# Bulgaria & Greece

## Spring in the Balkans



**Wallcreeper by Clayton Burne**

*Spring in Bulgaria and Greece is a symphony of vibrant bird and wildlife. Our tour offers the opportunity to explore diverse habitats and witness the spectacle of migration. We search the Western Balkan Mountains, for powerful Golden Eagle against a backdrop of lush forests and rocky peaks before making our way into Greece. Here, Lake Kerkini transforms into a bustling avian hub, where Dalmatian Pelicans and Black Storks share the stage with a multitude of migrating warblers and raptors. The coastal wetlands around Maroneia provide a haven for a wide array of waterfowl and wading birds, and a spot of seawatching may reveal Yelkouan and Scopoli's Shearwates. The Dadia Forest are raptor rich with Cinereous Vulture, Eurasian Griffon and Golden Eagles ruling the skies.*

*The rolling Sakar Hills are a rich tapestry of steppe and woodland, offering up the melodious Calandra Lark and the acrobatic European Roller. We'll spend the last week of our tour venturing into the breathtakingly beautiful Rhodope & Rila Mountains in search of Wallcreeper, several vultures, partridges and woodpeckers.*

*Each location offers a unique blend of wildlife experiences, creating an unforgettable journey through the natural wonders of the Balkans.*

# *Itinerary & Map*

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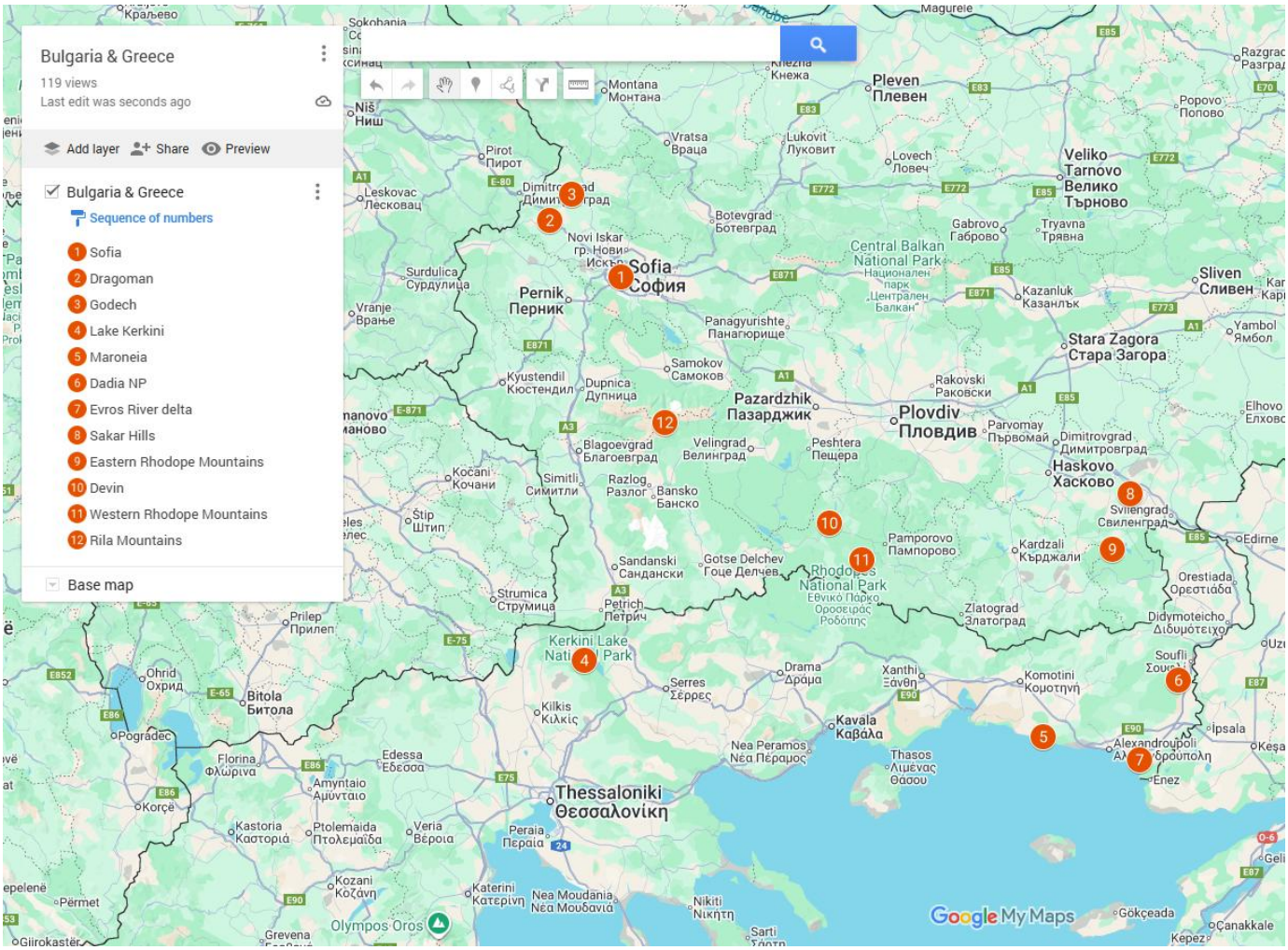
| **Day 1** | **Arrival in Sofia (Bulgaria), transfer to Godech via Dragoman marshes** |
| **Day 2** | **Western Balkan Mountains** |
| **Day 3** | **Dragoman to Lake Kerkini (Greece)** |
| **Days 4 & 5** | **Lake Kerkini** |
| **Day 6** | **Lake Kerkini to Maroneia via Nestos River area** |
| **Day 7** | **Maroneia area – Mediterranean scrub, Aegean Sea & Thracian wetlands** |
| **Day 8** | **Maroneia to Dadia Forest via Evros River delta** |
| **Day 9** | **Dadia National Park to Sakar Hills (Bulgaria)** |
| **Day 10** | **Sakar Hills & Maritsa River Valley** |
| **Day 11** | **Eastern Rhodope Mountains** |
| **Day 12** | **Eastern Rhodope Mountains to Devin, Western Rhodope Mountains** |
| **Day 13** | **Western Rhodope Mountains** |
| **Day 14** | **Western Rhodope Mountains to Rila Mountains** |
| **Day 15** | **Eastern Rila Mountains** |
| **Day 16** | **Rila Mountains to Sofia & final departure** |



