

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

22nd to 31st May 2018 (10 days)



ROMANIA

Danube Delta, Carpathians & Transylvania

"breathtaking... birdwatching experience of a lifetime"

"a wonderful way of exploring the Delta"

Danube 2011

One of the few holidays to include a stay on a 'floating hotel', exploring the spectacular wildlife of the Romanian Danube Delta and the stunning Carpathian Mountains.

The Delta is **one of the last remaining wilderness areas of Europe** where, at the end of a 1700 mile long journey across Europe, the Danube River empties its water into the Black Sea. Here, the river splits into numerous channels and canals, creating the second largest delta on the continent. Vast expanses of swamps, forests and lakes surrounded by thick reed beds, provide a sanctuary for over 300 species of birds. We will also discover the local culture - many of the people of the Delta live in remote fishing villages, preserving a fascinating history that is an integral part of the wetland ecosystem.

Our home in the Delta is a very comfortable 'travelling' houseboat, which has a lovely open deck for bird-watching and relaxing. A taste of the local cuisine may (optionally) include fish and wild boar, accompanied by the local wine. Our excursions are either short walks or by small boat. We should see huge numbers of herons, pelicans and terns as well as roller, golden oriole and white-tailed eagle.

In the Carpathians, we stay in an area of Transylvania full of hay meadows that are still farmed in a traditional way, ancient forests and stunning limestone gorges. Here, we will look for wallcreeper, black woodpecker and other mountain birds. There are also exciting plants to see, both in the Delta and in the mountains, along with butterflies, dragonflies, frogs and bats!

The expertise of our guides and leader will enable anyone with a general wildlife interest to enjoy this tour as well as those with a more specific interest in birds.



Price
£1895

Single Room Supplement
£300

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Bucharest
- Day 2** travel to Delta
inc Babadag Forest
- Day 3-6** Danube Delta
inc Black sea coast
- Day 7-9** Carpathian gorges,
forests & meadows
- Day 10** Bucharest and home

Leaders
Philip Precey
(and local guides)

birds, natural history,
culture, 5 nights aboard
'floating hotel'

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to the **wildlife TRUSTS**



ITINERARY

The itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders. In the Delta the itinerary depends upon water levels and other local factors. The details below are a guide to the itinerary we may have but this may need to be changed. The content of the days, however, will be similar.

Day 1 22nd May After arrival in Bucharest we transfer to our hotel in Amara, approximately 2 hours away. Dinner and overnight at the Hotel Diamant.

Day 2 23rd May An early morning exploration of the nearby lakes will give us our first introduction to the wetland birdlife of Romania. After breakfast, we will continue to travel eastwards, stopping along the way to visit the **Babadag forest**, home to **wild flowers** including toothed orchid, lady orchid, monkey orchid and peony. Our next port of call will be Murighiol, where we join our houseboat 'Kingfisher', our home for the next five nights.

Day 3 24th May Today we will have a leisurely cruise along the southernmost of the Delta's main channels, to **Sfantu Gheorghe**, one of the most beautiful fishing villages in the Delta. From the deck of the boat we will see many of the typical birds of the delta such as egrets, pelicans, herons, bee-eater, roller and the ever present marsh harriers, the peace only disturbed by the occasional white-tailed eagle hunting overhead. We will keep our eyes peeled for the beautiful great black-headed gulls, a speciality of the area.

Day 4 25th May We explore the local area around Sfantu Gheorghe by small boat, including the sandy Sahalin Island, an important bird reserve, at the mouth of the **Black Sea**, home to moustached warbler, **fire-bellied toad** and **golden jackal**. After lunch, we will walk around the Sfantu Gheorghe area, where we will look for a variety of migrating waders, lesser grey shrike, bearded tit and eastern olivaceous warbler. The beach is home to the **steppes runner**, a large lizard that only reaches Europe in this corner of Romania.

Day 5 26th May The boat will start moving upstream early in the morning. On the way we will stop to explore more shallow lagoons hidden amongst the reeds where hundreds of pairs of **whiskered tern** nest amongst the lily pads and red-necked grebes and red-crested pochard make their homes. The reeds will be alive with the song of birds, including **great reed, sedge** and **Savi's warblers**.

Day 6 27th May The day will be spent in the remote areas of Zatoane, Dranov and Holbina, along the **Black Sea coast**. Today will give us excellent opportunities for catching up with some of the shy animals of the Delta: **wild boar** or even **golden jackal** will be looked for, as well as birds such as **paddyfield warbler** and other north-bound migrants.

Day 7 28th May After leaving the boat at Murighiol, we start to travel slowly west, crossing the Danube before heading towards the **Carpathian Mountains**, stopping en route for the scenery and wildlife. After travelling north up a forested valley, we take the road west into the mountains above Zarnesti, our home for the last three nights.



