Bulgaria & Romania

Winter Birding



Red-breasted and Greater White-fronted Geese by Mladen Vasilev

The main attraction of our Bulgaria & Romania in Winter tour are the approximately 50,000 Red-breasted Geese, in fact, almost the entire world population of this Endangered species over-winter on the Black Sea coast of these two nations. We will be assured of superb views of great flocks of these incredibly beautiful waterfowl. We will also explore forests, mountains, steppes and cliffs for other key targets, including Dalmatian Pelican, the rare Lesser White-fronted Goose, White-headed Duck, the stunning Smew, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Eurasian Bittern, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, no less than eight woodpeckers, including Syrian, Black, White-backed and Grey-headed, Bearded Reedling, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Western Rock Nuthatch and the incomparable Wallcreeper. This is a highly recommended tour, offering prime European winter birding and opportunities for numerous highly sought-after species.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Varna (Bulgaria), transfer to Kavarna**
Days 2 & 3	**Coastal Dobrudzh & Romania**
Day 4	**Kavarna to Burgas**
Day 5	**Burgas area**
Day 6	**Strandzha Mountains**
Day 7	**Burgas to Madzharovo (Eastern Rhodope Mountains) via Sakar Hills**
Day 8	**Eastern Rhodopes to Sofia**
Day 9	**Vitosha Mountains & final departure**



Birding sites in detail



Dalmatian Pelicans by Mladen Vasilev

Varna Harbour. Here we are likely to encounter several gull species, including the ubiquitous Yellow-legged and Black-headed and less common Caspian, Mew and Mediterranean. Other species likely to be encountered include Eared (Black-necked) Grebes and massive Mute Swans. Upon arrival at our friendly, family owned and run hotel in Kavarna, we will check-in for the next three nights and discuss our forthcoming adventures over dinner.

Coastal Dobrudzh & Romania. We'll spend our time birding the Bulgarian and Romanian Coastal Dobrudzha area will be amongst the highlights of our tour.

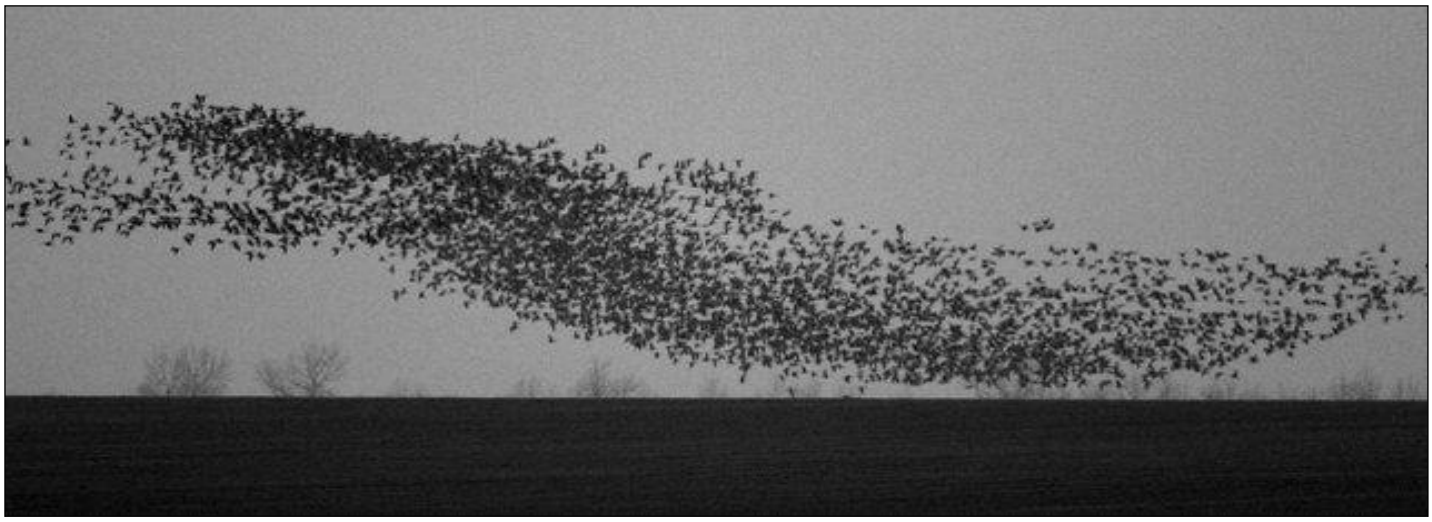
Our explorations will take us to Shabla and Durankulak Lakes in Bulgaria and Techirgyol Lake in Romania. If we have sufficient time and the winter weather conditions allow, we may drive further north in Romania and visit Sinoe Lake (north of the city of Konstantsa). These lakes occupy estuaries where local rivers have wound their way through the hilly plains down onto the coastal sand dunes and beaches to form these productive reed-edged lakes.

