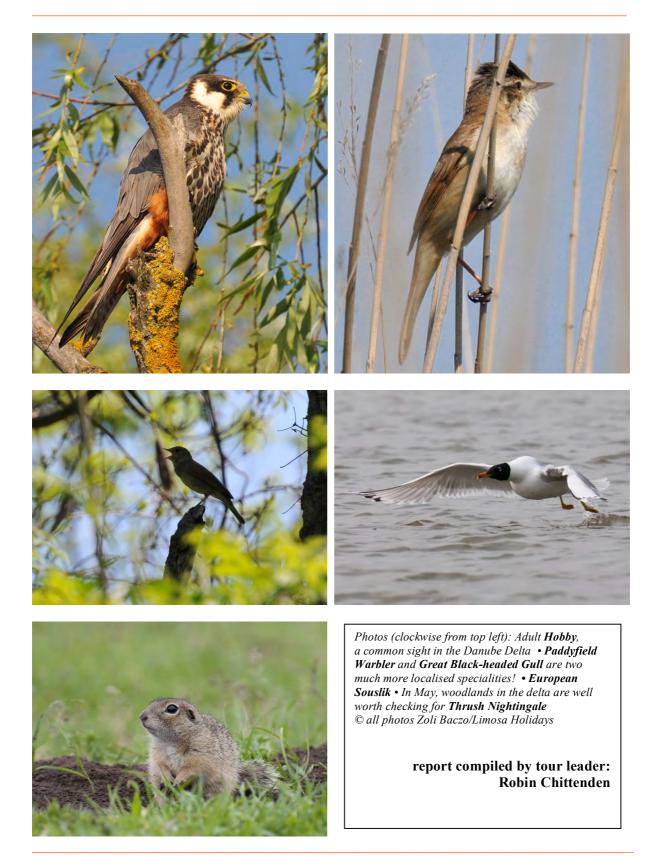
Romania: Danube Delta & Black Sea Coast

Sat 7th - Sun 15th May 2011



Trip Diary

Tour Leaders: Robin Chittenden & Zoli Baczó with Richard & Margaret Bentley, Steve & Pat Drew, Ann di Lorenzo, Christine Sanderson, Chris & Rosemary Sargent, Colin & Heather Stamp, Mike & Daphne Watson.

In contrast to the UK, the spring in eastern Europe was exceptionally late this year. This was illustrated by the fact that some summer breeding birds, that should have been common, had not even arrived. The unusually cool and showery weather had its benefits, however, and resulted in more migrant birds.

The fishponds at Calarasi-iezer were overflowing with bird life. It really was one of those occasions when new birds just kept on appearing: many slow flapping, displaying Little Bitterns; Purple Herons everywhere; a couple of black summer plumaged Spotted Redshanks; a flock of Glossy Ibises; several (Black-crowned) Night Herons; a Red-necked Grebe; a few Ferruginous Ducks; a fine Ruff (with a ruff); many Whiskered and Black Terns; and a smart drake Garganey.

Nearby, at Silistra Park, the highlights were a male Golden Oriole perched in the open, a male Levant Sparrowhawk zipped over and a dusky-hued Red Squirrel. Breakfast, with a view over the Danube, was interrupted by five Spoonbills gliding past.

En route to Mamaia we saw a male Barred Warbler, about twenty yards from us, perched fully in the open, with its beaming yellow eye. Two Syrian Woodpeckers helpfully allowed telescope views on a telegraph pole.

Lake Buceag was also teaming with bird life, including our first White-winged Black Terns, three close Garganey, two Hobbies and a Roller.

At Canarana Fettii we saw our first Bee-eaters and Red-rumped Swallows, as well as another Levant Sparrowhawk (a female this time), several Hawfinches, another couple of Golden Orioles and, perhaps best of all, a close Wryneck. A newly emerged Hebe Tigermoth was admired. En route from there to Mamaia, a female Pallid Harrier glided right past the bus and a pale morph Booted Eagle drifted over.

