

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich NR7 0PX

Telephone: 01603 300552

www.honeyguide.co.uk E-mail: chris@honeyguide.co.uk



Romania, 3 – 13 September 2026
Danube Delta & Carpathian Mountains

Holiday participants

Mick Gold
Everard Daniel
Ray and Jackie Guthrie

Kathy Bilham
Neil Storey



Group members on Danube Delta (DP).

Leaders

This holiday runs in partnership with Ibis Tours www.ibis-tours.ro

The Ibis leader was Daniel Petrescu.

Report compiled from various sources: lists by Daniel Petrescu, daily highlights from Kathy Bilham's diary and Daniel Petrescu's records.



Photos by Neil Storey, unless noted.

Cover: white-tailed eagle and a delta sunset. Above white pelicans.

As with all Honeyguide holidays, part of the price was put towards a local conservation project, in this case for Falco Cherrug ('the saker'), a young naturalists' group which is providing the delta's conservationists for the future.

The conservation contribution of £40 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust, resulting in a donation of £290. This brings the total given in Romania since the first Honeyguide holiday here in 1999 to £7972. The total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 is £170,207 (September 2026).

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

We start with the holiday highlights, as these give a good flavour of a September holiday in the Danube Delta and Carpathians.

Everard: red-footed falcons; hobby eating a bee-eater; enormous flocks of migrants; lakes full of water lilies and so many birds; Daniel and his super staff, boats and food.

Mick: eruption of red-footed falcons and hobbies hunting remorselessly; understanding the dynamic, constantly changing nature of the Danube Delta; vivid glimpses of spotted crake, kingfishers, bearded reedling; Daniel's guidance, his team and the food.

Jackie: peace and quiet on the water; white-tailed eagle; kingfishers; new plants; wonderful food.

Ray: just a wonderful trip with an excellent guide, well-planned with good accommodation and food; bird numbers on migration particularly red-footed falcon; good sightings of white-tailed eagles & kingfishers and finishing with pelicans (just a few!).

Neil: the trip that stands out for me is the evening speed-boat trip on which we saw the black-crowned night heron, squacco heron and perfectly posted white-tailed eagle.

Kathy: lesser spotted woodpecker at the top of a dead tree in full sunlight; a large flock of squacco herons and five kingfishers in one place; amazing boats with staff, good food and Daniel's encyclopedic knowledge; and five nutcrackers on our last day!



Night heron and squacco heron, highlights for photographer Neil.

DAILY DIARY

The first part of the day-by-day notes are from Daniel Petrescu. These note the places visited and a few of the bird species recorded on each day of the tour, concentrating on species for which the Danube Delta is notable. "New for the tour" counts species recorded for the first time on that day. This is followed by notes taken from Kathy Bilham's diary, usually leaving out birds noted in Daniel's log.

Day 1, 03 September 2026 Route: Bucharest – Tulcea (transfer; embarkation on the floating hotel)

13 species recorded — including European Roller, Mute Swan, Eurasian Coot, Black-headed Gull, Caspian Gull, White Stork.

From Kathy's diary: Met by Daniel Petrescu at the airport; very warm, 30°C. Endless fields of sunflowers while travelling east towards Tulcea, with a stop half-way. Birds along the journey included hooded crows and egrets. Crossed the Danube at 6pm, arrived at Tulcea at 7:30 pm.

Day 2, 04 September 2026 Route: Babadag Forest – Sinoe & Razelm lakes – Histria (saltmarsh, ancient citadel) – Black Sea coast

72 species recorded, 61 new for the tour — including Whiskered Tern, Eurasian Spoonbill, Great Egret, Dalmatian Pelican, Great White Pelican, Western Marsh Harrier.

From Kathy's diary: Everard saw a hummingbird hawkmoth in the hotel garden, plus sparrows and magpie; a well-watered garden with lots of flowers, including white hostas. Lots of birds noted this morning, including willow warbler, hoopoe, roller, spotted flycatcher, white wagtail, yellow wagtails, grey partridge and short-toed eagle. Steppe buzzard and booted eagle when by a pumped water course. Walk in Babadag Forest, where there were lots of plants and butterflies, including great banded grayling. Lovely picnic though hardly finished it when it poured with rain. Tortoise (presumably spur-thighed tortoise) in the forest, and young pheasants. Close hoopoes and a white storks nest in Histria village.



