



BIRDING IN ANCIENT BULGARIA

May 1 – 17, 2027



Eurasian Griffon, Rhodope Mountains, Bulgaria © Martin Prochazkacz/shutterstock

Bordered by Romania, Greece, Turkey, and the Black Sea, Bulgaria straddles the migration route of many of the birds that winter in Africa and breed in eastern and northeastern Europe. Our own journey in search of those and so many other birds takes us across the country, from the capital of Sofia in the west through the stunning mountains of the south to Bulgaria's Black Sea coast and the Danube River in the northeast.

In Sofia, Common Swift and colonies of Western House-Martin nest under the eaves of attractive National Revival buildings while Eurasian Collared-Doves and Eurasian Blackbirds sing in the leafy city parks. Above the city, in the dramatic Vitosha Mountains, Pallid Swift, Ring Ouzel, and Common Firecrest may be among the first birds to welcome us as we begin our explorations.

As we travel south into the western Rhodope Mountains, our sights will be set first on birds of agricultural habitats, then on the great diversity of species inhabiting the rivers, gorges, crags, and forests. Birds we hope to meet within these dramatically scenic areas include European Turtle-Dove, Alpine Swift, Crested Tit, Red-rumped Swallow, White-throated Dipper, and

Common Nightingale—to some ears, Europe’s finest songster. If we are fortunate, the star of the show will be the extraordinary butterfly-like Wallcreeper.

At lower elevations in the eastern Rhodope Mountains, we will concentrate on finding Black and White storks, Egyptian Vulture, Eurasian Griffon, Eurasian Scops-Owl, Eastern Subalpine Warbler, Spanish Sparrow, and Black-headed Bunting

Our journey then takes us eastward through rolling hills and flower-filled countryside to Sozopol on the coast of the Black Sea. We may see Booted and Imperial eagles and Lesser Kestrel, and numbers of European Bee-eater and European Roller will increase noticeably. Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Green Woodpecker, and Lesser Gray and Woodchat shrikes are often seen on the roadside. We will make a special effort to find Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and the extremely local Masked Shrike and Olive-tree Warbler.



The dazzling European Bee-eater © Brian Gibbons

North of Sozopol, the wetlands of Burgas and Pomorie are a paradise for waterfowl and other aquatic birds. Here we should see Common Shelduck, Pygmy Cormorant, Great White Pelican, and perhaps our first Dalmatian Pelican. Various herons and egrets and large numbers of Greater Flamingo are also present. The handsome Pied Avocet is a common breeding species here. Among a wide range of migrant shorebird possibilities, we will be on the lookout for Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, and Spotted Redshank, while noisy Yellow-legged Gull and Common, Sandwich, and Whiskered terns vie for our attention overhead. Cetti’s Warbler and Great Reed

Warbler fill the reedbeds with their noisy songs, and we will likely find Western Marsh Harrier quartering the marshes in search of prey.

Moving north along the Black Sea coast, we will explore mature oak woodlands in search of lowland forest species including the lovely Semicollared Flycatcher, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, and Short-toed Treecreeper. We will also visit dry steppes filled with wildflowers and wheatears, with Crested Lark singing overhead. Our hoped-for finds at reed-fringed lakes include Ferruginous Duck, Squacco Heron, Mediterranean Gull, and the extremely local Paddyfield Warbler, here at the western limit of its range.



Purple Heron © Faisca

The final leg of our journey will take us just south of the Danube River, to the Srebarna Biosphere Reserve. Here we will enjoy a wonderful mix of wetland birds including Graylag Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Ferruginous Duck, Great Crested Grebe, and Purple Heron. Common Cuckoo is truly common in this area, and European Bee-eaters present a dazzlingly colorful delight at their colonies. Syrian and Lesser Spotted woodpeckers, along with Eurasian Golden Oriole, Red-backed Shrike, and Corn Bunting are common in the area too, and we will be serenaded night and day by the classic symbol of music and love, the Common Nightingale.

Along the way, we will have the opportunity to learn some of Bulgaria's 8,000-year-long history with visits to Thracian sites including the ancient city of Perperikon, and tours of excellent museums in Sofia and Varna.

May 1–2, Days 1–2: Departure from home and arrival in Sofia, Bulgaria

Most flights from the United States bound for eastern Europe leave in the afternoon or evening, arriving the next day. If you depart on May 1, Day One of our tour, you will arrive at Sofia International Airport (airport code SOF) on May 2, Day Two. Once you have cleared immigration and customs and gathered your bags, a representative of our ground agent will be waiting for you outside the baggage claim area for the 30-minute ground transfer to the Hotel Jasmin, where a room has been reserved in your name.

