

Hungary and Bulgaria
12 to 26 June 2010
Led by Gerard Gorman & Yoav Chudnoff

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We are again offering our special “the best of two countries: Hungary and Bulgaria” program. These two countries will provide birders visiting Europe for the first time, or for that matter any birder, with a great spectrum of species and habitat.

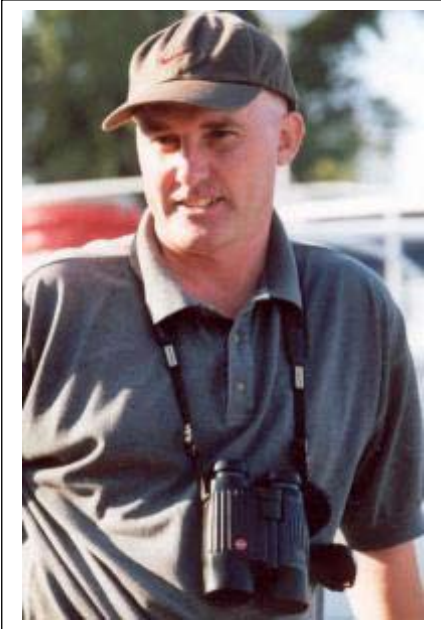
In Hungary, Gerard will put his 20 plus years of birding in Hungary to work providing you with insights that no one else can come close to. In Bulgaria, Yoav, along with leading conservationists from the Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds, shows you why Bulgaria's geographic location in Europe (Continental and Mediterranean climate) is so hospitable when it comes to the variety of species which can be found there.



As with all our birding trips, proceeds from this trip will be funding important raptor conservation projects in Bulgaria and Hungary.

Past Trips have funded: (a) Avi-fauna mapping in the Strandja Reserve; (b) Funding projects aiming at preserving habitat throughout the migratory byways (ie: Via Pontica & Via Aristotelis); (c) Imperial Eagle conservation and nest protection in the Sakar; (d) Publication of secondary school pamphlets encouraging conservation as well as creating an interest in birding; (e) The annual Bulgarian Youth Birding Olympics; (f) provisioning of carcasses at the Eastern Rhodope Vulture Feeding Station in close cooperation with BSPB Madjarovo Offices and (g) Administrative costs connected with Wind Farms placement evaluations and NATURA 2000, (h) Saker Falcon protection and research.

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ABOUT THE LEADERS



Originally from the UK, Gerard Gorman has lived in Hungary since the mid-1980s. He arrived in Budapest on an exchange scholarship and never left. A birdwatcher since childhood, he quickly realized that Hungary was exceptional for birds, and he set out to extensively explore his adopted country. Soon after, he started to make regular visits to neighboring Romania, Czechoslovakia (later to be split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia), and then to Croatia, Poland and Bulgaria.

He started to guide birders from Western Europe, and, as they say, the rest is history. When not guiding visitors, Gerard's main ornithological interest is in woodpeckers, in particular Syrian Woodpecker which he has spent several years studying. He has published numerous articles on the European Picidae, and indeed on other birds & birding, in international journals and magazines. He is author of five books including Woodpeckers of Europe (Bruce Coleman Books) The Birds of Hungary (Helm) and Birding in Eastern Europe (Wildsounds).

In 1995 he was awarded the Eric Hoskings Trust Writing Bursary for a project entitled "Birds and Political Change in Eastern Europe".



Yoav Chudnoff is an avid Birder, with a strong fascination with the Picidae. Yoav is involved in promoting Birding and Avifauna conservation in Bulgaria. He has been working as a volunteer representative of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) in the United States for the past 6 years as well as leading birding trips to Bulgaria. The BSPB is BirdLife International's Bulgarian partner.

His interest in Avifauna conservation stems from his 'side' interest in running a small family hotel, albeit stateside, in the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast town of Sinemoretz. The hotel participates in nature tourism and conservation and, in particular, birding. The area around Sinemoretz is rich in avifauna (140+ Species) as well as being home to 8 of the 10 picidae that can be found in Europe (all but Three-toed, Wryneck).

Because of his work with Bulgarian conservation organizations, in particular, the BSPB, the tours he offers are the only ones offered in the U.S. that are **100% fully endorsed and backed by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds.**

He has collaborated with Gerard Gorman on many occasions in the past concerning efforts in promoting Birding tourism in Bulgaria.

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ABOUT THIS TRIP:

This trip will focus on Hungary and Bulgaria. We will be visiting several key areas in Hungary (Kiskunsag, Bukk Hills and Hortobagy to name a few) and in Bulgaria (Danube River Basin, Bourgas Lakes, Eastern Rhodope, Sakar Flyway and more).

