



Juvenile Broad-billed Sandpipers (Dániel Balla)

DANUBE DELTA & DOBRUDJA IN AUTUMN
with **SAKERTOURS**
25th August – 1st September, 2019

Leader: Dániel Balla

Autumn in the Danube Delta and surrounding Dobrudja area gives one of the best opportunities to enjoy the autumn migration of many shorebird species like the all-time favourite Broad-billed Sandpiper, the Marsh Sandpiper or Curlew Sandpiper. The Black Sea coast is driving all migrant songbirds in the area as well giving the chance to spot them in the vegetation along the coastline. This tour is also known for chances of finding some rarities on migration.

Participants of this year's tour were keen to find Great White Pelican, Dalmatian Pelican, Ferruginous Duck, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk, Saker Falcon, Little Crake, Red-necked Phalarope, Marsh Sandpiper, flocks of Broad-billed Sandpiper, a Black-winged Pratincole amongst the Collared ones, Pallas's Gulls of all age, White-winged Tern, Black Tern, Citrine Wagtail, Pied Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, Paddyfield Warbler and a Semi-collared Flycatcher. All together we saw 178 bird species on this memorable 8 days of birdwatching.

25th August (Sunday)

After meeting each other on the airport near Bucharest we straight drove to a small bay with a shallow wetland nearby close to Constanta. Here we saw the first flock of Broad-billed Sandpipers of the tour just to have a cracking start. We had great views of Marsh Sandpipers and other waders as well as Red-rumped Swallows at the same site. On the sea we spotted the Black Sea Harbour Porpoise from an unusually close distance just before leaving. Driving towards our first hotel we had time so just stopped at the usual quarry we are always visiting, where we collected Pied Wheatear and Northern Wheatear just after close views of a magnificent Saker Falcon hunting in front of us. We watched Short-toed Eagles circling up and a Long-legged Buzzard just to complete the list of raptors here. As we were quite close to the hotel, we could visit one more wetland just near the road where we picked up the first Red-necked Phalaropes and Ferruginous Duck.



Saker Falcon seen on the first day (top left), tiny part of a huge Mediterranean Gull flock (top right) and Red-necked Phalaropes (Dániel Balla)

26th August (Monday)

We just gone for a short prebreakfast walk around our hotel which produced a beautifully perched female Golden Oriole in the morning lights and a few minutes later we bumped into a Syrian Woodpecker which just landed on a tree trunk in front of us. After breakfast we drove aimed to visit the wetland sites around Constanta. While we saw Lesser Grey Shrike on the land side the water held a line of Little Gulls all along the shore which summed up to be more than 2500 individuals at the end. As driving along the shore, we managed to get stunning views of Broad-billed Sandpipers, Red-necked Phalaropes, Ruffs and other waders but the real surprise of the site was the enormous group of Mediterranean Gulls which we counted to be at least 30.000 individuals.

In the afternoon we drove through the sites we visited rapidly yesterday to see what we left behind and added Isabelline Wheatear, Tawny Pipit, Spanish Sparrow and more Rollers, Hoopoes from very close distance just to mention a few.

27th August (Tuesday)

Our prebreakfast birding was a bit unusual as we did a short drive to a wetland close to a hotel. On the way we picked out a subadult Pallas's Gull from a flock of Caspians just in the first lights of the morning. Arriving to our special spot it did not took too much time to spot the first Paddyfield Warbler and we finished with a total 4 birds seen very well. After breakfast we had a short drive to a wetland site with woods and bushes around not far from the coast in hope of catching some migrating songbirds. We found Thrush Nightingales in the understorey and a singing Eastern Olivaceous Warbler as well. We had open views on a juvenile Barred Warbler but the crown on the songbird sightings were the views of several Red-breasted Flycatchers some of them giving prolonged views in the open while a dark morph Booted Eagle just crossed the sky. We had a lunch in our hotel to prepare for the afternoon session which we started on the seacoast. A short sea watching ended with views of Arctic Skuas trying to steal some fish from Sandwich Terns. Later we moved to a coastal wetland site where we had close views of Caspian, Little and even Gull-billed Terns. After spending some time with comparing different races of Western Yellow Wagtail we moved towards to our last birding spot of the day. We arrived in the best lights of the day to enjoy magnificent views of an unbelievable flock of 210 Broad-billed Sandpipers joined by Marsh Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, Dunlin while a Golden Jackal was checking them from time to time between the reeds.