After check-in, you can relax in your room or join your fellow tour participants for an optional walking tour of the Bulgarian capital. We will visit the historical city center where attractions include imposing National Revival architecture, Saint Alexander Nevsky — the Bulgarian Orthodox Cathedral — the ancient St Sofia and St George's churches, the well-preserved underground Roman ruins of the ancient town of Serdika, and the Parliament Building amongst others. Along the way, we are sure to encounter some of the common urban birds including Common Wood-Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Eurasian Magpie Alpine and Common swifts, Western House-Martin, Great Tit, and Eurasian Blackbird. This evening there will be a welcome reception and dinner at a local restaurant.

Should you want more time to rest after the long transatlantic journey or want to see more of Sofia on your own, you should arrive one or (or more) days in advance of the tour. Given sufficient advance notice, the VENT office will be happy to help you with arrangements for an early arrival.

NIGHTS: Aboard international flight (Day 1)

Hotel Jasmin, Sofia (Day 2)



Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Sofia © Pudelek/Creative Commons

May 3, Day 3: Vitosha Mountain Nature Park and the National History Museum

Established almost a century ago, Vitosha Mountain was Bulgaria's first nature park—and the first anywhere in the Balkans. It preserves more than 100 square miles of forest, high-elevation grassland, and marshes, with comfortable access on easy trails through rich spruce forests and open meadows. A favorite destination of visitors from nearby Sofia, Vitosha Mountain is especially well known for the ancient churches and monasteries that dot its varied landscape, some of them dating back as far as the tenth century.

We will make an early start this morning in search of some of the nearly 250 species of birds known from the park. Fully half of them breed locally, making Vitosha an especially rewarding springtime destination. In addition to many other common woodland birds, we have good

chances at encountering such specialties as Northern Nutcracker, Ring Ouzel, and Willow Tit. We'll check cliffs and other rocky habitats for Pallid Swift, Eurasian Crag-Martin, and Black Redstart. Among the colorful passerines we are likely to enjoy here are European Robin, Common Firecrest, Common Chaffinch, European Greenfinch, and Yellowhammer.



The Vitosha Mountains Rise Behind Sofia © Stolichanin/Creative Commons

After a good lunch, we will pay a visit to the National Museum of History, set against the stunning backdrop of Vitosha Mountain. The museum's extensive holdings document the development of Bulgaria and the Balkans over 8,000 years, from the sixth millennium BC to the Ottoman era and beyond. Housed in a massive late Brutalist structure originally built as the residence of the general secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the museum's exhibits include breathtaking gold vessels and other precious objects from Thracian hoards discovered over the past two centuries.

We then return to our hotel for dinner and to reflect on our impressions of what will have been a very full and exciting day.

NIGHT: Hotel Jasmin, Sofia

May 4, Day 4: Sofia to Trigrad



The gorgeous Black-headed Bunting © Robert Warren

We will set out this morning on the 3.5-hour drive to the village of Trigrad, surrounded by the imposing stone massif of the Rhodope Mountains just a few miles from the Greek border. Along the way, we will make several stops to enjoy our first encounters with many of the characteristic birds of open country, among them White Stork, European Bee-eater, and Calandra and Crested larks. We will be paying special attention for regional specialties such as Rosy Starling and Corn and Black-headed buntings. The starling is unpredictable in its distribution, essentially nomadic, while the buntings can be relatively common. Corn Bunting, though visually

undistinguished, is famous for its constantly repeated jangly, hissing song, while Black-headed Bunting is one of the most striking members of the family, males combining lemon-yellow underparts and a warm rusty back with a neat black “helmet”; the song of this species is a bright and cheerful metallic carol, one of the most evocative sounds of spring in eastern Europe.

Our accommodation for the next two nights is in the very heart of the Bulgarian Rhodope. If time allows, we may be able to visit the famous Devil’s Throat, a cave traditionally identified as the site where Orpheus entered the underworld to retrieve his beloved Eurydice. Today, the cave is familiar to television viewers as the atmospheric setting for a popular Bulgarian detective series.

NIGHT: Hotel Yagodina, Yagodina

May 5, Day 5: Trigrad Gorge

Over millions of years, the swift waters of the Trigradska River have cut through nearly seven hundred feet of marble to carve a valley that narrows into a dizzyingly steep gorge. These are the haunts of one of Eurasia's most fascinating birds, Wallcreeper. Widespread but nowhere common, Wallcreeper can be surprisingly inconspicuous as they quietly sidle and hop up sheer rock surfaces; they are most easily detected by patiently watching cliffs for the momentary flick of a wing. In flight, those wings are intricately patterned and incredibly colorful, making the bird resemble nothing so much as an enormous butterfly. Though this sometimes-elusive species can never be guaranteed, the Trigrad Gorge is among the most reliable sites anywhere in the world, and if we are very fortunate, our local colleagues will have identified a nesting territory and "staked out" this most charismatic of European passerines.



