Turkey

Birding Eastern Anatolia

8th June to 18th June 2023 (11 days)



Caspian Snowcock by Alihan Vergiliel

Turkey, a country the size of Texas, is a spectacular avian and cultural crossroads. This fascinating nation boasts an ancient history, from even before centuries of Greek Roman and Byzantine domination, through the 500-year Ottoman Empire and into the modern era. Needless to say, with such a pedigree the country holds some very impressive archaeological and cultural sites. Our tour of Eastern Turkey starts in the eastern city of Van, formerly known as Tuspa and 3,000 years ago the capital city of the Urartians. Today there are historical structures from the Seljuk and Ottoman periods, and Urartian artifacts can be seen at its archaeological museum.

However, it is the birds that are of primary interest to us as here, at the eastern limits of the Western Palearctic, we expect to find some very special and seldom-seen species, including Mountain 'Caucasian' Chiffchaff, Green Warbler, Mongolian Finch and Grey-headed Bunting. Around the shores of Lake Van we will seek out Moustached and Paddyfield Warblers in the dense reed beds, while on the lake itself, our targets include Marbled Teal, the threatened White-headed Duck, Dalmatian Pelican, Pygmy Cormorant and Armenian Gull, plus a selection of waders that may include Terek and Broad-billed Sandpiper. As we move further north-east into the steppe and semi desert areas, we will attempt to find Great Bustards and Demoiselle Cranes, with a potential supporting cast of Montagu's Harrier, Steppe Eagle, the exquisite Citrine Wagtail and Twite, to name but a few. In the mountains our targets will include two very special birds: Caucasian Grouse and Caspian Snowcock! With luck, we will also pick up Velvet Scoter, Bearded Vulture, Wallcreeper, White-winged Snowfinch and Asian

Crimson-winged Finch. In the region's woodlands and farmland, we will be on the lookout for a variety of woodpeckers and Red-breasted and Semi-collared Flycatcher.

Other species that we may encounter on our route include Ferruginous Duck, Black Stork, White-tailed and Eastern Imperial Eagle, Little Bustard, several species of larks, Radde's and Alpine Accentor, White-throated Robin, Sombre Tit, four species of nuthatch, including the near endemic Krueper's, and Pale Rockfinch. This adventure through fascinating, historic Eastern Turkey offers great birding in often stunning scenery, all at a fairly relaxed pace. The tour is complimented by welcoming people, delicious local cuisine and comfortable accommodation, and is sure to be a thoroughly enjoyable birding and cultural extravaganza!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrive in Van**
Day 2	**Lake Van to Tatvan**
Day 3	**Tatvan to Malazgirt**
Day 4	**Malazgirt to Doğubeyazit**
Day 5	**Doğubeyazit to Kars**
Day 6	**Kars & surrounds**
Day 7	**Kars to Erzurum**
Day 8	**Erzurum to Ikizdere**
Day 9	**Ikizdere and surrounds**
Day 10	**Ikizdere to Trabzon**
Day 11	**Trabzon & depart**



Birding sites in detail

Lake Van. At 3 755 km^2 (1 450miles^2), this is the largest lake in all of Turkey, and many locals use its exceptionally alkaline waters to clean their clothes without having to use any soap! We will be birding the northern shore of Lake Van for White-headed Duck, Armenian and Slender-billed Gulls, Ruddy Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard, Moustached, Savi's and Paddyfield Warblers, Bearded Reedling, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Syrian Woodpecker and possibly Terek and Broad-billed Sandpipers. Smaller lakes in the area have Eurasian Bittern, but we'd need a fair amount of luck to see one.



Radde's Accentor by Angie Cederlund

Nemrut Crater Lake. Targets here include Red-fronted Serin, Ortolan Bunting, Ring Ouzel, Shore Lark, Finsch's, Isabelline and Eastern Black-eared Wheatears, Horned Lark, Eurasian Skylark, Siberian Stonechat, White-throated Robin and Chukar Partridge.

Malazgirt and Bulanik Plain. This is the only known breeding location for Demoiselle Cranes in Turkey, although they are by no means guaranteed. Our search should however reveal some Common Cranes, as well as breeding Great Bustards, Calandra and the recently split Turkestan Short-toed Larks and Montagu's Harrier. The attractive Rose-colored Starling is another species we will be keeping an eye out for.

Caldiran Plain. This site was formed from black lava flows emanating from Mt. Tendurek. Here we will look for White-winged Snowfinch, Asian Crimson-winged, Mongolian and Trumpeter Finches, Twite, the stunning Citrine Wagtail and possibly Steppe Eagle.

Ishak Pasha Palace. We have time to explore the imposing Ishak Pasha Palace, whilst in the hills above we will look for Grey-necked Bunting, Red-fronted Serin, Mongolian Finch, both Western and Eastern Rock Nuthatches, Rock Sparrow and other rock-loving birds. As the day heats up, we will scan for Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) and Saker Falcon.