Though there is a short flight-time (around 1 hour) between the two, Hungary and Bulgaria are two very contrasting countries. Their histories, languages, cultures and cuisines differ greatly. Bird-wise and habitat-wise there are stark contrasts as well. For example, Hungary is land-locked and typified by large flat grasslands whereas Bulgaria has more rugged uplands and the impressive Black Sea coast. We believe these two birding destinations compliment each other perfectly and provide an opportunity to see a rich range of European lowland, upland, forest, wetland and coastal species.

For those that have an interest, all of the habitats we will be visiting offer nocturnal birding opportunities. As both Hungary and Bulgaria are world renowned wine producers, we'll also have a chance to sample some of the local offerings.

In Gerard's own words: "Hungary's population of over a thousand Great Bustards is crucial for the survival of the species in Central Europe ... Hungary also holds significant breeding populations of four other threatened species: Eastern Imperial Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Corncrake and Aquatic Warbler. Bulgaria has one of the richest and most diverse avifaunas in Europe and is worth a visit at almost any time of year."

GRADING & FITNESS

The walks are multi-graded from easy to moderate.

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Itinerary

June 12 2010: Arrive Budapest Airport. Meet with local guide and private bus & driver. Travel south-east a short way to the Kiskunsag National Park. The grasslands of eastern Hungary, called the puszta, are perhaps most famed for their Great Bustards and the Kiskunsag is one of the very best areas in Hungary for this species. If flight arrival times allow we may well go immediately in search of a flock that dwell on the flat grasslands and farmlands here. This magnificent species is Hungary's national bird. Birds around our hotel include Black Redstart, Crested Lark, Red-backed Shrike

June 13 2010: We have a full day in this flat, lowland area. If we did not have time yesterday to find the bustards, we will make that a priority this morning. Other grassland birds we should encounter include Eurasian Roller, Red-footed Falcon, Collared Pratincole, Lesser Grey Shrike, European Hoopoe, Common Quail, Grey Partridge, Eurasian Skylark and Corn Bunting. Our picnic lunch will be in a suitably birdy spot. Later we will explore several shallow salt-lakes and fish-ponds which host breeding herons, wildfowl, shorebirds, terns and warblers. We will bird on easy walks on flat terrain here and can expect to see White Stork, Western Marsh Harrier, Yellow-legged Gull, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Whiskered and Black Terns, Golden Oriole, Penduline Tit, Bearded Tit, Crested Lark, Bluethroat, River, Great Reed and Savi's Warblers and many others. Eurasian Rollers and European Bee-eaters are often roadside birds.

June 14 2010: Today we head north-eastwards to the Bukk Hills. On our journey (2 hours if done direct) we will stop at various bird sites. For example, for raptors such as Montagu's Harrier and Eastern Imperial Eagle and in wooded spots for Syrian and Black Woodpeckers, Common Nightingale and Barred Warbler. We will pass through many small villages and towns and see roadside nesting White Storks and how people in rural Hungary live. The grounds of our hotel will be worth birding as there are often may well be Wryneck, Middle Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers and Hawfinch in the garden. In the evening Scops Owl may call here, too. Two nights Bukk Hills.

June 15 2010: There will be an optional pre-breakfast walk for early birds. After breakfast we explore the hills, especially the clearings, pastures and oak-beech-hornbeam woods in the southern Bukk. A priority today will be Corncrake, a skulking bird of wet, grassy meadows. Other key birds here are Short-toed and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Eurasian Goshawk, Honey Buzzard, Black Stork, 8 species of woodpecker, Tawny and Ural Owls, Long-tailed and Marsh Tits, Wood Warbler, Red-breasted and Collared Flycatcher, Grey Wagtail and Rock Bunting. On one evening, there's the option of a visit to an old (over 100 years), traditional family run wine-cellar, the area we stay in is famous region for wine production.

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June 16 2010: Today we head south-eastward to the Great Plain, crossing the River Tisza to the famous Hortobagy region, one of Europe's great bird areas. Again, we will bird on route and stop for Saker Falcon, more Red-footed Falcons and nesting White Storks and various herons. Saker Falcon is another bird which is held in high esteem by Hungarians as it was something of a totem for the ancient Magyars. We may well take our lunch by Lake Tisza which will have Great Crested and Little Grebes, Purple, Grey, Squacco and Black-crowned Night Herons, more Western Marsh Harriers and various ducks. There's a chance of White-tailed Eagle here, too. (Today we will probably be joined by a member of the MME's Raptor Working Group who will show us some of the sites where raptor conservation work is on-going) Two nights Tiszafured.