The remarkable Wallcreeper inhabits the canyon walls of Trigrad Gorge © Nrik Kiran

The immediate environs feature a pleasant variety of additional habitats, including scattered stands of pine, broadleaf forest, meadows, and cultivated land. Together with the gorge's cliffs,

ledges, and caves, those habitats are home to a wide range of highly sought-after bird species. Both Alpine and Pallid swifts nest in the crooks and crannies of the canyon walls, while White-throated Dipper feed in the turbulent waters of the river below. Overhead, we have a good chance to see a European Honey-buzzard, Eurasian Crag-Martin, or Red-rumped Swallow. Scattered trees and bushes offer song perches for Mistle Thrush and Ring Ouzel, while the more forested reaches are home to Eurasian Blackcap, Long-tailed and Crested tits, and European Serin.

NIGHT: Hotel Yagodina, Yagodina

May 6, Day 6: Trigrad to Madzharovo

We will check out of our Yagodina hotel this morning to strike out for the eastern Rhodope Mountains. These magnificent hills are one of the best places in Europe for large birds of prey. Remote and wild, the area combines cliffs, meadows, woodland, and patches of scrub, a mix that appeals to an extremely diverse avifauna. Along our drive of about four and a half hours, we can hope to see Black Kite, Gray and White wagtails, and Red-backed and Woodchat shrikes.

Our route takes us to the archaeological complex of Perperikon, an ancient Thracian city that preserves the most extensive ensemble of megaliths in eastern Europe, but which was only discovered in 1990. Excavations conducted over the past quarter century have revealed the traces of human activity beginning as early as the sixth millennium BC; the site appears to have been continuously occupied through the Roman era, when an enormous fortified palace was built, and into the Middle Ages, finally abandoned only at the beginning of the Ottoman period in the fourteenth century.

Later in the day, we will arrive in Madzharovo, our base for two nights and the site of a preserve specially created for the conservation of three impressive Old World vulture species.

NIGHT: Hotel Valchitza, Madzharovo



The archaeological complex of Perperikon © Kiril Kapustin/Creative Commons

May 7, Day 7: Eastern Rhodope Mountains

Studen Kladenets is an ancient volcanic landscape of shady basalt cliffs, bizarrely shaped hoodoos, and blue-green zeolites, uncommon crystalline structures formed where alkaline water seeps through volcanic ash. As we admire the area's unique geology, we will also keep an eye to the skies for soaring birds of prey. This area is said to have the greatest raptor diversity anywhere in Europe, and likely sightings today include Eurasian Griffon, Egyptian, and Cinereous vultures. These great scavengers often share thermals, soaring alongside Common Buzzard and Black Stork.

We will continue our explorations in the Dolna Kula area, where the stony valley of the Krumovitsa River provides a mosaic of habitats including cliffs, scattered woody vegetation, and agricultural fields, attracting a broad assortment of birds, including several species of decidedly southern affinity. Traditional agricultural practices here afford nesting sites and feeding areas for European Roller, Eurasian Hoopoe, Little Owl, and Lesser Gray Shrike, that last a species now very scarce at best in northern and western Europe. Rocky slopes with sparse shrubs and trees are home to Chukar, Western Rock Nuthatch, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, and an excellent

mix of warblers, including Olive-tree, Sardinian, Eastern Orphean, and Eastern Subalpine warblers.

Ledges and cliffs offer nesting and roosting sites for Black Stork and Common Raven, while Eurasian Hobby and Levant Sparrowhawk inhabit streamside woodlands. Even the scattered villages have their special birds, with nesting White Stork and Spanish Sparrow often easiest to find in human settlements and sharing pole-top nesting sites!



Little Owl © Robert Warren

We will return to Madzharovo for dinner, after which we will look for Eurasian Scops-Owl that sometimes forage around the village.

NIGHT: Hotel Valchitza, Madzharovo

May 8, Day 8: Madzharovo to Svilengrad

This morning we will check out of our Madzharovo hotel and head east to Svilengrad, where Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria meet. The drive is less than two hours all told, leaving us plenty of time to bird along the way. Our route takes us through fine stretches of scrubby hillside and open country, where we can hope to find Eurasian Hoopoe, Crested Lark, and Isabelline Wheatear. We also plan stops to look for an impressive array of raptors large and small, including Eurasian Griffon, Western Marsh Harrier, Common “Steppe” and Long-legged buzzards, Booted and Imperial eagles, and Lesser Kestrel.