Eastern Rock Nuthatch by Emre Yedidag

Aralik Marshes. We visit this site primarily for a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater colony and a known Pygmy Cormorant site nearby.

Lake Kuyucuk. This is one of Turkey's most important wetlands sites, and is classified not just as a Wildlife Reserve but also as a Ramsar Site. We will visit the Kuyucuk Bird Research and Education Center, where we will have the opportunity to observe the ringing activities by the Kuzeydoga Society members and volunteers. According to the Kars-Igdir Biodiversity project, Lake Kuyucuk holds over 220 species, 149 of which were discovered by the project team. The number of birds here is quite astounding, sometimes exceeding 35,000 birds at once! +-20,000 Ruddy Shelduck alone were counted in a single day in 2004 by the project team, which amounts to about 10-12% of the world's

total population. Some of the other species we will look for here include Red-necked Phalarope, Spur-winged Plover, Red-necked Grebe and the black-headed form of Yellow Wagtail, to name a few.

Aktas Lake. This lake is politically divided between Turkey and Georgia, and is one of the most protected places where both Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans breed.

Erzurum Plain. This area has two common breeders in White-winged Tern and Long-legged Buzzard, whilst we may also find Golden and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Blue Rock Thrush, Griffon Vulture and Black-bellied Sandgrouse nearby.

Askale town dump. We'll make a quick stop at the town dump where both Black and Egyptian Vultures, as well as White-tailed Eagle are regular scavengers.



Pygmy Cormorant by Emre Yedidag

Gelinkaya village. In the early morning, we will visit Gelinkaya village where the pink-breasted form of Menetries' Warbler (mystacea) are known to breed – though they are very rare and we will need some luck to spot them. Semi-collared Flycatcher, Eurasian Penduline Tit and Mountain 'Caucasian' Chiffchaff also breed at the same site. We'll keep our eyes open in the general area for Eastern Imperial Eagle.

Yedigoller (Seven Lakes). Road and weather conditions permitting, we'll drive to Yedigoller (Seven Lakes). At an altitude of around 3 000 m, the mountains here form a barrier between humid northern forest and the southern steppes.

Depending on road conditions, we may walk for between 4-5 km (+-3 miles) to reach the lake view area. Caspian Snowcock, the fabulous Wallcreeper, Radde's and Alpine Accentors, Griffon Vulture, Asian Crimson-winged Finch, Lanner Falcon and Eurasian Eagle-Owl are some of the species that breed here which we'll be looking for.

Ikizdere and surrounds. We will spend much of a day in deep forest in an area with a pleasantly mild climate. We will make an early start for Caucasian (Black) Grouse, and with a bit of luck we will see them displaying at their leks, over the tree line. Again, depending on the off-road conditions, we will attempt to enter inside the display area. After hopefully obtaining some great sightings of the area's most famous avian denizen, we will then walk a path in search of the region's songbirds, including Mountain Chiffchaff, Common Redstart, Krüper's Nuthatch, Common Rosefinch and Eurasian Bullfinch.



Caucasian Grouse by Ugur Altinarik

Sumela Monastery. This incredible structure clings to a sheer cliff face inside a deep forest, and aside from marvelling at this amazing architectural feat, we will explore the surrounds of a local fast-flowing stream that is usually very productive for woodland birds. Here we will be searching for Green Warbler, Mountain Chiffchaff, Eurasian Bullfinch, Red Crossbill, White-breasted Dipper and many other woodland birds.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate paced tour suited for those in good health with reasonable level of fitness. Not suited for anyone with mobility challenges or serious medical conditions
Birding Ease		Mostly unchallenging, a few species that require time and effort, possibly waiting for periods of time in cool conditions.
Accommodation		Generally decent standard of hotels and resorts. Some do not serve alcohol. Aircons units are variable, but often not required.
Walking / Trails		Mostly open birding on plains, lake and road sides. A longer hike of 4-5 km (+-3 miles) may be necessary, but is optional.
Vehicles / Roads		Road conditions are generally good. At higher altitudes, snow drifts may necessitate walking.
Photography		Generally good, but some harsh lighting at times and some species distant.
Annoyances		Some long days.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

This tour is made available through our Tailor-made tours department. To explore this offering further for pricing, precise day to day itinerary, inclusions & exclusions, or to tailor the tour to your personal requirements, please contact our Tailor-made team on tailormade@rockjumper.com

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.

- **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.**

- This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot, and may require walking for several hours at a time. These walks will however always be at a slow pace, and will entail no more than 3-4 miles (5-6 km) in one day.
- Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a generally good standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of are comfortable. There is no camping on this trip.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour will depart from Van Airport on day 1 and conclude at Trabzon Airport on day 11.

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.

Istanbul Atatürk Airport, Istanbul (IATA: IST) is the main port of entry for international flights into Turkey for this tour and is well serviced by many of the world's major airlines. Van Airport (IATA: VAN) is easily reached by internal flight from Istanbul.

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.