## *Birding sites in detail*



**Bearded Reedling by Clayton Burne**

**Dragoman Marshes.** We will explore the marshes and their surroundings, looking for Short-toed Snake Eagle, Little Crake, Great Reed Warbler, Bearded Reedling, Common Rock Thrush, Barred Warbler, Lesser Grey Shrike, and Ortolan Bunting.

**Western Balkan Mountains.** We'll be searching this area for Rock Partridge, Long-legged Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Alpine Chough, Common Rock Thrush, Sombre Tit, Rock and Cirl Buntings. We'll try to find and see the elusive Corn Crake in the meadows around Dragoman.

**Lake Kerkini.** We'll visit all the key birdwatching areas of the lake, including a 3-hour boat trip to the heron and cormorant nesting colony, which provides excellent opportunities for bird photography. Key species include Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Pygmy Cormorant, Purple, Squacco, and Black-crowned Night Herons, Little Bittern, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Black Stork, Western Marsh Harrier, Black Kite, Black-winged Stilt, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Great Reed, Savi's, and Cetti's Warblers.

In the surrounding forests, steppes, and arid areas, we can see breeding birds like Long-legged Buzzard, Levant Sparrowhawk, Grey-headed, Lesser Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers, Eurasian Wryneck, Red-rumped Swallow, Masked, Lesser Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, Calandra Lark, Olivaceous Warbler, Semi-collared Flycatcher, and a trio of buntings; Black-headed, Cirl and Ortolan.

**Nestos River Area & Maroneia.** The Nestos Gorge and associated riverine forest holds several key species such as Short-toed Snake and Golden Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard, Alpine and Pallid Swifts, Red-rumped Swallow, Eurasian Crag Martin, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Blue Rock Thrush, and Western Rock Nuthatch.



**Syrian Woodpecker by Adam Riley**

**Maroneia area – Mediterranean scrub, Aegean Sea & Thracian wetlands**. The Maronia area allows us to access several distinct habitats such as exploring



**Eurasian Griffon by Rob Williams**

Mediterranean vegetation, old olive groves, and the Aegean Sea coast. Here we hope to find Lesser Kestrel, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Masked Shrike, Eastern Orphean, Eastern Subalpine and Olive-tree Warblers, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Zitting Cisticola and both Ortolan and Black-headed Buntings. Offshore, we can expect to find Yelkouan and Scopoli's Shearwaters, and Audouin's Gull.

The Thracian Lagoons and lakes hold White-tailed Eagle, Montagu's Harrier, Western Marsh Harrier, Levant Sparrowhawk, Greater Flamingo, Spur-winged Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, Slender-billed Gull, and Gull-billed Tern.