One species we hope to see today and on several other days of our tour merits special mention: European Turtle-Dove. Still tolerably common in eastern Europe, this charming pigeon was once a familiar sight—and its gentle purring song a familiar sound across most of the continent. Over the past fifty years, however, the European population overall has decreased by more than 75%,

with a shocking 92% decline recorded in Britain since 1990. The apparent causes of this devastating loss are no real surprise: the intensification of agriculture has severely limited the traditional hedgerow habitat the turtle-dove prefers, necessarily reducing the abundance of the wild plant and animal species it feeds on. The increased use of pesticides and herbicides has exacerbated the situation, while hunting, both legal and illegal, removes tens, perhaps even hundreds of thousands of birds from the population every year. Bulgaria's conservation community, with the support of EU programs such as Natura 2000, has focused in recent decades not just on "flagship species" like the Lammergeier and Imperial Eagle but also on the habitats, wild and anthropogenic, that continue to sustain so many organisms, like the turtle-dove, that are imperiled in the rest of their European range.

We will arrive in Svilengrad and check in to our hotel before reassembling for dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Parish, Svilengrad



Masked Shrike © Len Worthington/Creative Commons

May 9, Day 9: Svilengrad to Sozopol

We will leave Svilengrad this morning to continue our eastward journey to the shores of the Black Sea. The three-hour drive to Sozopol may produce such special birds as Black Stork, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock-Thrush, Olive-tree Warbler, or Eurasian Golden Oriole.

Woodchat Shrike can be impressively common, and we will make a special effort to find the lovely Masked Shrike, which approaches the northwesternmost edge of its range in the woodlots, orchards, thorny scrubland, and gardens of eastern Bulgaria.



European Turtle-Dove © Hrdlika Polna

Today's selection of colorful finches may include the noisy and often gregarious European Greenfinch. The Hawfinch is in some respects the very opposite: usually deathly quiet when perched, and at this season generally seen only as single birds or pairs. But this very large, very large-billed finch, a close relative of the Evening Grosbeak, is a real beauty, well worth the time and patience often required to get satisfying looks. We also have a good chance at adding to our tally of Old World buntings. Not only are Corn and Black-headed buntings present, but the attractive Rock and Ortolan buntings are also possible today.

Sozopol itself is a compact resort town on the Black Sea, still more popular with Bulgarian tourists than with foreign visitors. This is believed to be the oldest surviving human settlement on the Bulgarian seaside, and the charming old town is characterized by narrow cobbled streets, imposing public buildings in the National Revival style, and a thriving art scene with numerous galleries and shops. A seaside promenade affords wonderful views of the town and the water alike.

Birders are drawn here not only by the appealing setting but by the opportunities to see—right in the center of town and on the coastal trail—such eastern European specialties as Syrian Woodpecker or even Red-breasted Flycatcher. The overgrown fields just south of town, are

interspersed with more open grassland; hedges and thickets here attract a wide variety of passerine migrants when conditions are right.

NIGHT: Kalitea Hotel, Sozopol

May 10, Day 10: The Burgas Lakes



The Dalmatian Pelican is a specialty bird of far eastern Europe © Iliuta Goean

The wetland complex surrounding the city of Burgas, on the shores of the Black Sea, was declared a Ramsar site more than 20 years ago. Comprising four shallow lakes covering an area of more than 35 square miles, these wetlands and the associated reedbeds—

the largest in Bulgaria—are the most productive birding sites in the country, with some 80% of the entire Bulgarian species list sighted here over the years. We may well record the highest single-day tally of our tour today, just 30 minutes away from our Sozopol hotel.

Almost any species of eastern European water bird can occur here. Among the waterfowl, we will be looking particularly for Common Shelduck, Garganey, and Common Pochard; we can also expect to find wild, native Mute Swan. The Burgas Lakes are a significant locality for both Great Cormorant, which nests on high transmission towers near the wetlands, and Pygmy Cormorant; this was long one of the most reliable sites in Europe for the latter species, which has recently increased massively in numbers and in range. Both Great White Pelican and the much less abundant and widespread Dalmatian Pelican are also among the birds we hope to see here.

Unsurprisingly, Burgas is also a hotspot for long-legged wading birds. In addition to the widely distributed Gray Heron and Little Egret (the counterparts, respectively, of the American Great

Blue Heron and Snowy Egret), the slender and secretive Purple Heron and the strikingly patterned Squacco Heron are present here in good numbers. Eurasian Spoonbill and Greater Flamingo can be conspicuous out on the open flats where they prefer to feed.

Shorebirds, too, are among the Burgas specialties. Both Pied Avocet and Black-winged Stilt breed here, as do the delightful Little Ringed Plover and the dramatic Black-tailed Godwit. We will also be looking for Yellow-legged Gull and Whiskered Tern, as Cetti's Warbler and Great Reed Warbler sing from the extensive reedbeds.