June 17 2010: The grasslands, marshes and fish-farms of the Hortobagy National Park abound in birds. Red-footed Falcons nest in loose colonies and are particularly photogenic. Numerous fish-pond systems here teem with birds: expect Pygmy Cormorant, Red-necked Grebe, Great White and Little Egrets, more herons, Common and Little Bitterns, Eurasian Spoonbill, Spotted Redshank, Icterine, Moustached, Marsh, Savi's and Great Reed Warblers. Puszta birds include Tawny Pipit, the blue-headed race of Yellow Wagtail, Little Owl, Eurasian Stone Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit and Lesser Grey Shrike. Raptors include Long-legged Buzzard, Montagu's Harrier and Saker Falcon. The Hortobagy also has extensive marshes and smaller brackish lakes with Black-necked Grebe, Garganey, Ferruginous Duck, Black and White-winged Black Terns. Water Rail and Little Crake will almost certainly call and may even show themselves. On one morning we'll enter a strictly protected area to see the rare and endangered Aquatic Warbler. We should also encounter Common Cranes and passage waders such as Ruff in breeding plumage and Green and Wood Sandpipers. All in all almost anything is possible in this internationally important area.

June 18 2010: Head for Budapest (2-3 hours) for flight transfer to Bourgas, Bulgaria. Upon arrival in Bourgas, we will drive to Madjarovo (220 km – 3-4 hours) with stops for birding en-route. The eastern Rhodope is a mountain of jagged peaks, towering cliffs and sparsely vegetated, boulder-strewn slopes. The most spectacular residents are the Griffon Vultures, inhabiting the crater of an ancient volcano. Cinereous and Egyptian Vultures and White-tailed Eagle are also visitors of the feeding tables. You will see many Black Storks nesting on the cliffs. Chukars often stand sentinel on rocky hillsides. The shrill whistles of Rock Nuthatches and the song of the Ortolan Bunting are heard everywhere. Other typically Balkan birds, like Pallid Swift, Red-rumped Swallow, Blue Rock Thrush, Black-eared Wheatear, Orphean, Subalpine and Olivaceous Warblers, Sombre Tit and Black-headed Bunting are here, too. Two Nights accommodation in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains.

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June 19 2010: We continue to explore the region around Madjarovo and Studen Kladenetz for Cinereous Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture – all regular visitors at the Vulture Feeding Site - Black Stork, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Chukar, Scops Owl, Red-rumped Swallow, Woodchat Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Sardinian Warbler, Subalpine Warbler, Barred Warbler, Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, Blue Rock Thrush, Black-eared Wheatear, Rock Nuthatch and Sombre Tit to name just a few.

June 20 2010: Drive to the southern Black Sea coast, with stops in the Sakar & Strandja Mountains, where we will be looking for Eastern Imperial Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk, Masked Shrike, Olive-tree Warbler and Orphean Warbler. The Sakar and Strandja Mountains are located in the south-east of Bulgaria, bordering on Turkey. The Sakar is an area of rounded hills and open valleys, where most of the lowland is a step-like grassland with scattered trees, and agricultural plots. The Sakar is also Bulgaria's Eastern Imperial Eagle stronghold. We will have a traditional lunch in a small village in the Sakar Mountains in order to support the conservation project for this raptor and to help raise local awareness of its importance. Accommodation in the Bourgas area for two nights

June 21 2010: Wetlands around Bourgas: Bourgas Lake, Mandra Lake & Poda lagoon, Pomorie Lake and Atanasovsko Lake. We will explore the wetlands boulder-strewn slopes, the most spectacular being around Bourgas, Ortolan Bunting are heard everywhere here as well as many other typically Balkan songbirds. The saline lagoons here still have some traditional saltpans which are of major importance for huge numbers of birds, including Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Broad-billed and Curlew Sandpipers, Marsh Sandpiper, Kentish Plover, Slender-billed and Mediterranean Gulls, Gull-billed Tern and many other waterfowl and wader species. The lush vegetation embracing the freshwater lakes of Mandra and Vaya and the surrounding reedbeds swarm with life - the air resounds with the song of Savi's, Marsh, Great Reed and Cetti's Warblers, whilst Golden Orioles flash through waterside poplars and Penduline Tits attend their fantastic hanging nests. Watching the life in the lakes inevitably creates the impression that they are created for the birds - Ruddy Shelduck, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Pygmy Cormorant, Squacco, Black-crowned Night and Purple Herons, White-winged Black Terns and many others.