**Evros River Delta.** Forming the border between Greece and Turkey, the lower Evros River and delta are a key birding hotspot. Highlight species include Greater Flamingo, Ferruginous Duck, Spur-winged Lapwing, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers, Kentish Plover, Slender-billed and Mediterranean Gulls, Gull-billed Tern, Collared Pratincole, White-winged, Black, and Whiskered Terns, and other migrating and breeding waders, shorebirds, gulls, and terns.

In drier habitats, we'll look for Eurasian Stone-curlew, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Calandra Lark and Greater Short-toed Larks, Isabelline Wheatear, Tawny Pipit, and Olivaceous Warbler.

**Dadia Forest.** One of the first protected areas in Greece, the Dadia Forest offers us opportunities for Cinereous and Egyptian Vultures, Eurasian Griffon, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Black Kite, Black Stork, Sardinian Warbler, Eastern Subalpine Warbler, Barred Warbler, Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, Blue Rock Thrush, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, and Sombre Tit.



**Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin by David Hoddinott**

**Sakar Hills.** Our time in the Sakar hills is likely to produce several raptors including Eastern Imperial, Lesser Spotted and Booted Eagles, European Honey Buzzard and Montagu's Harrier whilst we should



**Woodchat Shrike by Clayton Burne**

also find European Roller, European Bee-eater, Masked Shrike, Olive-tree Warbler, Tawny Pipit, and Isabelline Wheatear.

**Eastern Rhodope Mountains.** These mountains and valleys are home to an array of flora and fauna. It is considered a stronghold for vultures in south-eastern Europe, being the only breeding site for Eurasian Griffon in Bulgaria.

Highlights might include Lesser Spotted Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk, European Green Woodpecker, Lesser Grey Shrike, Eurasian Griffon, Egyptian Vulture, Black Kite, Booted and Golden Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard, Black Stork, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Sardinian, Eastern Subalpine and Olive-tree Warblers, Woodchat Shrike, Cirl, and Black-headed Bunting.

We'll also be keeping an eye out for Cinereous Vulture, Eurasian Hobby, Chukar Partridge, Eurasian Scops Owl, Eastern Bonelli's and Eastern Orphean Warblers, Common Redstart and Sombre Tit.

**Western Rhodope Mountains & Trigrad Gorge.** After moving west to the Devin area, we'll explore the Western Rhodope Mountains, making several stops bird in higher mountain conifer forests. We may see Ring Ouzel, Willow, Crested and Coal Tits, Common Firecrest, Goldcrest, and European Serin.

Our main target is the Wallcreeper, for which we'll visit Trigrad Gorge. Other birds here include Alpine and Pallid Swifts, Eurasian Crag Martin, White-throated Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Marsh Tit, and Rock Bunting.

Whilst driving northwest across the Western Rhodopes, we'll have good chances for Eurasian Pygmy Owl, Hazel Grouse, Spotted Nutcracker, Black, White-backed and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, and Common Rosefinch.

**Rila Mountains.** A day in the eastern Rila Mountains will be spent looking for Eurasian Pygmy Owl, Hazel Grouse, Spotted Nutcracker, Mistle Thrush, Tree Pipit, Eurasian Siskin, Water Pipit, and Black Redstart.



**Chukar Partridge by Glen Valentine**



**White-throated Dipper by Clayton Burne**

## *Tour Grading & Key*

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| **Overall Ease** | | Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels. |
| **Birding Ease** | | Moderate to undemanding. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions. |
| **Accommodation** | | Comfortable. |
| **Walking / Trails** | | Reasonably easy to moderate. Most walks on flat ground, paved/gravel roads. A few longer hikes on rougher ground with short inclines (optional). Some hikes are on rocky substrate. |
| **Vehicles / Roads** | | Sealed roads are of variable quality, often pitted with potholes. Some reasonably long drives broken up with birding stops. |
| **Photography** | | Worthwhile to good +. |
| **Annoyances** | | Some long days with early mornings. Weather can still be variable at this time of year, shifting warm to mild or even cold at altitude. |

# *Financial Arrangements and Important Notes*

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to lunch on day 16;
- All lodgings;
- Drinking water on the vehicle;
- Ground transportation as noted in the itinerary;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (**including bottled water** and mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- No tips or gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**Single Supplement**: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

**Tipping**: As noted above, gratuities are NOT included on this tour. If you feel that your leader/s have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Since some longish drives are necessary to reach the best areas for birds and animals, and as space in the vehicles is limited, it is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- This tour is designed to be a dedicated birding experience, and we will attempt to get good views of as many bird species as possible.

# *Arrival and Departure Details*

The tour begins in the Bulgarian capital city of Sofia on Day 1 with a group transfer to the town of Godech. The tour will conclude in Sofia in the late afternoon of Day 16.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Sofia Airport (IATA: SOF) is the main port of entry and departure on this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

**DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.**