had our breakfast earlier in the morning to start the exploration of the lakes complex Trei Iezere – Cazanel - Bogdaproste where we were hoping to see White Pelicans fishing. Besides the fact that we were able to see closely lots of water species – very good observations from close distance of Little Bittern, Night Herons, Squacco Herons, Purple Herons and large groups of pelicans spectacularly fishing – the group had the chance to observe the complexity of the habitats from that place. The labyrinth combination of big and narrow channels, big lakes, marshes, ponds, reed islands, high forested banks where Orioles, Hoopoes and Woodpeckers are very common, as well the areas of low waters covered by water lilies, water soldiers, water chestnuts and colonies of Common Tern and Whiskered Terns. We also saw from there White-winged Terns.

We returned to the pontoon and started immediately our journey towards Mila 23. We got aboard the motorboat to see the village a little and then we focused our exploration for an island filled with bushes and forests from Old Danube (Dunarea Veche) close to the Mila 23 village. Here we could see or hear in good conditions several Redstarts , Thrush Nightingale, Olivaceous Warblers, Icterine Warblers, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warblers, Penduline Tits, Blackcaps, Treecreepers, Orioles (*above*), Rollers, Hoopoes, Grey-headed and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Hobbies and Red-footed Falcons.



We returned to our pontoon; from now on, the observations were done in a more relaxed manner from the upper deck of the pontoon serving tea, coffee or a cold beer. It is a long way of approximately eight hours, a review of what was seen already but also a change in view perspective because what couldn't be seen from the motor boat because it is lower can be seen now. There was a larger and more ample view over the vastness of Delta and also the chance to see the birds from the smaller lakes that couldn't be seen before because of the vegetation.

The pontoon made a deviation from the course to see again the Furtuna Lake and the bird abundance there. On our return trip we saw a true inflation of Rollers, Egrets, Herons and Ducks especially Ferruginous Ducks (I think that of the last 25 years this was the richest one in Ferruginous Ducks). Now we can observe in very good conditions lots of White-tailed Eagles and even a nest with the bird nearby, while the Hobbies and Red Footed Falcons aren't amazing anyone anymore. Still, all the group stayed on the deck almost eight hours, even though they could have retired to their cabins. The weather was perfect, only here and there a white little cloud. Everybody was enchanted and relaxed. When we left the Danube Delta near Tulcea the sun was setting down and everybody regretted leaving the miraculous Delta.

As a final conclusion regarding the bird part of the trip, even though the group members were also interested in other aspects of reality than birds, still the list of seen birds in Delta and Dobrogea makes a total of 159 species, which is quite good.

We returned happy to Tulcea where we met the young people from ROS Falco Cherrug together with teacher Mrs. Gabriela Dorosencu. All the group was impressed because all those young people were speaking English and told them about their activities. In a festive manner, after emotional speeches, John Durdin handed them over the cheque representing the donation from Honeyguide. Thank yous were said, group photos had been done and the group was enchanted to meet and talk with those who will be so happy over their sponsorship.

I lead a lot of groups, but there are few which can compare to this one, which is so harmonious and pleasant. We can talk about the group members only with superlatives and John Durdin by his experience, tact and such a fine sense of humour was the true heart and catalyser of this trip. I cannot end without saying "John, we all love you and wait for you to come back!"

On the pontoon, the farewell evening was with cake, champagne and those two folk artists who played for us a lot of traditional instruments warmed up everybody's soul, making the breaking up even harder.

Saturday – Monday, 7-9 June - Bucharest

Transferred to the Ibis Hotel in Bucharest, with visits to Ceausescu's palace, old Bucharest, Village Museum, Romanian Peasants' Museum and the Monastery close by adding a new cultural dimension to this trip for a group who are loving nature in general and birds in special.