Navodari seemed to be bursting with small migrants, including two Red-breasted Flycatchers (one of which was sporting a brilliant red throat), and several Pied Flycatchers (including a male of the grey-brown forms). A small field was crammed with a flock of at least thirty Whinchats, and two Arctic Skuas cruised by offshore. Nearby, a summer plumaged Black-throated Diver was spotted on the sea. At Mamaia, early morning sightings from the hotel included up to three Otters and many Black Terns.

One field at Wolves Peninsula was particularly absorbing with at least eighty Collared Pratincoles, a few Calandra Larks, a Red-throated Pipit in display flight, a couple of Tawny Pipits, a female Red-footed Falcon on the ground and several Black-headed Wagtails. A Stone-curlew was out in the open, right by the track. At a marshy area nearby we quickly located a singing Paddyfield Warbler. One of the lagoons there was teeming with waders, composed of a couple of hundred Little Stints, many Curlew Sandpipers, ten Broad-billed Sandpipers, a Red-necked Phalarope, a few Kentish Plovers and seven close Temminck's Stints. Three Dalmatian Pelicans stood alongside a couple of hundred White Pelicans allowing direct comparison.

At the steppe-like habitat at Gura Dobrogei, three Isabelline Wheatears were displaying and a late Hen Harrier drifted past. At the Cheia Gorge we quickly found two pairs of Pied Wheatear. A Long-legged Buzzard cruised low over; showing off its plumage as it dipped past the crags, and another Levant Sparrowhawk shot through. Sousliks were everywhere and unusually approachable.

The reedbed and marshy area at Histria held several more Paddyfield Warblers, croaking Great Reed Warblers, Reed Warblers and a Savi's Warbler. On the luxuriant flashes were several Garganey, with many Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers. A Dalmatian Pelican circled over and an immature male Montagu's Harrier headed north. Of dragonfly interest were a Vagrant Emperor and a couple of Hairy Hawkers. On leaving, we somewhat confusingly saw a Golden Jackal with a Red Fox. Most dramatic were a wheeling flock of about five hundred White Pelican that gained height on the thermals and glided off north towards the Danube Delta.

Near Vadu, we spotted a female Pallid Harrier and five Honey-Buzzards circled over. The flashes at Vadu were covered in waders. Highlights were two Marsh Sandpipers, close Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints. Also showing closely were a Little Gull, four hunched Black-crowned Night Herons and a Savi's Warbler - actually in view.

En route to the Delta we found yet another female Pallid Harrier, our only Short-toed Eagle of the tour and our first Lesser Spotted Eagle. Nearby, the Babadag Woods felt special with a singing male Red-breasted Flycatcher. A Black Woodpecker and Wood Warbler were both heard, a Hawfinch perched in the open and a Honey Buzzard zipped over.

At the pasture near Enisala we watched a singing male Ortolan Bunting, a couple of Long-legged Buzzard drifted over and a Queen of Spain Fritillary was found. A heavy rain shower put paid to more searching so we retreated for a picnic to the nearby castle, which was surrounded by a dozen Tawny Pipits.

We boarded our ponton (hotel boat) at Tulcea and immediately admired an adult summer Little Gull. It wasn't long before we were gently gliding along the Danube, with the sun behind us. The channel was crowded with Whiskered, Black Terns and White-winged Black Terns. A couple of White-tailed Eagles drifted over. From the deck we saw Night Herons, Pygmy Cormorants and Glossy Ibises, which seemed to be flying about everywhere. The major surprise was an adult Great Black-headed Gull in full summer plumage that flew over!

Early morning scanning from our overnight mooring was amazing in terms of the sheer numbers of Night Herons and Swallows. Amazingly, another summer plumaged Great Black-headed Gull flew over. The noise from the cacophony of Marsh and Edible Frogs was at times deafening!

We headed towards Sulina, on the way clocking three adult White-tailed Eagles. Once in the bay, it wasn't long before we had located a fine pair of Great Black-headed Gulls, one of which allowed a very close approach. Another Great Black-headed Gull flew over. Also from the boats we saw a Dalmatian Pelican, and heading back we came across a party of migrant European Bee-eaters, a few Golden Orioles and a couple of Rollers.

