

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

23rd to 30th April 2024 (1 week)

BULGARIA

spring on the Black Sea coast

"the guides and leaders
were excellent"
Bulgaria 2015

"what a wonderful trip"
"a beautiful and interesting
part of the world"
Bulgaria 2016

Spectacular displays of spring flowers, with bird migration at its peak along the 'Via Pontica'.

This trip will take in some of the highlights of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, **an area amazingly rich in wildlife.**

In the south we will take in the **lakes and wetlands around Bourgas**. Here we will find many wetland birds, including Squacco Heron, White and Dalmatian Pelican, Pygmy Cormorant and Spoonbill. Northbound migrants should include all three marsh terns in smart breeding colours; Red-footed Falcon, Honey Buzzard and Lesser Spotted Eagle, sometimes in large flocks; both White and Black Stork; and a variety of waders heading up to the wetlands of Scandinavia, Poland and Russia.

This corner of Bulgaria is amongst the richest areas in Europe for **reptiles and amphibians**, and we will be joined by a local expert to help us track down some of the area's specialities, perhaps including the beautiful Leopard Snake or Reddish Whip Snake and two species of tortoise.

During our time in the north we will spend time on the flower-rich steppe around **Cape Kaliakra**, where a staggering 450 species of plants include splashes of red *Paeonia tenuifolia*, yellow *Adonis vernalis*, and carpets of abundant dwarf irises in a range of shades of purple and yellow. In this area we have a better chance than almost anywhere in Europe of catching sight of a Wild Cat.

This area is famous for several breeding birds with very restricted ranges in Europe, and we hope to find Pied Wheatear, Paddyfield Warbler, Levant Sparrowhawk Sombre Tit and Semi-collared Flycatcher all on their breeding territories.



Price
£1,895

**Single Room
Supplement**
£175

Full board

Day 1 flight to Varna
Day 2 Cape Kaliakra
Day 3 Yailata
Day 4 Durankulak and Shabla
Day 5 East Balkan Range
Day 6 Burgas wetlands
Day 7 Ropotamo area
Day 8 return to UK

Leaders

Laurie Jackson with local guides

Group size

min 5, max 14

spring flowers, birds,
reptiles



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1, 23rd April. Our flight takes us to Varna on the Black Sea coast from where we transfer to our hotel, just over an hour away.

Day 2, 24th April. We will spend today exploring **Cape Kaliakra** and the nearby steppe. At the Cape itself we will visit the fort, and look out to see where Bottle-nosed Dolphin or the endangered Black Sea population of Harbour Porpoise may be seen.

The coastal steppe is an area famous for its **wonderful displays of wild flowers** including beautiful dwarf irises *Iris pumila* and *Iris suavelons*, the fine-leaved peony *Paeonia tenuifolia*, yellow *Adonis vernalis* and bright patches of *Adonis flammea*. Nesting birds include Calandra Lark, Isabelline Wheatear and Stone Curlew, while the area is also home to a healthy population of both Golden Jackal and Wild Cat: fingers crossed!

Day 3, 25th April. We visit the archaeological reserve of **Yailata**, a mysterious cliff-top site with more than 100 troglodyte dwellings from the 5th century BC. There's a lot more to this site than history, however: the cliff-top grassland is home to **many wild flowers**, including several local endemics. **Pied Wheatear** nest amongst the rocks, another species with a very restricted range in Europe, while out to sea we hope to spot Yelkouan Shearwaters low over the waves. Among the steppe we have a chance to spot the endearing **Souslik**, their colonies watched over by whistling sentinels.

Day 4, 26th April. Today we explore the lakes in the north of Bulgaria, near to the Romanian border. We travel to **Lake Durankulak**, to be greeted by a cacophony of Savi's, Reed and Great Reed Warblers, and Marsh Frogs. Migration should be in full swing, with flocks of White-winged Black Tern, Whiskered Tern and Little Gull feeding over the reeds, groups of Red-footed Falcon heading north, and Bee-eaters, Hoopoes and White Storks settling in for the summer.

We will also visit **Lake Shabla**, where Ferruginous Duck, Squacco Heron and Ruddy Shelduck may be amongst the highlights. The surrounding scrub and woodland is home to Syrian Woodpecker and Red-backed Shrike, while smart Collared and Pied Flycatchers stop off on their way north.

Day 5, 27th April. A travelling day takes us south towards Burgas. On the way we will stop in the forested foothills of the Eastern Balkan Range. **Semi-collared Flycatchers** nest in specially provided nestboxes in the oak woodland, and the boxes are also used by Forest Dormouse: we hope to track down both species today. The woods are also home to Wild Boar, Red Squirrel and several species of woodpecker, including Grey-headed, Middle Spotted and the wonderful Black Woodpecker. Hawfinch, Sombre Tit and Eastern Bonelli's Warbler may also be amongst the targets for today, while a little local knowledge could help us find Eagle Owl at their nest site.