NIGHT: Kalitea Hotel, Sozopol

May 11, Day 11: Sozopol to Krapets

More than 40,000 tons of salt are harvested in the Burgas and Sozopol regions each year. The shallow saline pools created by that industry are unfailingly attractive to birds, and we will start the day in search of more shorebirds and waterfowl, possibly including Mediterranean Gull, Little Tern, Curlew Sandpiper, or Ruff. Some of these salt pans are equally interesting to human guests, who come to bathe in the noisome but putatively salutary black mud on the edges.

Nearby stands an extraordinary cultural and architectural monument, which we will drop in to see. This Roman-era Pomorie Tholos, or beehive tomb, is a domed mausoleum built for a wealthy pagan family in the second or third century AD. Five niches for the disposition of ashes are arranged around a massive central column, which expands to form a hemispherical roof. Unique in the Balkans, this amazingly



Thracian Tomb, Pomorie © Sasha Coachman/Creative Commons

well-preserved monument has been recognized as a national architectural treasure since 1965.

After lunch, we will continue northward, with a stop to look for a number of locally distributed oak woodland species. Bulgaria is famous among European birders for the diversity of its woodpeckers, and this habitat is ideal for Black and Middle Spotted Woodpecker. The dapper little Semicollared Flycatcher breeds here, too, as does the inconspicuous Short-toed Treecreeper.

We will check in to our hotel on arriving in Krapets, a beachside town surrounded by vast fields of wheat and sunflowers.

NIGHT: Yanitza Hotel, Krapets

May 12, Day 12: Durankulak and Cape Kaliakra

From our base in Krapets, we will visit two very different localities today featuring two very different habitats. The small village of Durankulak is the northeasternmost settlement in Bulgaria, first inhabited as long as 7,000 years ago. The nearby brackish wetland of the same name—just over three miles from the border with Romania—is protected under both Bulgarian and EU law as a refuge for rare wild plants and animals, including two species of polecat, the Eurasian otter, and the endangered European ground squirrel or Souslik.

The breeding birds of Durankulak include internationally significant numbers of Kentish Plover and Lesser Gray Shrike; the extensive reedbeds lining the lakeshore are home to substantial populations of Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, Eurasian and Little bitterns, Spotted and Little crakes, Bearded Reedling, and Savi's and Paddyfield warblers. Drier uplands support nesting Eurasian Thick-knee, European Bee-eater, and Red-footed Falcon.

Thirty miles south, the limestone cliffs of Cape Kaliakra rise nearly 200 feet above the Black Sea. This is the only breeding locality in Bulgaria for the European Shag; other seabirds we will watch for here include Yelkouan Shearwater and Yellow-legged Gull. For centuries, this exposed headland was fortified against possible invaders, and the ruins of those stone walls now provide welcome nest sites for Eastern Black-eared, Isabelline, and Pied wheatears.

Just inland, the scrubby steppe is home to Calandra and Greater Short-toed larks, Lesser Gray and Woodchat shrikes, and Corn and Black-headed buntings. Eurasian Hobby and Red-footed Falcon can sometimes be seen hunting here, especially in the evening.

NIGHT: Yanitza Hotel, Krapets



Eurasian Thick-knee © Fáisca

May 13, Day 13: Krapets to Vetren

We will make another excursion this morning to the beaches, cliffs, and steppe grasslands of Kavarna, adjacent to Cape Kaliakra, hoping to run across any seabirds or coastal species we might have missed thus far. Land birds can be equally exciting, and there is always the chance of encountering a Great Spotted Cuckoo, a wandering flock of Rosy Starling, or some other avian surprise.

Afterward, we will head inland and west toward Vetren and our tranquil birding lodge. We aim to have time for a wander around the peaceful village to enjoy the evening concert of bird song. Among the most talented choristers, we may hear European Robin, Common Nightingale, Eurasian Blackbird, Song Thrush, Eurasian Blackcap, and Common Chaffinch. All of the “pied”

woodpeckers—Syrian, Great Spotted, Middle Spotted, and Lesser Spotted—are possible here, as are Red-backed Shrike and Eurasian Golden Oriole.

NIGHT: Pelican Birding Lodge, Vetren

May 14-15, Days 14–15: Srebarna Nature Reserve

Our comfortable home base in Vetren is just a mile from the Danube River and not much farther from the Srebarna Nature Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There is excellent birding within remarkably easy reach of the lodge, and we will visit lakes, woodlands, and the banks of the blue Danube as we enjoy a wide range of species.



European Robin © Brian Gibbons

Special waterfowl to be seen in the area include Ruddy Shelduck, Garganey, Red-crested Pochard, and Ferruginous Duck. In addition to Pygmy and Great cormorants and Great White and Dalmatian pelicans, we will also be searching aquatic habitats and reedbeds for Glossy Ibis, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, and Great Reed Warbler. Both Whiskered and Black terns are possible, too.

