

Autumn Migration

Mid-August – Mid-October

A tour focusing on the spectacular annual migration of thousands of birds of prey, pelicans, storks and passerines along the Black Sea Flyway, known as the Via Pontica.

The northernmost part of the Bulgarian Black sea coast – Coastal Dobroudzha – is where our tour starts from. It is a vast plain, rolling gradually towards the coastal sand dunes and lakes. Here are the last remnants of the Great Steppe, formerly occupying the bigger part of the region and “bottle-neck” for the birds on their way south. A great number of birds are likely to be present here, including Little Bittern, Ferruginous Duck, Glossy Ibis, Caspian Tern, etc. The southern limit of this geographic area is Cape Kaliakra with its dramatic red cliffs, dominating the sea waters. There we will watch Mediterranean Shags and migrating seabirds. On the dry, open steppe-land we can find Calandra Lark, Stone Curlew and a range of migrants, including Isabeline Wheatears, Bee-eaters, various pipits (like the Tawny Pipit and Red-throated Pipit), larks, shrikes and buntings. The shrubs will produce a great diversity of warblers (Icterine, River and Barred warblers), Red-breasted Flycatchers, etc. If you come in late August-early September we can still expect to find Pied Wheatears and Alpine Swifts around the cliffs.

Migrating raptors will be passing overhead all the time, including Levant-Sparrow Hawk, Saker and Red-footed Falcons. Some resident species like the Long-legged Buzzard and Eagle Owl will also be around.

As we drive to the southern Black Sea coast, we will stop to explore the coastal riverine forests and sand dunes, and later the Goritz oak forests. There we can expect to find residents like the White-tailed Eagle, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper, Hawfinch and other forest birds.

The second part of the tour is dedicated to the wetlands around Bourgas, which form one of Europe’s richest bird areas. Together they harbor about 340 bird species. One of the biggest attractions of the Bourgas wetlands is the huge flocks of White and Dalmatian Pelicans roosting there during migration. The numbers of soaring birds following the Black Sea coastal flyway in autumn can rival those at the Bosphoros or the Gibraltar – endless flocks of thousands of White Storks, Lesser Spotted Eagles and Honey Buzzards and incredible numbers of Black Storks, Booted Eagles, Short-toed Eagles, Black Kites, Red-footed Falcons, Montagu’s Harriers, Levant Sparrowhawks, etc. pass overhead.

We will spend one of the mornings watching the migration at Dyulinski Pass – a watch point high up in the wood-clad hills of the Eastern Balkan range, overlooking the seashore below. Then we will move down to Atanasovsko Lake – a shallow saline lagoon with traditional saltpans still preserved. The lake is of major importance for a huge number of birds, including Black-winged stilt, Broad-billed and Curlew Sandpipers, Marsh Sandpiper, Kentish Plover, Slender-billed and Mediterranean Gulls, Gull-billed Tern and many other migrating wader and waterfowl species.

A stop at our Visitor Center in the Poda lagoon is also planned. We will spend an afternoon on the terrace of the Centre, watching raptor migration or walk in the Poda Protected Site, focusing on waders.

Itinerary:



Day 1

Arrival at Varna Airport and transfer to Kavarna

Day 2

Cape Kaliakra steppes and cliffs

Day 3

The lakes of Shabla and Durankulak

Day 5

Drive to the southern Black Sea coast with stops at the Batova and Kamchia forests

Day 6

The Bourgas wetlands

Day 7

Dyulinski Pass / Atanasovsko Lake

Day 8

The Bourgas wetlands

Day 9

Drive to Varna and departure from Varna

This tour can be extended to the Eastern Rhodopes and the Sakar Hills.

As elsewhere in Europe, the time of the autumn migration may produce many rarities. Species like Richard’s Pipit, Desert Wheatear, Terek Sandpiper, Steppe Eagle have been recorded in Bulgaria in recent years.



Red-footed Falcons