Later we explored the Dornica Channel, which was crowded with Night Herons, several Red-necked Grebes, Hobbies, Ferruginous Ducks, Pygmy Cormorants and Great White Egrets plus a Muskrat and a couple of Grass Snakes.

On one of our days in the Delta we explored some woodland by foot. Travelling there by boats we encountered a Dalmatian Pelican, a couple of Penduline Tits, Savi's Warbler, more Purple Herons, several Squacco Herons and some very close perched Hobbies. But the highlight was a Thrush Nightingale, singing right out in the open. Also while we were there a Black Stork and a Honey Buzzard circled over, and two migrant Red-rumped Swallows flew through.

The woodland had a lush understorey of Lily-of-the-valley, Solomon's-seal, and Sword-leaved or Longleaved Helleborine; also a liana called Silk-vine (*Periploca graeca*). In the open areas were swards of Greenwinged Orchids. We later saw more Penduline Tits, including a beautiful adult male with a half-built nest.

Highlights from the last full day on the Delta included Black Woodpecker, Montagu's Harrier and an Osprey. Unfortunately, the shallow water level at the heronry this year did not allow us to explore within the heronry itself - but we did get a flavour of all the shenanigans from the edge! The last night will be remembered for the hooting Tawny Owl and the Thrush Nightingale singing away.

Back in town at the end of our tour, the park in Bucharest was so packed with Romanians, enjoying their first hot Sunday of the spring, that we had to resort to having a picnic in the shade by the wall of the park. Amazingly a male Levant Sparrowhawk performed a display flight just after we arrived, and then a female drifted over. This was the first time that Zoli had witnessed a display flight and the first time he had seen Levant's Sparrowhawk actually in Bucharest. What with Golden Oriole, Hobby, Syrian Woodpecker at a nest hole and a singing Nightingale, it was indeed a good thing that we could not get in the park!

Robin Chittenden

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(Total 180 species recorded by the group)

Yelkhouan Shearwater Puffinus yelkouan 20+ Mamaia Quail Coturnix coturnix One heard on en route to Piatra. **Pheasant** *Phasianus* colchicus A few seen. **Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix* Two en route to the Wolves Peninsula **Greylag Goose** Anser anser A few seen here and there and a few hundred in the Danube Delta. Mute Swan Cygnus olor Common. Shelduck Tadorna tadorna Common south of the Danube delta. Gadwall Anas strepera Common. Wigeon Anas penelope One Wolves Peninsula Mallard Anas platyrhynchos Common. Shoveler Anas clypeata Six Wolves Peninsula, two Histria and two Vadu. Garganey Anas querquedula One Calarasi-iezer, four Lake Buceag, eight Histria, four Vadu and several in the Danube Delta Red-crested Pochard Netta rufina Four Wolves Peninsula, two Histria, two Vadu and one in the Danube Delta. Pochard Aythya ferina Common. Ferruginous Duck Aythya nyroca Common. Goldeneye Bucephala clangula Eight in the Danube Delta. Black-throated Diver Gavia arctica One Mamaia, a summer plumaged bird Midia Port and one off Danube Delta. Little Grebe Tachybaptus ruficollis One Histria. Red-necked Grebe Podiceps grisegena One Calarasi-iezer and thirty plus in the Danube Delta. Great Crested Grebe Podiceps cristatus Very common. Black-necked Grebe Podiceps nigricollis Twenty-five or so in the Danube Delta. Black Stork Ciconia nigra One en route Canarana Fettii and one in the Danube Delta White Stork Ciconia ciconia Common and widespread. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Twenty Calarasi-iezer, ten Lake Buceag, one Histria and seen every day in the Danube Delta with a total of at least one hundred and fifty. Spoonbill Platalea leucorodia Seven Silistra, Mamaia, ten Wolves, one Histria and twenty plus in the Danube Delta. **Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris* One Wolves, one Histria and one in the Danube Delta.