In open areas and on brushy fields, we hope to find Ring-necked Pheasants, the sadly imperiled European Turtle-Dove, Common Cuckoo, and two of Europe's most outlandishly colorful birds, European Bee-eater and European Roller. Red-backed Shrike, Greater Whitethroat, and Corn Bunting are likewise characteristic species of this area. Especially toward evening, Eurasian Hobby hunt swifts, swallows, and other small-winged prey over the grasslands.

The banks of the Danube and small woodlots and parks may turn up Syrian and Lesser Spotted woodpeckers, Common Nightingale, Lesser Whitethroat, or Eurasian Golden Oriole. The oriole, only distantly related to the American birds bearing the same English name, can be remarkably hard to see, in spite of its large size and the male's brilliant plumage, but we will be listening

carefully for the loud, spirited whistles that can help locate this spectacularly colorful singer high in the dense foliage.

NIGHT: Pelican Birding Lodge, Vetren

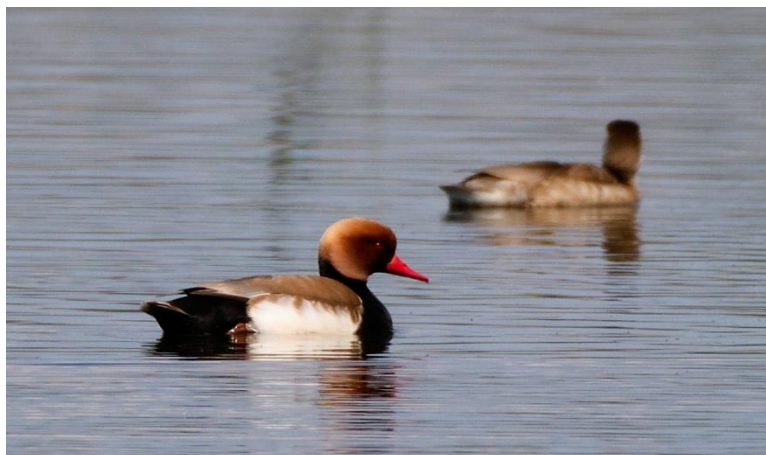
May 16, Day 16: Vetren to Varna, and Flight to Sofia

An optional pre-breakfast walk will be a last opportunity to enjoy some of the many birds we've come to know during our time together in Bulgaria. Afterward, we will drive a little more than two hours to Varna, back on the shores of the Black Sea.

We will have lunch there, then tour Varna's impressive Archaeological Museum. In addition to an important collection of icons created from the Middle Ages to the close of the Ottoman era, this large museum is famous as the home of the Varna Gold, a 13-pound gold treasure recovered from a Copper Age cemetery in the 1970s and 1980s. The jewelry and other ornaments that make up the trove are believed to have been created some 6500 years ago. The richness of the materials and, especially, the concentration of precious objects in just a few graves are valuable clues to the wealth and structure of an otherwise mute society reaching back to the fifth millennium BC.

A short afternoon flight will take us from Varna to Sofia for the last night of our tour.

NIGHT: Hotel Jasmin, Sofia



Red-crested Pochard one of Europe's most beautiful waterfowl species
© Robert Warren

May 17, Day 17: Departures

Tour participants can arrange their departure from Sofia for any time today. The hotel offers complimentary airport shuttle service.

ESSENTIAL TOUR INFORMATION

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 10 tour participants.

TOUR LEADERS: This tour is led by Mark Brazil and Mayumi Brazil.



Mark Brazil is a frequent expedition leader of small, land-based, wildlife-focused expeditions in Africa, South America, South Asia, and East Asia. He is a regular lecturer on expedition cruise vessels traveling widely from the Arctic to Antarctica and many destinations between. He is best known for his extensive experience of birding in Japan and for his many publications. Born and educated in the UK, Mark has degrees in Biology, English Literature, and Psychology. He has had careers in conservation biology, in natural history television (20+ years), as a university lecturer (9 years), and now works mainly as a freelance author, editor, and wildlife-expedition leader. He has lived in England, Scotland, and New Zealand, and is now a long-term resident of Hokkaidō, northern Japan, where he and his wife, Mayumi, live in the Akan–Mashū National Park. Mark began birding as a child in the UK, studied avian behavioral-ecology for his PhD, and has since birded on every continent. He is fascinated by the amazing diversity of avian behavior. He began leading nature tours in 1980, became involved in the expedition cruise industry in 1998, and since 2007 he has worked exclusively in the wildlife and adventure travel industry as a consultant, expedition leader, guide, and lecturer. In the last few years, he has been increasingly involved in outdoor guide training in Japan. His extensive travels across the length and breadth of Japan since 1980 have given him intimate knowledge of that country's birdlife, natural

history, and culture. He is well-known for his numerous articles and books relating to the region. Mark's most recent books are: *Japan: The Natural History of an Asian Archipelago* (2022) and *Wild Hokkaidō: A Guidebook to the National Parks and other Wild Places of Eastern Hokkaidō* (2021). His past books include: *Helm Field Guide to the Birds of East Asia*; *The Nature of Japan*; *Helm Field Guide to the Birds of Japan*; and *A Birdwatcher's Guide to Japan*.