Broad-billed Sandpiper in the Dobrudja area (Dániel Balla)

28th August (Wednesday)

This morning we again chose to drive to a wetland which we haven't visited yet. It turned to be a very good decision as we collected Little Crake and Water Rail two real skulkers amongst Bluethroat, Sedge Warbler and Bearded Reedlings. The real surprise however was the appearance of two Citrine Wagtails in the edge of the marsh vegetation around the lake. After the superb morning session, we drove to two different woodland sites where we had amazing views of Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Syrian Woodpecker in a row. In addition, we had great views of several Hawfinch and enjoyed watching a light morph Booted Eagle as it was fighting with a pair of Long-legged Buzzards just above the adjacent hill. After a fast lunch stop, we drove to Murighiol where we took our boat to the Danube Delta. On the way to Sfantu Gheorge town we visited a few better canals and lagoons where we had very good views of Caspian Terns, Caspian and Yellow-legged Gulls, Ferruginous Duck just to mention a few. As going down on the main channel we were amazed by the hundreds of different marsh terns hunting above the water from which we picked up a few White-winged Terns which were still almost in full breeding plumage. As a final program we visited a lagoon where we immediately got our eyes on a first calendar year Pallas's Gull swimming in the middle of the entrance of the lake. A few minutes later we had stunning and prolonged views of Little Crakes and also got Little Bittern as well. While driving to the hotel on the last few km's we picked out an Osprey eating a fish on the top of a dry tree giving a fantastic end to a fruitful day.



A curious Common Cuckoo (Dániel Balla)

29th August (Thursday)

Our first full day in the Danube Delta started with a short walk around our hotel in Sfantu Gheorge when we had amazing scope views of several Golden Orioles, Little Crake and Tree Pipit. After breakfast we had a short boat ride to a nearby wetland site where we saw 5 Marsh Sandpipers together and several other waders. We

moved towards a bushy area close to the coast to find some migrants. Red-breasted Flycatchers were calling almost from everywhere when we found an immature Ficedula flycatcher which after checking the images we took and looked carefully every feature of the bird were positively identified as a Semicollared Flycatcher. After the ID challenge we got back to our boat from where we saw a Little Bittern just flying above the water down the canal.

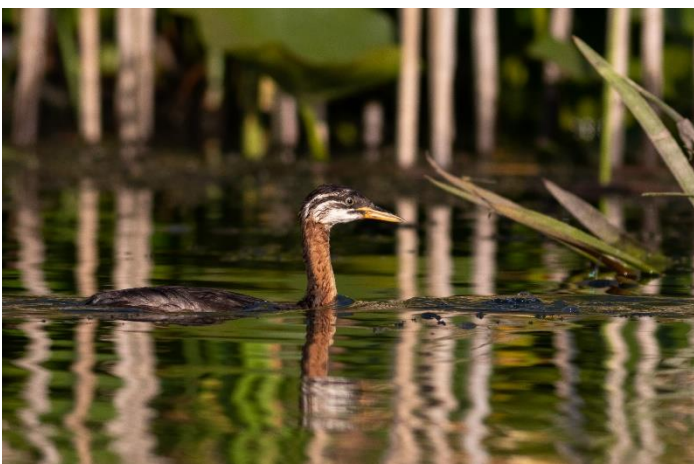


Semi-collared Flycatcher and Pallas's Gull (Dániel Balla)

We had a lunch and a short break in the middle of the day to skip the hottest period of the day and went out to the Sachalin Island in the afternoon. The area has not disappointed us as the shore and water were covered with birds for several kilometres. We saw hundreds of Spotted Redshanks, Black-tailed Godwits, groups of Great White Pelicans and Dalmatian Pelicans. A huge mixed flock of different terns including Gull-billed, Sandwich, Black and Caspian Terns were around from a few individuals were always hanging around our boat. We had very good scope views on several Grey Plovers a few in stunning breeding plumage as well as a Bar-tailed Godwit which was simply shining on the shore in the best afternoon lights. The crown on the afternoon however were the Pallas's Gulls which we counted a total of 8 individuals from a close distance.

