

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



15th to 22nd February 2020

BULGARIA

Winter wild goose chase

NEW
ITINERARY
FOR 2020

Exploring the threatened wetlands of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, with its spectacular winter wildlife.

Every winter almost the **entire world population of the endangered Red-breasted Goose** returns to the Black Sea coast, feeding on the winter crop fields of northern Bulgaria and roosting on the lakes of Shabla and Durankulak. Watching the early morning 'take off' of hundreds of thousands of geese, which can include thousands of Red-breasted Geese is **truly spectacular**.

We will also search through the larger flocks of White-fronted Geese, looking for Lesser White-fronted and Bean Goose. Rough-legged and Long-legged Buzzards are both common winter visitors and we will keep our eyes peeled for the occasional White-tailed Eagle, with Saker and Spotted Eagle both possible at this time of year.

From here we move south to the **lakes and wetlands around Bourgas**. Here we will find Pygmy Cormorant, White-headed Duck and Smew, alongside Dalmatian Pelicans in their bright breeding colours and the occasional Bittern, while scarcer visitors to the area might include Pallas's Gull and Great Grey Shrike.

A day away from the water will take us south into the oak-clad **Strandzha Mountains** where the woodland floor is a carpet of early-flowering *Colchicum coum*, primulas, snowdrops and crocuses, and woodpeckers drum while Woodlarks sing.

As well as the birds, we will also spend time looking for some of Europe's most exciting mammals: Wild Boar, **Wild Cat** and **Golden Jackal** been seen on our previous visits to Bulgaria, while Otter is always a possibility.



Price
£1,595

Single Room Supplement
£120

Full board

Day 1 Fly to Bourgas
Day 2 Bourgas
Day 3 Kamchia
Day 4 Durankulak
Day 5 Shabla, Kaliakra
Day 6 Travel to Bourgas
Day 7 Strandzha
Day 8 Return to UK

Leaders
Mike Symes
and local guides

Group size
min 5, max 14
winter birding,
mammals, early spring
flowers

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to **the Wildlife Trusts**



Focus of interest

This is one of our 'Easy birding and wildlife' trips which means that the itinerary is based mainly on birds and/or other animals (rather than plants or general wildlife) and this also reflects the knowledge of the leaders and guides. However, as with all of our trips, the pace is comfortable with time to enjoy other aspects of the natural history, rather than rushing from one place to another for specific species.



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities, such as the location of the geese, at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 Our flight takes us to Bourgas on the Black Sea coast from where we **transfer to our hotel** in the coastal town of Kraisimor.

Day 2 We will spend today around the internationally important wetlands in the Bourgas area. Chief amongst the attractions will be **Pygmy Cormorant**, pelicans and White-headed Duck. Other inhabitants of the area include **White-tailed Eagle**, **Bittern**, Great White Egret and Spotted Eagle as well as a variety of wildfowl. Spring bulbs should be in flower, including the delicate *Ornithogalum sibthorpii* and *Crocus flavus*. Night Kraisimor

Day 3 We will leave Bourgas and travel north along the Black Sea coast. Amongst our stops will be a visit to the **Kamchia River**, an area of riverine forest and associated habitats that gives us our best chances of finding two of Bulgaria's enigmatic mammals, Golden Jackal and Wild Cat. Birds may include woodpeckers (Lesser Spotted, Grey-headed or Syrian) as well as Hawfinch. We will stay 'in the field' until dusk (around 17.30) to ensure we have the greatest possible chances of seeing the mammals. Then we will drive onwards to Kavarna.

Days 4-5 An early start will take us to the lakes of Durankulak and Shabla, where the vast majority of the area's geese roost over night. The early morning 'take off', during which **tens of thousands of wild geese** including, hopefully, large numbers of Red-breasted Geese fly overhead to their feeding fields promises to be an unforgettable spectacle. After the exodus is over, we will spend the day exploring the area between the Romanian border and the Black Sea, seeking out the feeding flocks. Amongst the large numbers of White-fronted Geese we hope to find local rarities, including Eastern Greylag, Bean and Lesser White-fronted Geese.

Aside from the geese, there is good birdwatching at the lakes and off-shore, as well as a chance of seeing Otter or Golden Jackal although, as with all mammals, this will depend very much on a combination of patience and luck. We will spend some time at nearby **Cape Kaliakra**, where the sea cliffs give a better view out to sea and the sea duck, grebes and divers that winter off-shore. The nearby area of steppe, famous for its displays of wild flowers later in the spring, is home to wintering Calandra Lark, Long-legged Buzzard and Short-eared Owl.