Great banded grayling (NS); spur-thighed tortoise (MG).

Then a long list of good birds, including white tailed eagle, Mediterranean gulls, red-necked grebe, spoonbills, a huge flock of house and sand matins, spotted redshank and whinchats. Red-footed falcons – a lifer for Everard – and a large flock of bee-eaters, 30-40 birds, 'fabulous'. Ruddy shelduck, avocet, Caspian gulls and both pelican species then noted. At Lake Tuzla, reed buntings spotted by Neil and northern wheatear.

Dinner tonight included a birthday cake and champagne for Jackie.

Day 3, 05 September 2026 Route: Tulcea – Enisala citadel – Murighiol – Plopu – Cape Dolosman – Grindul Lupilor – Tulcea

69 species recorded, 22 new for the tour — including Ferruginous Duck, Whiskered Tern, Pygmy Cormorant, Glossy Ibis, Great Egret, Purple Heron

From Kathy's diary: looking over to the Ukraine border at Somova Lake. Caspian tern, purple and squacco herons, pygmy cormorant. Lunch near Balchik Castle in shade: Syrian and great spotted woodpeckers. Sarichoi (famous for being the heart of Romania's Russian-Lipovan community).

Arrived at floating hotel around 5pm, dinner at 7pm, fabulous views of lake from castle. Souslik and lots bee-eaters.

Day 4, 06 September 2026 Route: Tulcea – Sfântu Gheorghe branch (floating hotel) – Danube mouth & Sfântu Gheorghe beach (Black Sea)

52 species recorded, 12 new for the tour — including Pygmy Cormorant, Great Egret, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Great White Pelican, Western Marsh Harrier, White-tailed Eagle.



Bee-eater (NS)

From Kathy's diary: left Tulcea harbour 6:30ish, engine very quiet. Cloudy and much cooler today. Birds noted include: tree sparrow, common tern, hobby, black woodpecker, black-tailed godwit and black stork. Lunch on board, much warmer now, a nice breeze on the boat. Sandwich tern, red-backed shrike, long journey on the river. In smaller day boat, crossed river to Black Sea coast, walk along Sfântu Gheorghe

channel, had a paddle on the beach. Very warm near the edge, lots of shells, and a lovely rainbow. Back to floating hotel by 6:45.

Day 5, 07 September 2026 Route: Sahalin Island (dawn) – Litoral Canal – Sulina – Old Danube, mooring near Canal Magearu

89 species recorded, 19 new for the tour — including Whiskered Tern, Pygmy Cormorant, Great Egret, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron.

From Kathy's diary: lovely sunny morning, quite fresh, left the floating hotel about 8am after an early breakfast. River like a mill pond as we headed south in the delta. Fleeting glimpse of an oriole; lesser spotted woodpecker in the sunshine; garganey, cuckoo, greenshank. Good view of a colourful roller. Flock of 200 migrating red-footed falcons.

Left mooring at noon, then a nine-hour journey with lots of views of the delta. Went along the Danube Canal where the ships go to avoid the Black Sea; cargo mostly grain and sunflowers for oil. Dinner at 7:30 – the fish was zander – to make the most of the light, moored in a side channel.



Great egret, purple heron and pygmy cormorant (NS).

Day 6, 08 September 2026 Route: Canal Magearu – Letea village & forest – lakes Bogdaproste, Amiaza, Cazanel, Trei Iezere – Mila 23 (Canal Lopatna)

73 species recorded, 5 new for the tour — including Ferruginous Duck, Whiskered Tern, Pygmy Cormorant, Great Egret, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron.

From Kathy's diary: sunny but cool, left about 9:30 on the smaller boat. Another flock of red-footed falcons, saw a lovely penduline tits' nest. Water lilies, white and yellow, and beefsteak fungus in the forest. Learned about floating islands and how they are formed. Very tall Phragmites. Travelled to Letea, the village where Daniel grew up, met by a lady with a horse and cart. This took us to Letea Forest, a special area. Lots of lily of the valley (over now) and a plant with red berries that has medicinal properties. Back to floating hotel for coffee and cake.



By horse and cart in Letea (KB); whiskered tern (NS).