* * * * *

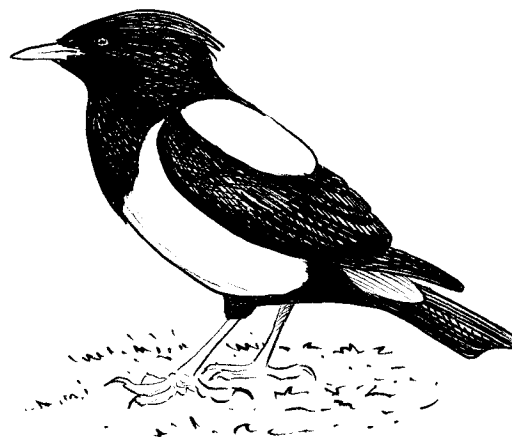
Danube Delta group 2 14 – 21/23 June 2003

Saturday 14 June: Bucharest to Tulcea

Sunday 15 June

Bestepe –Murighiol- Enisala-Babadag- Altan-Tepe

We have seen 91 species of water birds, steppe birds with a special mention for the abundance of Hoopoes, Rollers, Bee-eaters in colonies, Wheatears, Tawny Pipits, Mediterranean Gulls at colony Murighiol, Little Gulls, Whiskered Terns and Black Terns, Black-winged Stilts, Avocets, both species of Pelican and especially a multitude of Rose-coloured Starlings all over the way but mostly at their colony from Altan Tepe. Here a colony of about 800-1000 pairs of Rose-coloured Starlings could be seen, which could be photographed from a close distance.



We have seen interesting raptors: Short-toed Eagle and Montagu's Harrier (at Altan Tepe) and Hobbies. Alternating rocky hills and dry steppe with wetlands made a spectacular impression. As well as the panorama of the Delta from Bestepe, the panorama of the lagoons

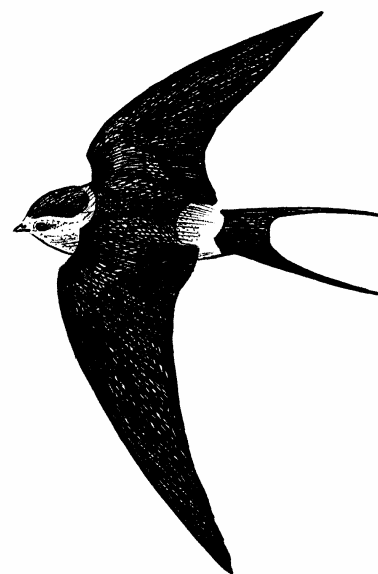
and lake complex from Babadag from the hill of Enisala Fortress and panorama of steppe-hills-forests from Altan Tepe. It was interesting also to observe the biodiversity of Babadag Forest.

Monday 16 June

Denis Tepe – Babadag - Istria – Vadu – Marea Neagra – Corbu – Cheia

It was a good day when 112 species of birds were seen, plus two or three which were observed only by one or two group members. There were very good observations of Long-legged Buzzard, Montagu's Harrier, Red-footed Falcons (in colony at Corbu), Waders at Vadu and Istria (Kentish Plovers, Grey Plover, a lot of Collared Pratincoles, Black-tailed Godwits, Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers, two very black Spotted Redshanks, Redshanks, Marsh Sandpipers in large number, Greenshanks, Wood sandpipers, a lot of stilts, Avocets, many terns (Little, Black, Whiskered, Common).

When we crossed through agricultural road, the plateau between Corbu and Piatra, we saw a lot of Calandra Larks, Skylarks, Crested Larks, but also some Short-toed Larks. Almost everywhere we saw Tawny Pipits, a lot of Black and Blue-headed Wagtails, some Isabelline Wheatears. On our way to Cheia Gorge was a very good observation of Red-rumped Swallows (*right*), flying and nesting under a bridge. When we got to Cheia it started to rain, only a few had the chance to see a Pied Wheatear.



[Other highlights for the group were good views of paddyfield warbler and white-spotted bluethroat singing. An anonymous group member also mentions the lovely lunches, including cold meats, local cheeses, small apricots, small sweet cherries with local bread and generous supplies of bottled water. The group transferred from the Hotel Europolis to the pontoon that evening. Ed.]