Little Bittern Ixobrychus minutus About ten Calarasi-iezer. (Black-crowned) Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax Seen every day and very common the Danube Delta. Squacco Heron Ardeola ralloides Seen every day and very common the Danube Delta. Grey Heron Ardea cinerea Widespread in small numbers. **Purple Heron** Ardea purpurea Seen every day and common the Danube Delta. Great White Egret Ardea alba Seen every day and fairly common the Danube Delta. Little Egret Egretta garzetta Common and widespread. White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* Flocks of a few hundred seen at Wolves Peninsula, Piatra, Histria and the Danube Delta. **Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* Three Wolves Peninsula, one Histria, one Lake and at least ten sightings in the Danube Delta. **Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* Twelve Lake Buceag and several hundred in the Danube Delta. **Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* Common. Kestrel Falco tinnunculus Widespread and fairly common. **Red-footed Falcon** Falco vespertinus Seen in mainly small number almost every day. Hobby Falco subbuteo Particularly common in the Danube Delta. Honey Buzzard Pernis apivorus One Canarana Fettii, five en route Vadu-Piatra, one Babadag Forest, Enisala and five in the Danube Delta. White-tailed Eagle Haliaeetus albicilla Several in the Danube Delta. Short-toed Eagle Circaetus gallicus One just north of Mihai Viteazu. Marsh Harrier Circus aeruginosus Widespread and seen daily. Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus One Gura Dobrogei Pallid Harrier Circus macrourus Single females seen: one between Canarana Fettii and Mamaia, one between Corbu de Jos and Piatra, and one Sacele. Montagu's Harrier Circus pygargus One Histria, one en route south of Tulcea and one in the Danube Delta. Levant Sparrowhawk Accipiter brevipes One Silistra Park, one Silistra Mamaia, one Cheia gorge, and a pair displaying in Bucherest. (Eurasian) Sparrowhawk Accipiter nisus Noted on four occasions. **Common Buzzard** Buteo buteo Several seen. Long-legged Buzzard Buteo rufinus One Cheia gorge and two Enisala. Lesser Spotted Eagle Aquila pomarina One just north of Mihai Viteazu and two south-west of Tulcea. Booted Eagle Aquila pennata One pale morph between Canarana Fettii-Mamaia Moorhen Gallinula chloropus Several seen here and there.

Coot Fulica atra Several seen here and there. **Stone-curlew** Burhinus oedicnemus One Wolves Peninsula **Oystercatcher** Haematopus ostralegus One Midia Port and one Danube Delta Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus A scattering at coastal wetlands. Avocet Recurvirostra avosetta A scattering at coastal wetlands. Lapwing Vanellus vanellus Widespread and seen daily. Grey Plover Pluvialis squatarola Two Wolves Peninsula. Ringed Plover Charadrius hiaticula Two Wolves Peninsula Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius One Histria Kentish Plover Charadrius alexandrinus Six Wolves Peninsula. **Red-necked Phalarope** Phalaropus lobatus One male Wolves Peninsula. Black-tailed Godwit Limosa limosa Four Calarasi-iezer and a scattering at coastal wetlands. Spotted Redshank Tringa erythropus Two Calarasi-iezer and a scattering at coastal wetlands. Redshank Tringa totanus A few at Histria and Vadu . Marsh Sandpiper Tringa stagnatilis Two Vadu. Greenshank Tringa nebularia Heard Midia Port. Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola Ten Calarasi-iezer and a scattering at coastal wetlands. Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos Small numbers here and there. **Turnstone** Arenaria interpres Two Vadu. Little Stint Calidris minuta At least twenty Calarasi-iezer and a good numbers at coastal wetlands. Temminck's Stint Calidris temminckii Seven Wolves and two Vadu. Curlew Sandpiper Calidris ferruginea At least ten Calarasi-iezer and good numbers at coastal wetlands. **Dunlin** Calidris alpina A few seen here and there. Broad-billed Sandpiper Limicola falcinellus Ten Wolves Peninsula **Ruff** Philomachus pugnax Several seen at coastal wetlands and the Danube Delta. **Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola* Eighty plus Wolves Peninsula and one Vadu. Black-headed Gull Larus ridibundus Seen most days. Little Gull Larus minutus Five individual seen.