Born and educated in Hokkaidō, Japan, **Mayumi Brazil** is a National Government Licensed Interpreter Guide with extensive experience in travel, culture, and expedition guiding. She has worked with leading international companies and co-led wildlife-focused expeditions worldwide. Passionate about sharing Japanese culture, Mayumi blends organization, insight, and hospitality to create meaningful, cross-cultural travel experiences.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: \$10,450 per person based on double occupancy or **\$11,310** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 through breakfast on Day 17, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the “TIPPING” sub-section below. If the minimum group size is not met, each participant will be charged a small-group supplement—shared equally and communicated in advance—to allow the tour to proceed.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The initial deposit for this tour is \$1,000 per person. At 180 days VENT will collect a second deposit that brings the total deposit amount to 40% of the tour price. We accept MasterCard and Visa for both deposits.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days (January 1, 2027) prior to the tour departure date.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: Tour prices are based on the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If rates change drastically, it may be necessary to impose a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges have been passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL SURCHARGES: Our prices are based on fuel prices at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TIPPING: An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are not included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and not sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment

applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

- **More than 120 days prior to the tour start date:** A refund of all monies paid will be issued, less 50% of the deposit (including initial and second deposit)
- **120 days or fewer prior to the tour start date:** No refund will be provided.
- **Optional add-ons:** Some tours offer optional add-ons that are designated as non-refundable. Any such add-ons are clearly identified as non-refundable at the time of booking. By selecting and purchasing an optional add-on, the participant acknowledges and accepts its non-refundable status. Fees paid for non-refundable add-ons are not refundable under any circumstances, regardless of when the tour is cancelled.

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours (Pre-Tours and Extensions are considered self-contained tours separate from the main tour). Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

CANCELLATION BY VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “*Force Majeure*” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including,

without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

SUGGESTED OPTIONS: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive Ripcord plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends Medjet and its MedjetAssist® plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a "Cancel for Any Reason" benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [Ripcord Travel Insurance](#); or click the Ripcord logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, second deposit, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The "pay as you go" approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to "pay as you go," you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a [Coronavirus FAQ page](#) on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

About Medjet's MedjetAssist Plan

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company's primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://www.Medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

AIR TRAVEL: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same

fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](#) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

PASSPORTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Sofia, Bulgaria is required.

VISAS: Visas are not required for U.S. citizens traveling to this destination. If you hold a passport from another country, please check with your consulate or embassy for the most accurate guidance.

IMPORTANT: The visa details above are current for U.S. citizens as of August 5, 2026. Because entry requirements can change without notice, we kindly remind all participants to double-check the latest information before traveling. Travelers using non-U.S. passports are responsible for confirming any entry requirements that apply to their home country.

CLOTHING: As this trip combines birding with some historical/cultural experiences, you will want to pack a mix of clothing that prepares you for several types of activities

- **Pants:** Recommended. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable.
- **Shirts:** Long & Short Sleeves

- Swimwear
- Hat
- Light Jacket

FOOTWEAR: We recommend a good trail-walking shoe or light hiking boot when in the field. Athletic shoes are not recommended for our birding locations. A lighter shoe, like an athletic shoe, will come in handy when relaxing around the hotels.

EQUIPMENT: Having the right equipment makes the travel experience more enjoyable. Below is a list of items that will ensure you are well-prepared:

- Backpack
- Polarized Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Collapsible walking stick – Highly recommended for those who have trouble walking.
- Umbrella
- Reusable Water Bottle
- Small flashlight or headlamp
- Small folding stool: Many people find this extremely useful when patiently waiting for shy forest birds.

Binoculars: We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. Please do not bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. You will find that 8x32 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes: Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

DESTINATION INFORMATION & LOCAL CONDITIONS

CLIMATE & WEATHER: May is one of the better months to travel in Bulgaria. Our time will be spent at a variety of inland and coastal locations ranging from sea level to a little over 1,000 feet.

Mild weather is expected, but daytime temperatures could reach into the middle 80s (°F). Along the Black Sea coast, sea-breezes have a cooling effect and keep the temperatures about 5–10 degrees cooler than in the interior regions. Night and morning temperatures may drop to the mid-50s. Overall, participants should be prepared for cool mornings, warm days, and cool evenings. Precipitation in the form of rain, related to a very late cold front, is certainly possible but not expected. Finally, we emphasize that the above description of expected conditions refers to historical norms. The effects of climate change are being felt noticeably across Europe, the consequences of which are that abnormal weather events are now documented with regularity almost everywhere. Participants should come prepared for a variety of unexpected conditions including cold rain and excessive heat.