Tuesday 17 June

Parches - Celic Dere - Niculitel - Valea Teilor – Hamcearca – Iulia

We intended to go again straight to Cheia but since it was likely to rain again, we didn't want to waste our day and chose another itinerary where we had the chance to make good observations even on rainy weather and visit interesting places.

In Parches in a marvelous area we saw in very good conditions raptors, three White-tailed Eagles, Long-legged Buzzards, and a discussable Lesser Spotted Eagle as well as Booted Eagle, Turtle Doves who were seen in other days, also Little Owls. We didn't miss today the presence of Hoopoes, Rollers and Bee-eaters in a large number. Some of us could see Barred Warbler, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes all over the place. A surprise for the group – Sombre Tits and again two pairs of Red-rumped Swallows on our way to Valea Teilor.

A very interesting place to see was Celic Dere Monastery. It is nun village, very quiet surrounded by forested hills, an ideal place for bird watching. A lot of woodpeckers, Grey Headed, Syrian, Middle Spotted and especially an excellent observation of Wryneck that was seen repeatedly by everybody. Right near the monastery we saw Sombre Tits but also Barred Warbler seen and heard by most of us. Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings were seen frequently everywhere. The great absent from this trip was Levant Sparrowhawk. We were that day at its nesting area and only Eugen saw it. In marvelous scenery we saw Steppe Buzzards, Long-legged Buzzards and a Goshawk female.

On our return way to Iulia we saw Booted Eagle white form an excellent observation. We didn't see any Pied Wheatear, but everybody was thrilled by the beauty of the hills and the steppe especially about the observation of some birds. It rained only a little in the southern part of Dobrogea, we found out this on the news so it did rain also in Cheia.

Wednesday 18 June, Danube Delta

Delta Dunarii - Sireasa – Sontea - Nebunu Lake, Baclanesti Lake, Furtuna Lake - Village Gorgova – Caraorman and spent the night on Old Danube, at the entrance on Magearu Channel (12 km from Letea)

On the channels Sireasa, Sontea, Furtuna Lake until Gorgova we did our trip by motorboat and afterwards with the floating hotel until Caraorman. The trip with the motorboat on the channels and lakes was very special, a big number of pelicans, egrets, herons, ducks and chance to see very well woodpeckers (Black, Grey-headed, Great Spotted). It is hard to decide what was more impressive, comparing with a wetland from Africa.

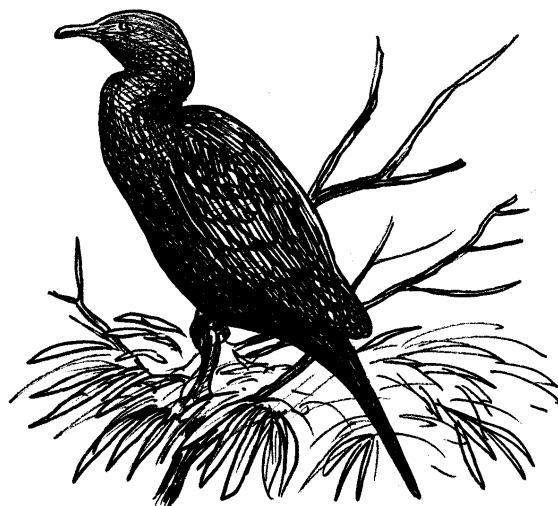
From the pontoon until Caraorman we did very interesting observations. There were a large number of flocks on the lake Obretin and multitude of water birds along the channels towards Caraorman. In Caraorman we did a short visit towards the forest and especially of the marshes surrounding the village to observe Waders. After the visit of Caraorman we left in the evening by the pontoon towards Letea. We slept in the wilderness of the Old Danube, while listened the choir of the thousands of birds.

Thursday 19 June, Danube Delta

Channel Magearu, Village Letea, Letea Forest - Mila 23 - Channel Lopatna - Versina
Early in the morning we started our journey towards Letea on the Magearu Channel, where we can observe the floating reed islands and the specific fauna of the area. Interesting birds, lots of Ferruginous Ducks, Purple Herons and egrets and finally a good observation of Little Crakes with chicks. We were able to see them from a 5 metres distance. (For Eugen's suggestion to search the area for Crakes, the honour of discovering the Crakes family is deserved by a lady).