Mediterranean Gull Larus melanocephalus Three Navodari Great Black-headed Gull Larus ichthyaetus A total of five adults all in magnificent summer plumage in the Delta. Yellow-legged Gull Larus michahellis Common and widespread. Caspian Gull Larus cachinnans One Calarasi-iezer, one Wolves Peninsulaand then common in Danube Delta. Lesser Black-backed Gull Larus fuscus One Calarasi-iezer and one in the Danube Delta were presumed to be of the form Baltic Gull. Little Tern Sternula albifrons Twenty plus Wolves Peninsula Gull-billed Tern Gelochelidon nilotica One Wolves Peninsula Caspian Tern Hydroprogne caspia Twelve Wolves Peninsula Whiskered Tern Chlidonias hybridus Very common and seen daily. Black Tern Chlidonias niger Common and widespread, seen almost every day but less numerous than Whiskered Tern. White-winged Black Tern Chlidonias leucopterus Many at coastal wetlands and several in the Danube Delta. Common Tern Sterna hirundo Common on coastal wetlands and in the Danube Delta. Arctic Skua Stercorarius parasiticus Two Navodari Feral Pigeon (Rock Dove) Columba livia Common. Stock Dove Columba oenas A few in the Danube Delta. Woodpigeon Columba palumbus Several in the Danube Delta. Turtle Dove Streptopelia turtur Fairly common. Collared Dove Streptopelia decaocto Widespread and common. **Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* Seen or heard every day. Little Owl Athene noctua A couple seen here and there. Swift Apus apus Common, widespread and seen daily. **Roller** Coracias garrulus Most common in the Danube Delta. Kingfisher Alcedo atthis Occasionally heard or glimpsed. Bee-eater Merops apiaster Seen virtually everyday. Hoopoe Upupa epops Common and widespread on the coast and inland and also seen in the delta. Syrian Woodpecker Dendrocopos syriacus A pair Ostrov, one Piatra and one at the nest hole Bucherest. Great Spotted Woodpecker Dendrocopos major A few seen here and there. Black Woodpecker Dryocopus martius One heard Babadag Forest and one Danube Delta.

Green Woodpecker Picus viridis One heard. Grey-headed Woodpecker Picus canus One Canarana Fettii and a few Danube Delta. Red-backed Shrike Lanius collurio One in the Danube Delta and a couple en route Bucherest Golden Oriole Oriolus oriolus Common and widespread. Jay Garrulus glandarius A couple here and there. Magpie *Pica pica* Very common. Jackdaw Coloeus monedula Widespread and common. Rook Corvus frugilegus Widespread and common. Hooded Crow Corvus cornix Widespread and common. Great Tit Parus major Common. **Blue Tit** Cyanistes caeruleus Common. **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* Several seen in the Danube Delta. Sand Martin Riparia riparia Very common. Swallow Hirundo rustica Common and widespread. House Martin Delichon urbicum Common. **Red-rumped Swallow** Cecropis daurica Ten Canarana Fettii and two Danube Delta. **Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus* A couple in the Danube Delta. Calandra Lark Melanocorypha calandra Common on the pseudo-steppe grasslands and agricultural fields. Short-toed Lark Calandrella brachydactyla Six Wolves Peninsulaand area **Crested Lark** Galerida cristata Several coastal area. Skylark Alauda arvensis Common and widespread. Woodlark Lullula arborea One heard Ostrov and two in the Danube Delta. Savi's Warbler Locustella luscinioides Frequently heard and occasionally seen. Great Reed Warbler Acrocephalus arundinaceus Common. Sedge Warbler Acrocephalus schoenobaenus A couple here and there. Paddyfield Warbler Acrocephalus agricola One Wolves Peninsula and four Histria. **Reed Warbler** Acrocephalus scirpaceus Common. Willow Warbler Phylloscopus trochilus A few heard and seen.