30th August (Friday)

In the morning we visited the seashore and then made a walk around the town checking bushy habitats. As the wind was quite strong the bird activity in the bushes was quite low but we had nice views of Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans in the early morning lights and had memorable minutes spent watching a Purple Heron hunting and eating its prey. In the afternoon we had a longer boat ride to a canal which had different habitats along. On the first section of the canal we had stunning views of a Little Bittern as it caught a frog and swallowed it later and managed to see three Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers on a single spot.



Red-necked Grebe (left) and male Little Crake (right) from our boat (Dániel Balla)

As we got out to the more open parts of the canal, we saw plenty of Squacco Herons, Moorhens, Black-crowned Night Herons and Hobbies sitting on treetops. On a few hundred meters section of the canal we had exceptionally close views of two Red-necked Grebe and several Little Crakes including a fine male individual. Just before we left the site a Grey-headed Woodpecker just popped up to the top of a dry tree in front of us which view we mastered to perfect lights thanks to Romi – our boatman.

31st August (Saturday)

Early morning, we had a fast visit to a bushy area where we heard Thrush Nightingale in the past days to get better views which we succeeded with. After breakfast we rapidly got back to the car by boat to have enough time for the Macin Mountains area. In the Macin area we put Wood Warbler, Black Redstart and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush in the bag had Hawfinch and Mars Tit again and had prolonged views of an immature Levant Sparrowhawk circling above us sometimes together with Kestrel giving good opportunity for comparison. After lunch we crossed the Danube with a ferry and drove into the middle of the Baragan Lowland to search for Dotterels. As we arrived to the site, we immediately spotted a small flock of this magical shorebird as they were feeding on the grazed steppe area. While getting close to them we spotted other smaller parties around us giving a total count of 27 bird on the site at least. While enjoying the Dotterels a pair of Eurasian Stone Curlew just appeared in front of a flock of sheep beautifully lighted by the sun behind us. We left the site in early sunset and got the last Lesser Grey Shrike and Long-legged Buzzard of the tour on the way to our hotel.



Levant Sparrowhawk (Dániel Balla)

1st September (Sunday)

Our hotel was just near a huge saltlake which held outstanding numbers of birds when we got there in the morning for an unusually long prebreakfast birding. We saw Marsh Sandpipers again and Broad-billed

Sandpipers close and found a single European Golden Plover. On the water we saw big numbers of Black-necked Grebes and watched Whiskered and White-winged Terns hunting for the last time on the tour and followed 7 Dalmatian Pelicans arriving and landing on the lake. Changing our position on the shore gave us very close views of Collared Pratincoles and juvenile Kentish Plovers. We had information of Black-winged Pratincole in the area a few days back so kept on searching for Pratincoles. A few minutes later we found a flock of 10 Pratincoles roosting in the Salicornia patches of the bare ground. As we got closer, we found a bird which we thought could be a Black-winged but had to wait for the birds to fly. Minutes later the flock got in the air and boom the expected individual was showing black underwing in the backlight making it easier to separate from the Collards than expected. The excitement made space in us for a good breakfast so we decided to go back to the hotel. After leaving we drove to another lake where saw Broad-billed Sandpipers again a flock of 100+ Spotted Redshanks feeding in the water and Collared Pratincoles around us in the short grass. We also counted at least 10 Marsh Sandpipers on this last site giving a nice end to this tour.