Large flock of migrating swallows, back again for lunch at 2pm then departed at 3:15: hardly noticed the movement. Left at 4pm on a small boat, from which we saw three squacco herons very close. A swimming grass snake and grey-headed woodpecker noted among a long list of species, and this part of the day is when the group saw ferruginous ducks, whiskered terns, frogs, wood sandpiper, little crane and garganey. "Never seen so many cranes in one spot ... also a spotted crane."

Day 7 09 September 2026 Route: Danube Delta channels and lakes – Tulcea (disembarkation)

62 species recorded, 1 new for the tour — including Ferruginous Duck, Whiskered Tern, Pygmy Cormorant, Great Egret, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron.



From Kathy's diary: left mooring at 7:30am, breakfast on the move, changed to the little boat at 8:30. Hardly moved and on a patch of reeds many birds including five kingfishers.

On Lake Fortuna, lovely close views of pelicans stealing fish from the cormorants, "Wish I had a better camera!"

Lunch back at the floating hotel, then a long journey to Tulcea. On the journey saw a white-tailed eagle, bee-eaters and a heron eating a snake. Arrived in Tulcea at 6:40pm

[Heron tackling a dice snake \(NS\).](#)

Day 8, 10 September 2026 Route: Tulcea – Berca Mud Volcanoes – Vulcan / Predeluț (Carpathian foothills)

27 species recorded, 11 new for the tour — including Western Marsh Harrier, European Bee-eater, Northern Goshawk, Lesser Spotted Eagle, European Green Woodpecker, Crested Tit.

From Kathy's diary: some of the group left the floating hotel at 9am to go to the airport, fingers crossed for the flight (because of a big UK air traffic control issue affecting many flights, happily no problem.) *Daniel, Everard and Kathy then headed for the Carpathians.* Lots of rooks and starlings. A whip snake on the road: Daniel stopped to encourage the snake off the road. Stopped at truck stop for a sandwich and drink. Saw honey buzzard and raven. Arrived 5:45pm. Everard and I went upstairs to the library: fabulous room with a lovely view of lights on the houses in the twilight.

Day 9, 11 September 2026 Route: Zărnești – Strâmba Valley – Colțul Chiliilor – forest meadows – bear hide (evening)

29 species recorded, 7 new for the tour — including European Bee-eater, Eurasian, White-throated Dipper, Ring Ouzel, Mistle Thrush, Dunnock.

From Kathy's diary: early cup of tea, breakfast on the balcony of hotel, very good elderflower juice. Goldfinch, hooded crow, grey wagtail in National Park at Zărnești Gorge. Six tit species: great, blue, coal, crested, marsh and willow. Wallcreeper, lovely views, crag martin, though no chamois.

After lunch and siesta, about 45 minutes to Strâmba Valley for the bear hide. Stopped for close view of a lesser spotted eagle. Bumpy road to bear hide. Met up with a ranger with a gun, a last resort to scare bears, not allowed to shoot them. Sat in bear hide and watched seven bears including females and two cubs, feeding on corn. No meat is provided, though bears had been gorging on apples in the mountains. Nuthatch, two ravens, lots of chaffinches and two foxes – brilliant views. Stopped for a sandwich and a drink then back to the hotel.



[Brown bears, lesser spotted eagle \(ED\).](#)

Day 10, 12 September 2026 Route: Zărnești Gorge – Piatra Craiului National Park (shepherd track through spruce/fir/beech forest)

13 species recorded, 1 new for the tour — including Spotted Nutcracker.

From Kathy's diary: cool and cloudy, hummingbird hawkmoth on my balcony. Stock dove, jay, kestrel, ring ouzel, mistle thrush, tree pipit, treecreeper ... then five nutcrackers! Honey buzzard, treecreeper: a steep walk but fantastic views. Skies cleared and not too hot. Northern goshawk. Scenic drive, though with some

mist, lots of typical Romanian farmhouses. Lovely views of Dracula's castle – with scaffolding. Dipper in a stream in the gorge, red squirrel, autumn crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*).

Day 11, 13 September 2026

From Kathy's diary: left hotel at 8:30, raining but gradually cleared. Two marsh harriers on the way, stopped at a garage for drink then onto Bucharest. Good flight home, arrived early.