In Letea we were waited by a tractor to visit the forest. We visited the village on the run and head ourselves towards the area of sand dunes where we saw Hobbies, Honey Buzzards, White-tailed Eagles, Rollers, Hoopoes, Woodlarks, Nightingales, Redstarts, Song Thrushes, Garden Warblers, Blackcaps, Icterine Warblers. The forest grown on the sand among the dunes with secular oaks, ash trees, lots of bushes which can be hardly passed through, lianas and the dunes area lots of rare plants, *Ephedra distachya* – joint-pine – gained the amazement of the group. A strange combination of desert areas and luxuriant forest difficult to pass though. On our return way on the beautiful channels near the village Reed, Great Reed and Savi's Warblers as well as a plentitude of Glossy Ibis, Purple Herons, Squacco Herons and Great White Egrets were seen.

After lunch we get on the road with the floating hotel towards Mila 23. We can see a mixed colony near Crisan: Pygmy cormorants (*right*), Little Egrets, Glossy Ibis, Night Herons, Squacco Herons and Spoonbills. We are observing from the boat deck the Mila 23 village, but we entered the Eracleea channel to be away from the village. We set our anchor in the Lopatna channel and until nightfall we explored the area Versina, a complex of small



lakes filled with water lilies, water soldiers and water chestnuts and a lot of water birds. It was a spectacular year for Ferruginous Ducks. The sun was setting down while we were admiring the wild scenery, enchanted by the frogs' song and the birds' flight on the red sky.

Friday 20 June, Danube Delta

Very early in the morning we started to explore with the motorboat the complex of big and small lakes: Trei Iezere, Cazanel, Bogdaproste and the marshes nearby in search for the fishing pelicans. The beauty of the landscape amazed the group and they can make a picture in their minds regarding the immensity of the Delta.

After the morning trip we headed towards Mila 23 where after a short look over the fishermen village we continued our journey towards the island, forested and filled with bushes, which is right next to the village. Here we saw: Olivaceous Warbler, Blackcaps, Reed Warblers, Redstarts, Rollers, Hoopoes, Black Woodpeckers, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Penduline Tits and other water birds.

During lunch we travelled with the pontoon towards Fortuna Lake where we observed the multitude of birds on the lake and then we headed with the motorboat towards a small lake, very inaccessible for the purpose of making a clearer picture upon the diverse habitats. The Crulig Lake is covered entirely by water chestnuts and water lilies and on this green carpet we were able to see hundreds of Squacco Herons, Glossy Ibis and Ducks. On the exit channel we passed through a willow trees tunnel and the aspect was like a flooded amazonian forest. All over the place the Penduline Tits are calling while Kingfishers are passing by.

Aboard again the floating hotel we started a 6 hours journey to one of the most beautiful routes from the Danube Delta. Everybody will stay on the deck having large perspectives over what's going on beyond the reeds from the channel banks. The multitude of birds from all over the place was impressive but not as much as White-tailed Eagles, the large number of Marsh Harriers, Glossy Ibis and ducks. Pictures are taken and the peoples are feeling relaxed on the deck drinking coffee, tea and some of them even a beer. On the dusk we arrived in Tulcea where a festive evening with cake and champagne took place and the group had the chance to hear the two virtuous folk singers playing a lot of old instruments. This festive dinner makes the departure even harder. The next morning the group will leave for Bucharest and together with Marian they will make some more birdwatching on the car rush.

We saw a total of 160 species, some of us had a richer list but as a trip rule we decided that we wouldn't count the birds unless they were seen by two people, the other remained on the personal list of that person. Most likely the number would have been greater but the season was late for the singing birds so we didn't hear too many; still the group was amazed by the spectacular Delta and the bird inflation from here.

Saturday – Monday, 21-22 June - Bucharest

As for the first group, to Bucharest, where some of the group flew back to the UK, with rest transferring to the Ibis Hotel, visits to Ceausescu's palace, old Bucharest, Village Museum and Romanian Peasants' Museum.