CONDITIONS: Your trip to Bulgaria combines birding activities with exposure to some of the country's historical and cultural attractions, including its cuisine. Most days will be dedicated to birding and natural history pursuits amid Bulgaria's highly varied landscapes; however, the program's historical/cultural component includes world-class museums in Sofia and Varna, along with brief visits to stunning archaeological sites at Perperikon and Pomorie. For our historical and cultural activities, we will be joined by licensed local guides who will provide expert interpretation. Overall, the balance of birding to historical and cultural pursuits will be about 80%–20%. At times, the emphasis could be on either birding or archaeology while at other times the circumstances of the moment will incorporate elements of both. We make the point that our culturally-oriented activities will not result in a loss of birding opportunities.

Physical demands will be easy to moderately strenuous (Perperikon is situated on a hilltop accessed by a trail with steps, making it moderately strenuous, but it is set in natural habitat with a visitor center beside the carpark, so while it is wonderful to reach the hilltop site, it is not essential). Please bear in mind that our guided tours will involve a moderate amount of walking and standing. We emphasize that no one will be subjected to physical demands that exceed their capabilities. All walking will be done at a slow pace.

FOOD & WATER: Most days will begin at a “reasonable” hour, with breakfast available at 7 or 7:30 a.m. Those who would like to join Mark on some mornings for an early pre-breakfast

wander to enjoy morning birdsong, are most welcome. On most days, we will be in the field by 8:00–8:30 a.m., and on many days we will stop for picnics or at local restaurants for a mid-day break. Our return time to our accommodations at the end of each day will depend on our scheduled activities, varying from 4:30–6:00 p.m. We will always aim to allow for an hour in the hotel each night before dinner.

CURRENCY & SPENDING: Your trip fee includes all necessary expenses; however, you may want to bring some cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as gifts, laundry, gratuities, alcoholic beverages, meals on your own, and personal items. It is best to carry small denominations, as hotels and lodges may be unable to provide change for large bills. If you plan to extend your time in Bulgaria beyond our program, do consider obtaining local currency. It is best to acquire local currency before leaving home, or at the airport on arrival in Sofia.

The official currency of Bulgaria is the Bulgarian Lev (BGN). You can check the latest conversion rate at <http://www.xe.com/>.

Major credit cards are accepted at many places. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information about banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

ELECTRICITY: Bulgaria operates on a 230V supply voltage and 50Hz. Electrical outlets conform to Types C & F (Europlug and Schuko plug, respectively), both with a two-round-pin configuration. A plug adapter will be necessary. Please be sure your devices and appliances can handle the much higher voltage (120V in the United States). If you have doubts or otherwise are unsure, you should bring a voltage converter to protect your electronic equipment.

INTERNET ACCESS: WI-FI access is widely available at our accommodations; however, speed may be variable.

LANGUAGE: Bulgarian is the language of Bulgaria. English is also spoken quite widely and can be expected at most of the touristic places, namely hotels.

TIME: 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service will be available for an extra charge at some of the hotels where we stay; however, the service should be requested only at those places where we will spend more than one night.

HEALTH & SAFETY

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

SUN EXPOSURE: The sun's ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

INSECT REPELLENTS: There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET: (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes.

The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.

- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

Insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin): is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for pre-treatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website

of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION

A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

FIELD GUIDES:

BIRDS:

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe. 3rd Edition*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2023 (third edition).

This is the most important and comprehensive natural history book for this trip. It is the best all-around field guide to the birds of Europe and is also available as a smartphone App.

MAMMALS:

MacDonald, David and Priscilla Barrett. *Mammals of Europe*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2002.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS:

Speybroek, [Jeroen](#), [Wouter Beukema](#), [Bobby Bok](#), [Jan Van Der Voor](#), and [IlianVelikov](#). *Field Guide to The Amphibians & Reptiles of Britain & Europe*. Bloomsbury Wildlife Guides. Bloomsbury Publishing New York, NY, 2016. An outstanding newer guide.

BUTTERFLIES:

Tolman, Tom and Richard Lewington. *Butterflies of Europe*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2002.

HISTORY AND CULTURE:

Kapka, Kassabova. *Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe*. Granta Publishing, 2017.

A highly regarded book that is part travelogue, personal memoir, and historical overview.

CLO Apps

eBird. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files. Highly recommended.

Merlin Bird ID. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate birdwatchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions about his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app and the appropriate regional "pack." Highly recommended.

TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "VENT") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other

services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on August 5, 2026 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "*Airline*") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during

the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

View the complete [Terms and Conditions](#) on our website.

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