Red-footed falcon, hobby eating a bee-eater (ED)

WILDLIFE LISTS

BIRDS

Northern pintail	Sandwich tern	Western jackdaw
Eurasian teal	White stork	Northern raven
Mallard	Black stork	Hooded crow
Greylag goose	Pygmy cormorant	Rook
Common pochard	Great cormorant	Eurasian jay
Ferruginous duck	Eurasian spoonbill	Spotted nutcracker
Mute swan	Glossy ibis	Eurasian magpie
Gadwall	Great egret	Eurasian blue tit
Northern shoveler	Grey heron	Crested tit
Garganey	Purple heron	Great tit
Ruddy shelduck	Squacco heron	Coal tit
Common shelduck	Little egret	Willow tit
Grey partridge	Little bittern	Marsh tit
Common pheasant	Black-crowned night heron	Eurasian penduline tit
Great crested grebe	Dalmatian pelican	Bearded reedling
Black-necked grebe	Great white pelican	Eurasian skylark
Little grebe	Western osprey	Crested lark
Rock dove / feral pigeon	Northern goshawk	Common house martin
Stock dove	Eurasian sparrowhawk	Barn swallow
Common woodpigeon	Common buzzard	Eurasian crag martin
Eurasian collared dove	Long-legged buzzard	Sand martin
European turtle dove	Short-toed snake eagle	Long-tailed tit
Common cuckoo	Western marsh harrier	Common chiffchaff
Eurasian coot	Montagu's harrier	Willow warbler
Common moorhen	Lesser spotted eagle	Eurasian reed warbler
Spotted crane	White-tailed eagle	Common whitethroat
Water rail	Booted eagle	Eurasian blackcap
Little crane	European honey buzzard	Goldcrest
Pied avocet	Long-eared owl	Eurasian wren
Northern lapwing	European roller	Eurasian nuthatch
Common sandpiper	Common kingfisher	Wallcreeper
Dunlin	European bee-eater	Eurasian treecreeper
Ruff	Eurasian hoopoe	Common starling
Common snipe	Great spotted woodpecker	White-throated dipper
Black-tailed godwit	Syrian woodpecker	Common blackbird
Spotted redshank	Middle spotted woodpecker	Ring ouzel
Wood sandpiper	Lesser spotted woodpecker	Mistle thrush
Common greenshank	Black woodpecker	Red-breasted flycatcher
Green sandpiper	Grey-headed woodpecker	Spotted flycatcher
Common redshank	European green woodpecker	Northern wheatear
Whiskered tern	Peregrine falcon	Common redstart
Black tern	Eurasian hobby	Whinchat
Black-headed gull	Common kestrel	European stonechat
Little gull	Red-footed falcon	Dunnock
Caspian tern	Red-backed shrike	House sparrow
Pallas's gull	Lesser grey shrike	Eurasian tree sparrow
Mediterranean gull	Great grey shrike	Meadow pipit
Caspian gull	Eurasian golden oriole	Tree pipit
Common tern		White wagtail

Grey wagtail
Western yellow wagtail
European goldfinch

Hawfinch
Common chaffinch
Red crossbill

Reed bunting



White pelicans (MG).



Red-footed falcons (ED)

MAMMALS

European souslik	Northern white-breasted hedgehog (roadkill)
Brown bear	(<i>Erinaceus roumanicus</i> , a recent split from <i>Erinaceus concolor</i>).

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Spur-thighed tortoise	Dice snake <i>Natrix tessellata</i>
Grass snake <i>Natrix natrix persa</i> (two yellow longitudinal stripes)	Edible frog

BUTTERFLIES

Cardinal	Knapweed fritillary
Meadow brown	Great banded grayling
Eastern bath white	Mallow skipper
Brown argus	Common blue
Clouded yellow	

DRAGONFLIES

<i>Anax parthenope</i> – lesser emperor	<i>Sympetrum meridionale</i> – southern darter
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OTHER INVERTEBRATES

Beautiful marbled moth <i>Eublemma purpurina</i>	Mediterranean slant-faced grasshopper <i>Acrida ungarica</i>
Italian locust <i>Calliptamus italicus</i>	Hummingbird hawkmoth



Knapweed fritillary, mallow skipper, cardinal (NS).