Chiffchaff Phylloscopus collybita A few heard and seen. Wood Warbler Phylloscopus sibilatrix One Silistra Park and one singing Babadag Forest Blackcap Sylvia atricapilla Common in drier woodlands. Garden Warbler Sylvia borin Several heard and a few seen in the Danube Delta. Barred Warbler Sylvia nisoria Two Ostov Lesser Whitethroat Sylvia curruca Four heard or seen. **Bearded Tit** Panurus biarmicus A few Histria and the Danube Delta. Nuthatch Sitta europaea One Babadag Forest. (Eurasian) Treecreeper Certhia familiaris One heard Babadag Forest. **Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* Widespread and common. Blackbird Turdus merula A few here and there. Song Thrush Turdus philomelos A couple here and there. **Robin** Erithacus rubecula One heard Babadag Forest. Thrush Nightingale Luscinia luscinia Seen and heard in the Danube Delta. Nightingale Luscinia megarhynchos Several heard. Black Redstart Phoenicurus ochruros Two Mamaia **Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* One Histria and commonly heard and frequently seen in the riparian woodlands of the delta. Whinchat Saxicola rubetra Thirty Navodari and several more also in the coastal area. Isabelline Wheatear Oenanthe isabellina Three Gura Dobrogei. Northern Wheatear Oenanthe oenanthe Several in coastal areas. **Pied Wheatear** Oenanthe pleschanka Two pairs Cheia gorge, although one male showed some evidence of hybridzaiton or perhaps just a variation in plumage. Spotted Flycatcher Muscicapa striata A couple seen here and there. Pied Flycatcher Ficedula hypoleuca Three Navodari, three Mamaia and one Histria Collared Flycatcher Ficedula albicollis One heard in the Danube delta. **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* Two Navodari including spring male with red throat and another singing male with red throat Babadag Forest. House Sparrow Passer domesticus Widespread and common. Spanish Sparrow Passer hispaniolensis Common **Tree Sparrow** Passer montanus Common

Yellow Wagtail Motacilla flava

Many 'Black-headed' and 'Blue-headed' Wagtails seen. Also a few males showed the characters of the form M. f dombrowskii, which shows a dark crown and nape, slightly darker ear-coverts and a white supercilium. This form is usually treated as an intergrade between 'Blue-headed' and 'Black-headed' Wagtails. White Wagtail Motacilla alba Several seen. Tawny Pipit Anthus campestris Several seen in psuedo-steppe and agricultural fields and twelve Enisala. **Red-throated Pipit** Anthus cervinus One Calarasi-iezer and several Wolves Peninsulas **Tree Pipit** Anthus trivialis One north of Mihai Viteazu **Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* Small numbers here and there. **Greenfinch** Carduelis chloris Just a handful **Goldfinch** Carduelis carduelis Regularly seen. Linnet Carduelis cannabina Three Cheia gorge Hawfinch Coccothraustes coccothraustes At least six Canarana Fettii and one Babadag Forest. **Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra* Common. Ortolan Bunting Emberiza hortulana A singing male Enisala. Black-headed Bunting Emberiza melanocephala Three males, distantly, in flight between Canarana Fettii-Mamaia. **Reed Bunting** Emberiza schoeniclus Several.

MAMMALS

Noctule Bat Nyctalus noctula European Hare Lepus europaeus Red Squirrel Sciurus vulgaris Otter Lutra lutra European Souslik Spermophilus citellus Muskrat Ondatra zibethicus Red Fox Vulpes vulpes Golden Jackal Canis aureus Roe Deer Capreolus capreolus

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Grass Snake Natrix natrix European Pond Terrapin Emys orbicularis Balkhan Wall Lizard Podarcis taurica Eastern Green Lizard Lacerta viridis Marsh Frog Pelophylax ridibundus Edible Frog Pelophylax kl. esculentus^{*1} *¹ kl.=klepton= fertile hybrid of the Pool Frog (Pelophylax lessonae) and the Marsh Frog (Pelophylax ridibundus).

DRAGONS & DAMSELS Common Bluetail (Blue-tailed Damselfly) Ischnura elegans Vagrant Emperor Anax ephippiger Hairy Hawker Brachytron pratense Variable Bluet (Variable Damselfly) Coenagrion pulchellum