Black-winged Pratincole (Dániel Balla)

It was time to go back to Bucharest to reach everyone's flight. On the way to the airport we had a lunch in a restaurant where we voted for the birds of the trip. After summarizing the points the TOP5 of the trip become the following:

1. Broad-billed Sandpipers
2. Semi-collared Flycatcher
3. Levant Sparrowhawk
4. Little Crakes
5. Pallas's Gull / Little Bittern / Saker Falcon

BIRDS – list of bird species recorded on the 2019 tour

C = Commonly seen, more than 10 individuals

'Numbers' = Actual number seen on the tour

H = Heard only

LO = Leader only

NL = Non-leader

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	C
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	C
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	C
4	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	C
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	C
6	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	C
7	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	9
8	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	C
9	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	6
10	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	C
11	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	6
12	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	C
13	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	C
14	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	C
15	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	C
16	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	2
17	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	C
18	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	C
19	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	10
20	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	3
21	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	C
22	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	7
23	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	C
24	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	C
25	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	C
26	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	C
27	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	C
28	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	C
29	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	C
30	Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	C
31	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>	C
32	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	C
33	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1
34	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	5
35	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	5
36	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>	2
37	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1
38	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	C
39	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	2
40	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	5
41	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	C
42	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	C

43	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	2
44	Little Crake	<i>Porzana parva</i>	C
45	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	C
46	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	C
47	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	2
48	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	9
49	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	C
50	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	C
51	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	C
52	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	1
53	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	C
54	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	C
55	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	C
56	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	3
57	Eurasian Dotterel	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>	27
58	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	9
59	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	1
60	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	C
61	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	C
62	Broad-billed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris falcinellus</i>	278
63	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	C
64	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	C
65	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	3
66	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	C
67	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	C
68	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	C
69	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	17
70	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	C
71	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	5
72	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	20
73	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	C
74	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	C
75	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	C
76	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	C
77	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	28
78	Black-winged Pratincole	<i>Glareola nordmanni</i>	1
79	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	C
80	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	C
81	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	C
82	Pallas's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus</i>	10
83	Mew Gull*	<i>Larus canus</i>	2
84	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	C
85	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	C
86	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	C
87	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	C
88	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	C
89	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	C
90	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	C
91	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	C
92	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	C

93	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	C
94	Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	2
95	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia f. domestica</i>	C
96	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	C
97	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	C
98	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	1
99	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	C
100	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	5
101	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	3
102	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	C
103	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	C
104	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	C
105	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	C
106	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>	2
107	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>	3
108	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	3
109	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	C
110	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	4
111	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	C
112	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	10
113	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	C
114	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1
115	Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	2
116	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	C
117	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	C
118	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	C
119	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	8
120	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	C
121	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	C
122	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	C
123	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	C
124	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	1
125	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	7
126	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	C
127	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	C
128	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	4
129	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	5
130	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	C
131	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	C
132	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	C
133	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	C
134	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	3
135	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	3
136	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	1
137	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	C
138	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	C
139	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	C
140	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	8
141	Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	6
142	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	C

143	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>	1
144	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	2
145	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	C
146	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	2
147	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	7
148	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1
149	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	C
150	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1
151	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	C
152	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1
153	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	1
154	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	5
155	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>	C
156	Semicollared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula semitorquata</i>	1
157	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	2
158	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	2
159	Common Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	2
160	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	2
161	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	C
162	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	5
163	Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	10
164	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniensis</i>	C
165	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	C
166	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	C
167	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	C
168	Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	2
169	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	C
170	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	5
171	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	4
172	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	C
173	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	14
174	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	C
175	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	C
176	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	C
177	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	1
178	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	C

MAMMALS – list of mammal species recorded on the 2019 tour

C = Commonly seen, more than 10 individuals

'Numbers' = Actual number seen on the tour

1	Black Sea Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena relicta</i>	2
2	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>	1
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	1
4	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	C
5	European Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus citellus</i>	C



Juvenile Little Bittern (Dániel Balla)



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