List provided by Daniel Petrescu, leaving out some “unidentified or uncertain observations”

Trees and shrubs

Salix alba – white willow
Salix cinerea – grey willow
Salix × fragilis – crack willow
Alnus glutinosa – black alder
Elaeagnus angustifolia – Russian olive
Tamarix ramosissima – tamarisk
Amorpha fruticosa – false indigo (invasive)
Quercus pedunculiflora – Danube oak
Fraxinus pallisiae – Pallis' ash
Fraxinus ornus – manna ash
Pyrus pyraeaster – wild pear
Malus sylvestris – crab apple
Ligustrum vulgare – wild privet
Sambucus ebulus – dwarf elder
Rhamnus sp. / *Frangula* sp. – buckthorn (?)

Semi-parasitic plants on trees

Viscum album – common mistletoe
Loranthus europaeus – yellow-berried (deciduous) mistletoe

Lianas and climbers

Periploca graeca – silk vine
Cynanchum acutum – strangewort (white latex)
Calystegia sepium – hedge bindweed
Solanum dulcamara – bittersweet nightshade
Clematis vitalba – old man's beard

Floating and submerged aquatic plants

Nymphaea alba – white water lily
Nuphar lutea – yellow water lily
Nymphoides peltata – fringed water lily
Trapa natans – water chestnut
Salvinia natans – floating fern
Stratiotes aloides – water soldier
Sagittaria sagittifolia – arrowhead

Bank, reedbed and marsh plants

Typha angustifolia – narrow-leaved cattail
Typha latifolia – broad-leaved cattail
Sparganium erectum – branched bur-reed
Butomus umbellatus – flowering rush
Oenanthe aquatica – fine-leaved water dropwort
Cicuta virosa – cowbane
Thelypteris palustris – marsh fern
Myosotis scorpioides (syn. *M. palustris*) – water forget-me-not
Lythrum salicaria – purple loosestrife
Stachys palustris – marsh woundwort
Mentha pulegium – pennyroyal
Althaea officinalis – marsh mallow
Rumex sp. – water dock (possibly *R. hydrolapathum*)
Urtica sp. – nettle (probably *U. dioica*)

Sand and dune plants

Convolvulus persicus – Persian bindweed
Petasites spurius – sand butterbur
Centaurea arenaria – sand knapweed
Plantago arenaria – sand plantain
Ephedra distachya – joint pine
Euphorbia seguieriana – Seguer's spurge
Peucedanum arenarium
Linum austriacum – Austrian flax
Convallaria majalis – lily of the valley

Steppe, rock and citadel plants

Marrubium peregrinum – branched horehound
Artemisia annua – sweet wormwood (source of artemisinin)
Artemisia austriaca – Austrian wormwood

Thymus zygioides – Dobrogean thyme
Onopordum tauricum – Taurian cotton thistle
Berteroia incana – hoary alyssum
Carduus thoermeri – thistle
Carthamus lanatus – woolly distaff / saffron thistle
Paronychia cephalotes – nailwort (showy white sepals)
Dianthus nardiformis – carnation, Dobrogean endemic
Echium italicum – pale bugloss
Euphorbia myrsinites – myrtle spurge (on rock)
Salvia aethiopis – Mediterranean sage
Teucrium polium – felty germander (?)
Teucrium chamaedrys – wall germander (?)
Sedum hillebrandtii – stonecrop, between rocks at the citadel
Alcea pallida – pale hollyhock
Stipa capillata – feather grass (not *S. pennata*)
Festuca callieri – fescue
Festuca valesiaca – Volga fescue

Ruderal and arable plants

Portulaca oleracea – purslane
Malva parviflora – small-flowered mallow
Solanum villosum – hairy nightshade
Heliotropium europaeum – European heliotrope
Plantago major – greater plantain (dried out)