Also north-bound, passing migrants could include groups of Lesser Spotted Eagle, Honey Buzzard and Red-footed Falcon, both White and Black Storks, White and Dalmatian Pelicans, and small numbers of Pallid and Montagu's Harriers, all of which are funneled into the passes over the mountains.

Day 6, 28th April. We will spend today around the internationally important wetlands in the Burgas area. Chief amongst the attractions for us will be both European species of pelican, Pygmy Cormorants and **large colonies** of Purple and Squacco Herons, Spoonbill and Glossy Ibis, as well as a variety of waders and wildfowl. Great Reed Warblers sing from the reeds while White-tailed Eagle and Marsh Harriers soar overhead, and we will hope to find Broad-billed Sandpiper and Slender-billed Gull during the day.

Day 7, 29th April. This corner of Bulgaria is noteworthy for its **reptiles and amphibians**, with some local specialties restricted in Europe to here and nearby Turkey. Today we will try to track down some of these special animals: Blotched Snake, Meadow Lizard and Eastern Slow-worm are all possible, as well as two species of tortoise, and European Glass Lizard. Although reptiles are a focus of our day there should be plenty of wild flowers to enjoy, and birds to listen out for.

Day 8, 30th April. Today we have to retrace our steps, heading north back to Varna. If time allows, we will make one or two visits along the way to look out for north-bound birds and other wildlife, before we head to the airport and our flights home.

Accommodation, meals, travel and weather

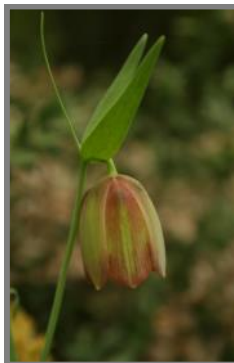
Our accommodation will be at good three-star local hotels, all with en-suite accommodation, with our time split between the coastal town of Kavarna, and the outskirts of the city of Burgas.

Meals provided during the stay will be a mixture of **Balkan and International dishes**, with an emphasis on local cuisine and plenty of salads. Requests for special diets can be accommodated. Transport will be by small bus, minibus or smaller vehicles if necessary.

The weather in Bulgaria should be pleasantly warm, even hot: rain is always a possibility, as is cooler weather, particularly in the evenings and on the coast.

Health and fitness

On most days, we are walking for much of the day, albeit at a relatively slow pace. It is necessary to walk on rougher ground and up some (gentle) slopes, although none of the walking is strenuous. Good (light) walking boots are essential. All walks and excursions are optional.



Leaders

Laurie Jackson is an excellent all-round naturalist and experienced Wildlife Travel leader who has led more than 30 of our holidays in recent years: this will be her fifth visit to Bulgaria. Our local guides are from **Neophron** who have guided all of our previous trips to Bulgaria, and we are very please to be travelling with them again.

Group Travel

The group flights will be from London Heathrow, with Austrian Airlines.

23rd April depart London Heathrow 06.00, arrive Vienna 09.10
 depart Vienna 12.30, arrive Varna 15.15
30th April depart Varna 16.00, arrive Vienna 16.50
 depart Vienna 20.20, arrive London Heathrow 21.40

There may be flights to Varna from other UK airports, although these may not be at the same times as the group flights, and could require separate transfers to and from the hotel: please speak to us about options.

Bulgaria is two hours ahead of the UK.

Passport and Entry Requirements

Please note that travel rules may be changed by either the UK or Bulgarian government at any time. For up-to-date information, check www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/bulgaria

If you hold a British passport, you are able to travel to Bulgaria for up to 90 days in total in any 180-day period without a visa. Your passport must be issued less than 10 years before the date you enter the country (check the 'date of issue') and valid for at least 3 months after the day you plan to leave (check the 'expiry date').

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 23/01/2024

INCLUDED: Return flights from London to Bulgaria, local transport and entry fees on excursions as specified in the itinerary. Seven nights' accommodation, all meals from dinner day 1 to breakfast day 8. Services of leaders and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Gratuities. Travel insurance. Covid tests and associated costs.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Photos: front (clockwise from top): *Paeonia tenuifolia*, Whinchat, *Onosma taurica*, Pied Wheatear, *Iris pumila*. **inside** (left to right): *Adonis verna*, Eastern Green Lizard, White-winged Tern, Yailata, *Fritillaria pontica*, Nose-voaned Viper.

Trip reports from our previous visits to Bulgaria can be found on our website.