Our previous autumn visits to Bulgaria have given us many unforgettable moments…..

Following a huge flock of over 10,000 White Storks; finding Wryneck, Eastern Olivaceous and Barred Warblers and Thrush Nightingale right outside our hotel one morning; being distracted by a flock of Levant Sparrowhawks close overhead; counting migrating Yellow Wagtails as they came in off the sea; searching for Black-eared and Isabelline Wheatears when the call went up for a Pallid Harrier, we saw five males that morning, plus a Saker that flew past our lunchtime restaurant; we could go on…..

Perhaps none of these events will be repeated exactly, but seven nights in the right place at the right time of year will certainly turn up sightings of equal quality.

Local breeding bird numbers peak at this time – high counts of Bee-eaters, Golden Orioles, and Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes are the norm. Lakes attract flights of pelicans and storks, and we expect a good range of waders. Alongside the many common species, Red-necked Phalaropes and Marsh and Broad-billed Sandpipers regularly appear.

The coast forms a major flyway from the Ukraine to Turkey, with birds en route to the Bosphorus crossing point. We can expect Booted, Short-toed and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Honey, Steppe and Long-legged Buzzards and Goshawks whilst keeping an eye out for the scarcer raptors such as Eleonora’s Falcon.

In addition to the birds there is plenty of other wildlife to see including some of Bulgaria’s hundreds of species of butterfly. There is a rich culture too, and some very pleasant wines and beers.

All the ground arrangements and local guiding will be provided by our long-term partners and local BirdLife representatives, the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, and this tour will support their conservation activities.

**ITINERARY**

**BOURGAS AREA**

On arrival at Bourgas Airport we will go straight to our first hotel, just 20 minutes away. Four nights in the village of Sarafovo give us the opportunity to visit a wide choice of reserves and other top sites, including a heronry at Poda, the famous Lake Anatatasso, lakes at Pomorie and Apeu, and the Izvaska River. On previous visits we have found lots of birds around our hotel, including Little Owl, Red-rumped Swallow, Wryneck, Syrian Woodpecker and Crested Lark.

The complex of wetlands around Bourgas, including the famous Lake Anatatasso, attracts a huge variety of birds at this time of year. The shallow lakes vary from freshwater to saline and so provide for different bird species. As well as Night, Purple and Squacco Herons, and Dalmatian and White Pelicans, we shall look for Gull-billed and all three marsh terns, Curlew Sandpiper, Kentish Plover and Collared Pratincole. On the reedy fringes we can look for Great Reed, Marsh and Cetti’s Warblers, and both Bearded and Penduline Tits. There are gathering flocks of Caspian, Yellow-legged, Slender-billed, Mediterranean and Little Gulls.
There are meadows, bogs, low hills and woodlands in the nearby countryside which are good for a range of other birds including Lesser Spotted Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Levant Sparrowhawk, Woodlark and a host of interesting flycatchers and warblers.

This whole area is a magnet for migrants of all sorts, so we can spend some time at the known watch points and wait for the birds to come to us. The birds that could possibly turn up at this time are too numerous to list, but have included Little Crane, Black-winged Pratincole and Terek Sandpiper on previous visits.

KARVANA
On day five we will head north, birdwatching along the way. We will explore the flooded forest around the Kamcia river mouth. This area is good for White-tailed Eagle, Hobby and migrants. Oak forests at Goritza are good for Short-toed Treecreeper. Woodpeckers here include Black, Grey-headed, Middle Spotted and Lesser Spotted. We will also drive over the Drnliński Pass to watch for migrants passing overhead.

Our second hotel is near the town of Karvana, on the north-east coast. Steppe, rocky headlands and small marshes draw a wide range of birds to this region. Pallid Harrier has been seen here on many occasions, joining the regular passage migrants which include Red-footed Falcon, and Honey and Steppe Buzzards.

Our stay of three nights here will give us ample time to explore the best birding sites. Both Isabelline and Pied Wheatear prefer the dry steppe along with Stone Curlew, whereas Red-breasted Flycatcher, warblers, and many other passerines are best looked for in the small wooded valleys. Not to be missed are Lakes Sabla and Durankulak, two bird-rich wetland and sand dune sites on the coast which also attract Ferruginous Duck and Garganey. Citrine Wagtail has provided a highlight on past visits.

We will visit the dramatic Cape Kaliakra, where Yelkouan Shearwaters are frequently seen just offshore, and Eleonora’s Falcons sometimes patrol the cliffs for tired migrants. The restaurant here does a tasty lunch!

The dry steppe is dissected by deep narrow valleys. One such is the Bolata Valley, which is home to Pygmy Cormorant, herons and Eurasian Eagle Owl.

Partly because of traditional farming methods and partly due to a low human population density, lots of species can be easier to see in autumn in Bulgaria than elsewhere, including Goshawks, Turtle Doves, Hawfinches, Common Nightingales, Thrush Nightingales and Cirl Buntings.

On morning of the last day we will drive to the airport, birding along the way, arriving in good time for our flight back to the UK.

CLIMATE AND PACE
We can expect warm or hot sunny weather, with a low chance of rain. Breakfast will normally be taken at about 7am or 7.30am. Basic fitness is all that is required. Full days will be spent in the field with short/medium length walks. Any uphill sections will be taken at a sensible pace.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD
Full-board accommodation is provided with four nights in Sarafovo and three nights in Karvana, at locally owned hotels with a good standard of food and accommodation. All rooms have en suite bathrooms. Packed lunches will be taken some days, on others we will have restaurant lunches.

PRICE INCLUDES …..
All birdwatching excursions with expert leaders and local guides, full-board accommodation (starting with breakfast on 4th, ending with lunch on 10th), bottled water on the buses, reserve entrance fees, local transport by mini-coach, and international flights.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED
Travel insurance. Personal items, drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS
Return flights from Manchester to Bourgas using charter services provided by Balkan Airways. Outbound flight departs early evening; return flight arrives back early evening.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 nights:</th>
<th>3rd to 10th September 2016</th>
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<tr>
<td>Principal leaders:</td>
<td>Roger Barnes and Phil Palmer, plus a local guide with each group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum group size:</td>
<td>Maximum 28 clients, split into two groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost:</td>
<td>£1450 per person sharing (£95 single supplement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deposit:</td>
<td>£300 per person</td>
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DOWNLOAD A BOOKING FORM AT http://www.birdholidays.co.uk/BOOKING.FORM.WEB.pdf

Or contact us: tel 0113 3910510 or info@birdholidays.co.uk

Please return the form direct to Roger or Phil at BIRD HOLIDAYS LTD, 10 Ivegate, Yeadon, Leeds, LS19 7RE