Day 8 29th May Our explorations will take us into the Piatra Craiului for a walk (gently) up Zarnesti Gorge in search of more of local specialities including limestone-loving flowers and the colourful **wallcreeper**, a bird that is hard to find but usually nests here. We will also explore hay meadows, pastures and woodland where we should see many flowers and butterflies as we explore the local villages and countryside.

After an early dinner, those who wish to will head to the western edge of the Piatra Craiului National Park, to visit a hide in the forest (optional: price of 40 Euros per person) where we will wait for **brown bears** to emerge from the forest to feed. Wild boar, roe deer and even wolf have also been seen here on our previous visits: fingers crossed!

Day 9 30th May Today we travel through the Fagaras Mountains to the valley at Sinca Noua. This is a wonderful area of meadows where local people still farm traditionally using horses and carts resulting in an area that still has a rich biodiversity; many butterflies should be around and we will look out for sand lizard, yellow-bellied toad, lesser spotted eagle and grey-headed woodpecker.

Day 10 31st May We say goodbye to Transylvania and return to Bucharest for our journey home.

Life in the Delta

In the heart of the Delta there are a **myriad of marshes, reedbeds, lakes and water channels** holding an amazing number of breeding birds as well as frogs, snakes, otters, dragonflies, butterflies, small mammals and a rich plant community. It has a high number of fish species and, traditionally, the majority of people who live in the Delta have earned their living from fishing. The Delta contains **the world's largest area of reed bed** and almost 400 freshwater lakes. It is Europe's richest location for birds but remains relatively undeveloped as far as tourism is concerned. In addition to wetland, there are areas of sandy, dry ground that are covered with woodland of oak and ash. Mature willow trees are an exceptional feature, covering much of the wetter land. Also in the area covered by the **Biosphere Reserve** are dry steppes and open dunes. Our journey takes us along the southernmost channel, the Sfantu Gheorghe, which is the **most attractive** and probably the oldest. It meanders gently to the village that shares its name –a fishing village and small port, very isolated and surrounded by dunes, woodlands and marshes, adjacent to the Black Sea. Many of the villages in the Delta were settled by **Ukrainians and other, previously 'Russian', peoples** and the houses reflect the presence of these cultures.

Weather

The weather should be pleasant, mostly warm, even hot. Some rain is possible, as is cooler weather, particularly in the mountains. We will not walking long in hot sun and we will adapt our excursions to the weather. There is no major problem from mosquitoes at this time of year in the Delta. It is very pleasant to sit on the viewing/sun deck of the boat as we travel down the waterways looking at the wildlife from the comfort of our own 'home'.



Leader and Guides

Philip Precey is a Director of Wildlife Travel and has led several of our trips in recent years, including four previous trips to Romania. Philip is a keen all round naturalist, never to be found far from his binoculars. Whether it's helping with the tricky warblers, keeping his eyes peeled for passing mammals or identifying the variety of dragonflies that we hope to come across, Philip's natural history knowledge will ensure you have a great time. Our local guides, from **EuroDelta Travel**, know the Delta intimately: their company specialises in tours of the Delta. They have organised and led our many previous trips to the area and we are very pleased to be travelling with them again.

Accommodation, meals and transport

Our hotel in Amara is of a good standard with en suite rooms. In the Delta, our home is a **very comfortable 'travelling house boat'**, each cabin has **en suite** shower/w.c. The 9 cabins are all on the 'outside' (i.e. with a window) and have twin or double beds (not bunks). In Transylvania, we stay in a small pension in the rustic hamlet of Magura, above Zarnesti, where all rooms have en suite bath (or shower) rooms. Our meals will be a mixture of **Romanian and international dishes**, with an emphasis on local cuisine. On land we will travel by small coach. The journey from the Delta to Transylvania is long and takes most of the day. It is a fascinating journey across the country and we will have several stops en route to stretch the legs.

Fitness

The longest walk will probably be for about 3 or 4 hours but at a slow pace. You will need to be able to step/climb in and out of small boats, sometimes directly onto the bank but always with a helping hand. We will spend quite a bit of time sitting in the small boats. This tour is not suitable for people with significantly limited mobility.

Flights

The group flights are with **British Airways** from Heathrow to Bucharest.

22nd May Depart Heathrow 11.00, arrive Bucharest Otopeni 16.20
31st May Depart Bucharest Otopeni 17.20, arrive Heathrow 18.50

Romania is 2 hours ahead of UK time.

TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

DEPOSIT £650 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 20/02/2018

INCLUDED: Return flights from London Heathrow to Bucharest, including all airport taxes. Local transport on excursions as specified in the itinerary. 9 nights accommodation, full board basis. Services of leaders and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Optional visit to bear-watching hide (40 Euros per person). Entrance fees for optional sightseeing (eg museums). Gratuities. Travel insurance.

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