This region also offers some of the best chances for finding **Wild Cat** in Europe, and we will keep our eyes peeled for this enigmatic predator as we explore the area. The exact itinerary will depend on local conditions including where the geese are feeding and how much ice is present on the lakes as well as viewing conditions and luck. Night Kavarna

Day 6 A travelling day takes us back down to Bourgas. Several stops along the way should give us the chance to catch up with **Eagle Owl** on their nesting cliff as well as woodlands home to several species of woodpecker and a good population of Wild Boar. Night Kraisimorie

Day 7 A change of focus today, as we head for the southeastern corner of Bulgaria to explore the **Strandzha mountains**. These low hills stretch over the border into Turkey, with small villages and meadows hidden in the forest of Eastern Beech and Pontic Oak. Here we will seek out one of Bulgaria's shyest residents, the **White-backed Woodpecker**, which is best looked for at this time of year, when we hope it will be drumming in the forests. We will also be looking out for early spring flowers, including *Colchicum coum*, the pretty reddish *Primula acaulis rubra*, crocuses and snowdrops. With a little luck we will also find one of the Eastern Imperial Eagles that make this area their home. Night Kraisimorie

Day 8 After breakfast we will return to the Bourgas lakes for another chance to enjoy the wildfowl and raptors of the area. There should also be some time to visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Nessebar before we make our way to the airport for our flight home.

Accommodation, meals and transport

We will be staying at two hotels during the holiday - Kavarna in the north and Kraisimorie in the south. Exact hotels used will depend on the final group size. All rooms have en-suite facilities with bath and/or shower. Meals provided during the stay will have an emphasis on local cuisine. Lunches will be a mixture of picnics and café/restaurants. Requests for special diets can be accommodated. Transport will be by small bus or smaller 'people carrier'-type vehicles if necessary.

Weather

The weather at this time of year can be, not surprisingly, cold, perhaps around freezing (although it may also be warmer) during the day, with snow on the ground. Cold winds can add to the chill factor, **you should be prepared for it to be cold throughout the trip**. Snow or rain are both possible. We will adapt our activities to the weather.

Health and fitness

On most days, we are out and about for much of the day as we travel around the countryside looking for the birds. You should be comfortable with walking on snowy or icy ground. For this reason the trip is not likely to be suitable for anyone who has problems with balance or who needs a stick to walk. There are likely to be steps at our hotels, with no lift, and we are likely to be climbing in and out of the vehicle fairly often.



Leaders

Mike Symes is our leader for this trip, an excellent all-round naturalist and professional ecologist who has worked for Devon Wildlife Trust for over ten years. Mike has led many previous Wildlife Travel holidays from Norfolk and the Burren, to the Danube Delta and the Serengeti.

Our local guides are from **Neophron** a company with direct links with local conservation. Neophron guided our previous trips to the country and we are very pleased to be travelling with them again.

Passport and visas

If you hold an EU passport, you do not currently need a visa to travel to Bulgaria. Your passport should be valid for the proposed duration of your stay; you do not need any additional period of validity on your passport beyond this.

Should we leave the EU without a deal in place before February 2020, you should have at least six months left on your passport from your date of arrival.

Flights

Group flights are with Wizz Air from London Luton.

15th February depart Luton 13.55, arrive Bourgas 19.25

22nd February depart Bourgas 20.00, arrive Luton 20.45

Bulgaria is two hours ahead of the UK



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 £500 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 16/11/2019
SEE GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET ON HOW TO BOOK

INCLUDED: Return flights from London Luton to Bourgas. Local transport as specified in itinerary, including entry fees. Seven nights' accommodation, all meals. Services of leaders.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments and drinks with meals. Gratuities. Insurance. Entry to optional tourist sites.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

The Manor House, Broad Street,

Great Cambourne, Cambridge CB23 6DH

Tel: 01954 713575

email: wildlifetravel@wildlifebcn.org

www.wildlife-travel.co.uk



Directors: Christine Donnelly, Brian Eversham, Philip Precey, Michael Russell, Dr Tim Upson
Wildlife Travel Ltd. Reg. No 2237697; (for Registered Charity numbers, please contact us)

Photos: Front (clockwise): Bulgaria in winter, Great Bittern, *Crocus flavus*, *Cyclamen coum*, Red-breasted Goose (Neophron) **Inside:** wintering goose flocks (Neophron), Wild Cat (Neophron), Great Grey Shrike, Dalmatian Pelican. **Back** Black Sea coast, *Primula acaulis ssp rubra*