These are the main wintering grounds and roosting sites for almost the entire world population of the Endangered, Red-breasted Goose, the key target species of this winter tour. This species, the most attractive of all geese and one of the most beautiful waterfowl, breeds on the tundra of the incredibly remote and inaccessible Taimyr, Gydan and Yamal Peninsulas of northern Siberia. To avoid the frigid winters, they migrate in a south-westerly direction across Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine to Coastal Dobrudzha, where they roost on these lakes at night. Early in the morning, we will watch the geese as they take off en masse (a truly impressive sight!) and fly inland for their daily feeding forays in the surrounding winter crop fields. The Red-breasted Geese numbers at the lakes that we will visit vary anywhere between 5,000 and 50,000 birds, depending upon the severity of the winter.

Following the flocks, we will explore the fields to obtain as close a view as possible without disturbing the geese. Besides enjoying these stunning, Red-breasted Geese, we will also scan these great flocks (generally dominated by Greater White-fronted and Red-breasted Geese) for the extremely rare Lesser White-fronted Goose, as well as Greylag, Barnacle and Bean Geese. Overwinter flocks of



Pygmy Cormorants by Adam Riley



Red-breasted Goose flock at dawn by Adam Riley

Whooper and Tundra Swans, sometimes numbering in their dozens or hundreds, can also be found grazing in these fields.

After we have had our full of goose watching, we will turn our attention to the lakes and their surrounding reedbeds. Targets here include Eurasian Bittern - which are regularly seen flying across the reedbeds, Great Egret, Grey Heron, Marsh Harriers - which also winter here in good numbers, Red-crested Pochard, Common Goldeneye, the stunning Smew, the Endangered and highly sought-after White-headed Duck, Gadwall, Eurasian Widgeon, Northern Pintail, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian (Green-winged) Teal, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe, the mighty White-tailed Eagle and gulls - which may include Pallas's, Caspian and Mew Gull. We will spend time birding the edge of the reeds in search of the shy but stunning Bearded Reedling, previously known as Bearded Tit and placed in the tit family before it was reclassified as a parrotbill. However, the latest genetic research has revealed that is a unique species and is now placed in its own monotypic family, Panuridae. This habitat also supports two other sought-after species, the attractive Penduline Tit and uncommon Moustached Warbler. More widespread birds that we should encounter here are European Robin, Winter Wren and Common Reed Bunting.

We will also partake in some sea watching and keep our eyes peeled for Black-throated and Red-throated Divers, Black-necked (Eared) and Red-necked Grebes, Red-breasted Merganser and Greater Scaup, Little Gull and if we are very lucky, Yelkoun Shearwater. Previous Rockjumper tours have also spotted pods of Harbour Porpoise.



Bearded Reedling by Clayton Burne

We will also explore the rugged Cape Kaliakra where we will look for the Mediterranean subspecies of European Shag and a resident pair of Eurasian Eagle-Owl. These cliffs also provide us with our best chance for the fabulous Wallcreeper; while the adjacent steppes and fields host numerous wintering raptors, including good numbers of Common, Long-legged and Rough-legged



Long-eared Owl by Adam Riley

Buzzards, a few Greater Spotted Eagles, Northern Goshawk, Hen Harriers quartering the fields, Peregrine and if we are very lucky, Saker Falcon, Merlin and Common Kestrel, as well as Grey Partridge, Ring-necked Pheasant, Eurasian Skylark and the attractive Calandra Lark and singing Corn Buntings. Corvids are common and species which we can expect to find in good numbers include Eurasian Magpie, Hooded Crow, Rook and Western Jackdaw with smaller numbers of Northern Raven and Eurasian Jay. Woodlands, shrubs and even the small rural villages support other birds that we will seek. Long-eared Owls, in fact, seem to seek out trees in village squares as their day roosts and it's not unusual for us to find more than a dozen dozing together. Short-eared Owls prefer fields, but we will also search village roofs for the cute Little Owl. Syrian and Greater Spotted Woodpeckers are also often found in villages and other possible species include Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Stock and Eurasian Collared Dove, Great Grey Shrike, Redwing, Fieldfare, Black Redstart, Common Linnet, Common Chaffinch, attractive Bramblings, European Greenfinch, Eurasian Siskin and delightful flocks of beautiful European Goldfinches.