June 22 2010: Drive to the northern coast via Goritca oak forests and Kamchia riverine forests: White-tailed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Black Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper, Barred Warbler, Hawfinch, Blue, March and Great Tits and, possibly Semi-collared Flycatcher. Accommodation around Balchik for three nights

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June 23 2010: Srebarna Lake on the Danube river: The Srebarna Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a freshwater lake adjacent to the Danube and extending over 600 ha. It is the breeding ground of almost 100 species of birds, many of which are rare or endangered. Dalmatian Pelican, several species of heron, Little Egret, Great White Egret, Glossy Ibis, Pygmy Cormorant, Ferruginous Duck, Whiskered Tern, Red-footed Falcon, Penduline Tit.

June 24 2010: Morning: Durankulak Lake and Shabla lakes. Durankulak is one of the best- preserved coastal wetlands in Bulgaria with international importance for the protection of over 260 endemic, rare and endangered species of plants and animals. The Shabla lakes are one of the largest wintering grounds of Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) and White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) in Europe: Little Egret, Pygmy Cormorant, Ferruginous Duck, Red-footed Falcon, Collared Pratincole, Paddyfield Warbler, other migrating & summering species of shorebirds, gulls and terns. In the afternoon we will visit Cape Kaliakra and Yailata steppes and cliffs. Both Cape Kaliakra and the Yailata steppes are archeological reserves – Kaliakra is the site of ancient ruins and fortresses situated in what is thought to be the largest surviving steppes in Bulgaria: European Shag (the Mediterranean ssp. *desmarestii*), Mediterranean Shearwater, Stone Curlew, Eagle Owl, Levant Sparrowhawk, Alpine Swift, Short-toed Lark, Calandra Lark, Tawny Pipit, Isabelline Wheatear, Pied Wheatear, and, possibly, Rose-coloured Starling.

June 25 2010: Drive to Bourgas with stops (depending on departure time. Depart from Bourgas Airport to Budapest. Arrival in Budapest; Afternoon and Evening Free.

June 26 2010: Transfer to Airport and depart for home.

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TRIP INFORMATION

Practical Information

Seasonal Climate – Both Hungary and Bulgaria's climate is continental, and warm sunny days can be expected (with daytime temperatures rising to around 75-80° F). It will be cooler in the mountains, (sweaters, windbreaker, light coat is recommended) - where rain or showers are always a possibility.

VISA INFORMATION

A valid passport whose expiration is no sooner than 6 months after date of entry in either Hungary or Bulgaria. Visas for American and UK citizens are not required. However, it is recommended to contact the local Consul of either country prior to departure for any changes to entry into either country. Additional information concerning visas may be found at either country's embassy website.

PACKING FOR THE TRIP

Luggage: One main piece of baggage and a rucksack for carrying items during the day walks.

Clothing: Pack essential late spring and early summer clothing, although some medium weights are needed for spring; warm fleece or sweater throughout the season as temperatures are lower in the mountains- particularly at night. Rainwear may also be needed.

Footwear: Comfortable walking boots and trainers or sandals.

Equipment: Insect repellent, sunscreen and sun hat. Binoculars are a must. (A telescope and tripod would be useful though our leaders will also show group members birds through their 'scope'.)

WHAT'S INCLUDED

All meals (except last day in Hungary), packed picnic lunches, transportation and accommodation in 2*/3* accommodations, RT Airfare Budapest-Bourgas-Budapest. Membership in both the BSPB and MMS is included in the price of the trip. (You will also receive a BSPB T-Shirt as well!

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

Alcoholic beverages, RT airfare & airport taxes to Hungary, items of a personal nature, tips, souvenirs and etc. Last night dinner in Budapest (Free Day). Bottled

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water will be provided at all meals, however, extras, such as additional beverages may be charged depending on the program.

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WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN THIS TOUR

Above and beyond receiving a great education and insight by one of Europe's leading birders, this tour will help fund the following projects:

Hungary: 1) Magyar Madártani és Természetvédelmi Egyesület (MME/BirdLife International's Hungarian Partner) Raptor Conservation.

Bulgaria: Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds (BSPB/BirdLife International's Bulgarian Partner) 1) Egyptian Vulture, Griffon Vulture & Imperial Eagle conservation in Eastern Rhodope Mountains; 2) BSPB administrative costs to be used in work of coastal habitat protection and other vital projects.

PRICING: \$3485.00 pp - \$360.00 single room supplement.

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ITINERARY MAP OF REGIONS TO BE VISITED IN HUNGARY



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ITINERARY MAP OF REGIONS TO BE VISITED IN BULGARIA