Saline and coastal habitat plants

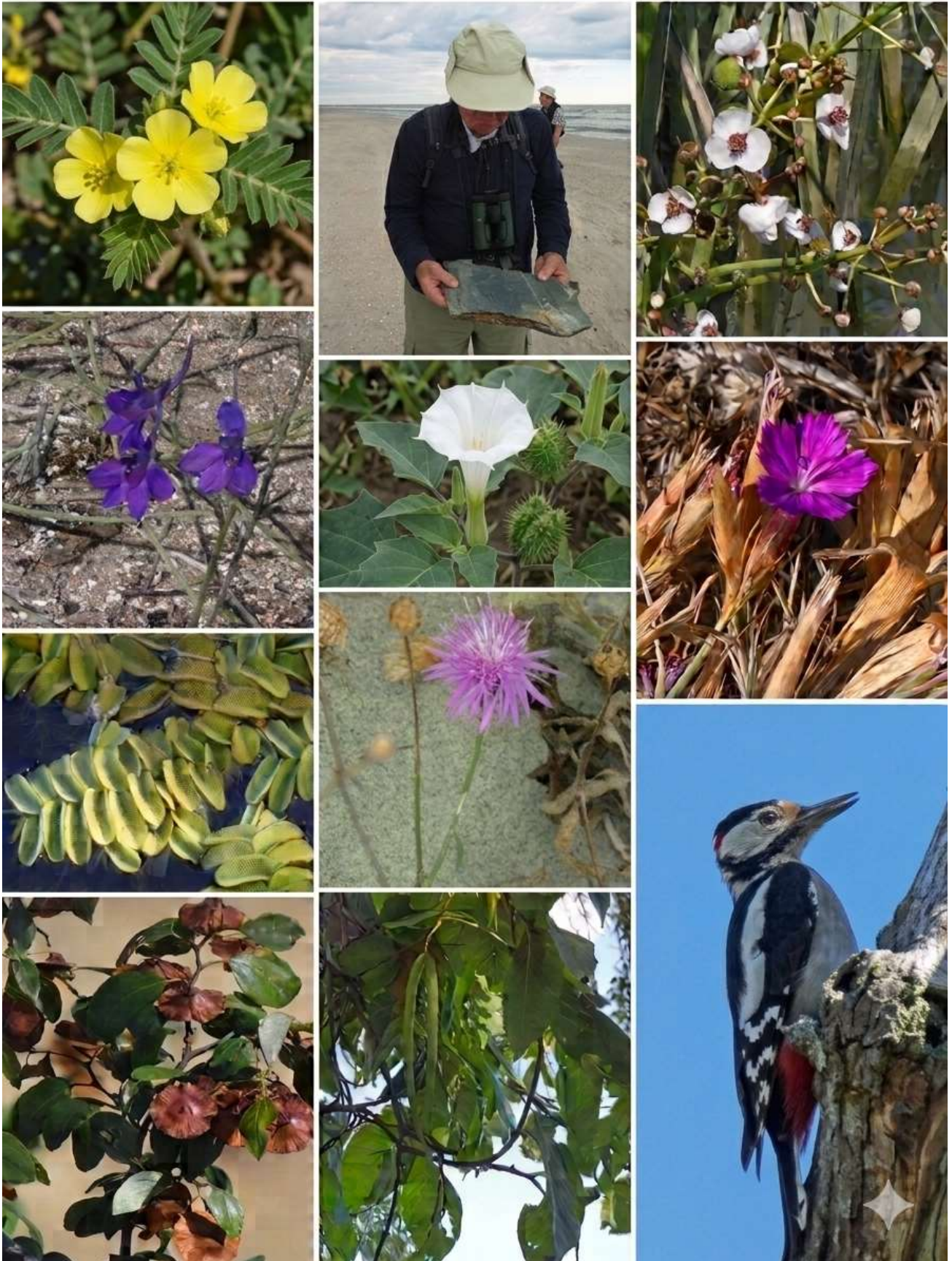
Suaeda inermis (syn. *Salsola soda*) – opposite-leaved saltwort
Salsola kali – prickly saltwort
Heliotropium sibiricum (syn. *Argusia* / *Tournefortia sibirica*) – Siberian heliotrope
Salicornia sp. – glasswort (species unconfirmed)
Suaeda maritima – annual sea-blite



Colchicum autumnale in the Carpathians (ED).

Also in the Carpathians (per ED):
Willow gentian *Gentiana asclepiadea*
Two bellflowers, probably *Campanula carpatica* and *C. patula* (spreading bellflower)
Edelweiss high in Zărnești Gorge.

Collage of photos by Jackie Guthrie



Left column: *Tribulus terrestris* caltrop or goathead; *Consolida regalis* forking larkspur; *Salvinia natans* floating fern; seeds of *Paliurus spina-christi* Christ's thorn.

Middle column: Ray on Black Sea coast with a piece of drone; *Datura stramonium* thorn-apple; *Centaurea arenaria* sand knapweed; seedpods of *Periploca graeca* silk vine.

Right column: *Sagittaria latifolia* arrowhead; *Dianthus nardiformis* Dobrogea carnation or dwarf pink; Syrian woodpecker.