Kavarna to Burgas. After some final birding in this northern Coastal Dobrudzha area, we will drive to the southern Bulgarian coast via Varna. En route we may bird Varna Lake where we will look for Pygmy Cormorant (restricted to south-east Europe and south-west Asia), Black-crowned Night Heron, the skulking Water Rail and the explosively vocal but shy Cetti's Warbler. If time is available, we may also explore the Kamchia riverine forests to the south of Varna, where possibilities include the impressively large Black Woodpecker, as well as Grey-headed and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers and Short-toed Treecreeper. We can also expect several waterfowl in this area; while the surrounding agricultural lands will provide further chances for Merlin, Northern Goshawk and other raptors. Further possibilities today include Woodlark, Eurasian Nuthatch, Hawfinch, Cirl Bunting and Yellowhammer. Tits we may encounter include the sought-after Sombre, beautiful Blue, bold Great, Marsh and Long-tailed Tits (including both the dark headed europaeus and white-headed caudatus subspecies of the last-mentioned species.)

Burgas area. Our main focus in this area are the Burgas wetlands, namely Lakes Atanasovsko, Burgas (Vaya) and Mandra, as well as the nature reserve around Poda Lagoon. Here we can watch vast flocks of Pygmy Cormorant (approximately 10,000 of which over-winter in the area!), wintering Dalmatian Pelicans (several in their beautiful breeding plumage can be expected), further chances for the rare White-headed Duck and White-tailed Eagle, beautiful salmon-pink Slender-billed Gulls, Mediterranean Gull, flocks of Pied Avocet and Northern Lapwing, Grey Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Green Sandpiper, Common Redshank, Common



Hawfinch by Adam Riley



Eastern Imperial Eagle by Adam Riley

Snipe, the electric blue Common Kingfisher, White Wagtail, Water and Meadow Pipit, Eurasian Tree and Spanish Sparrow, Common Reed Bunting, plus numerous commoner wintering waterbirds. We also stand additional chances for Eurasian Bittern, Smew, Bearded Reedling and Eurasian Penduline Tit, in case we failed to find any of these species further north. We will also carefully scan the open waters for Great White Pelican and Ferruginous Duck, small numbers of which also regularly remain to winter in this area. Other possibilities today include Peregrine Falcon (which roost on city high-rise buildings), Black Kite, Goldcrest, Common Firecrest and Crested Lark.

Strandzha Mountains. Today we will depart early and head towards the Turkish border in the south-eastern corner of Bulgaria to visit the Strandzha Mountains. This remote, beautiful and hilly region is well-wooded and is famous for supporting no less than eight woodpecker species! These woodpeckers will be our key targets today, especially the impressive Black, Grey-headed, Green, rare White-backed, Middle Spotted and diminutive Lesser Spotted. Numerous other woodland species we should encounter today include Common Wood Pigeon, Eurasian Jay, Marsh, Great, Blue and Long-tailed Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Common Blackbird, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, European Robin and the mighty-beaked Hawfinch. If we are very fortunate, we may even find a roosting Tawny Owl.

Sakar Hills. This area of steppe-like meadows and fields is home to the fabulous Eastern Imperial Eagle. We stand good chances of finding other birds which have already been mentioned, especially raptors and open country species.



Wallcreeper by Clayton Burne



Chukar Partridge by Glen Valentine

Madzharovo (Eastern Rhodope Mountains). Here we will find ourselves in the late afternoon at the cliffs plunging down to the beautiful, meandering Arda River. These cliffs support Bulgaria's largest population of Griffon Vulture, which we will enjoy watching as they swoop into roost for the evening. Our other key target species here is the sought-after Western Rock Nuthatch, and we will scour these same cliffs for this delightful rock-loving species.

Eastern Rhodopes to Sofia. We'll spend our time around Madzharovo searching for Golden Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, coveys of Chukar Partridge, Eurasian Green Woodpecker, Western Rock Nuthatch, Sombre Tit and both Rock and Cirl Buntings. Here we will also have further opportunities for finding the elusive Wallcreeper, which regularly winters in this area. A small bird hide at a local nature centre will provide photographers with superb opportunities for capturing woodland species, including Greater and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, Eurasian Jay, Eurasian Nuthatch, Hawfinch, European Greenfinch, Common Chaffinch and a variety of tits.

Vitosha Mountains. We will visit the snow-covered Vitosha Mountains which tower over the southern sector of Sofia. Here we stand excellent chances to find several new species. Our targets include the attractively marked Southern Nutcracker, and several other typical coniferous forests birds such as Willow and Coal Tit, Eurasian Treecreeper, European Bullfinch and Common Crossbill.

Tour Grading & Key

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 is cold, to very cold – especially at altitude.

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.**

- 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.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour departs from Bulgaria's Varna Airport on Day 1 and will conclude in Sofia in the late afternoon of Day 9.

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.

Varna Airport (IATA: VAR) and Sofia Airport (IATA: SOF) are the main ports 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.