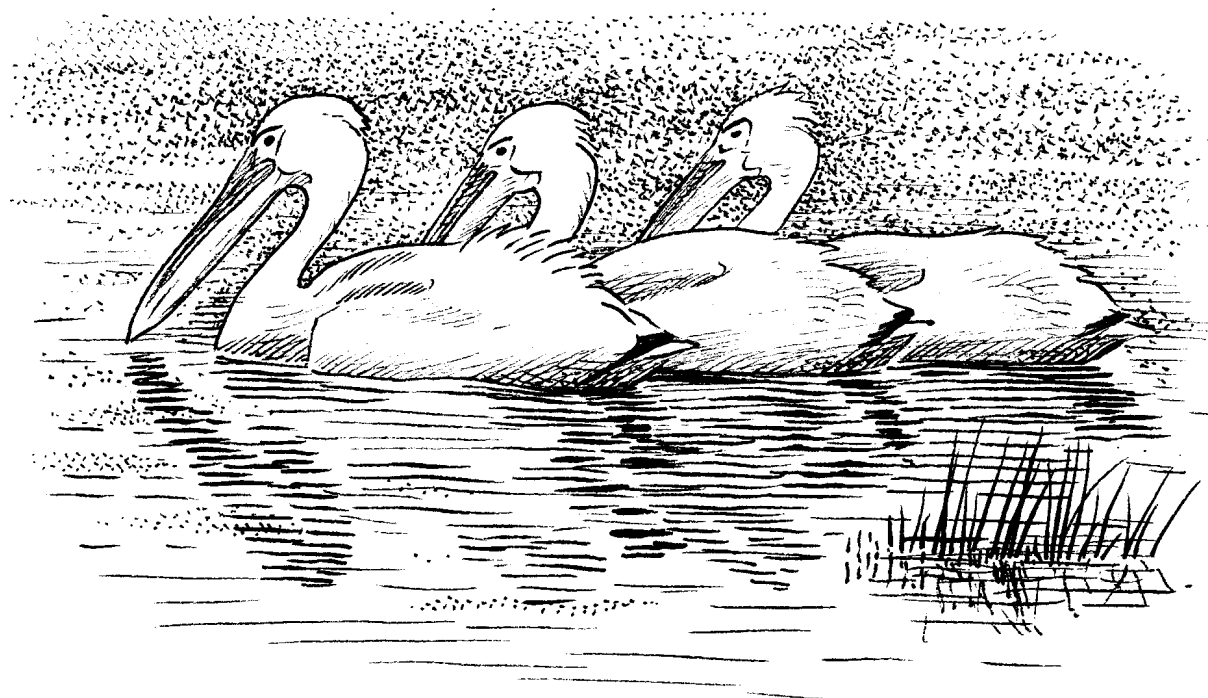


Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

36 Thunder Lane Thorpe St Andrew Norwich NR7 0PX
Telephone and Fax 01603 300552 Evenings and weekends



Danube Delta
3 – 10 June 2000

DANUBE DELTA

3-10 June 2000

The group

George Preston	London
Christopher Burnett	Derbyshire
Brenda Owen	Wokingham
Delphine Hoyle	Wokingham
Zsuzsi Yardley	London
William Syrett	London
Mary Smart	London
William Elliot	Teddington
Elizabeth Elliot	
Peter Newell	West Sussex
Shirley Newell	

Leaders

David Collins	Bury St Edmunds
Daniel Petrescu	Tulcea, Romania
Mihai Petrescu	Tulcea, Romania

Report by David Collins, incorporating plant list supplied by Mihai Petrescu

With commiserations to Stephanie Davies who had to withdraw shortly before the holiday.

This holiday, as for every *Honeyguide* holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. The conservation contribution this year of £25 per person, £300, was given to the young ornithologists group in Tulcea, *Falco cherrug* (the saker falcon). This brings the total given to various conservation projects in Europe to more than £2,755 in 2000, and £20,180 since the start of Honeyguide. A thank-you letter from ROS appears at the end of this report.

Illustrations by Rob Hume. Cover: white pelicans

DANUBE DELTA

3-10 June 2000

Saturday 3rd June – Bucharest to Tulcea

Brenda and Delphine arrived at Gatwick with the unfortunate news that their friend Stephanie Davies was unable to join us due to illness. The group boarding the aircraft therefore numbered 12.

After what seemed like hardly any time at all we were arriving at Bucharest airport. Having negotiated customs we were soon spread out on the roomy Ibis minibus and on our way east through gently rolling countryside. There was plenty to see on the way, and we quickly learnt that Mihai was very knowledgeable about many things apart from flowers. We passed through delightful villages: each house with a garden consisting of vegetables, a few flowers, and a number of trees. Mihai explained that the trees were to provide shade in the hot summer, to provide a little shelter in the very cold winters, and also to provide timber for building! Some of them, of course, also provided fruit. It seems everything in Romania is put to good use.

The fields were a mix of big state owned fields and narrow strips of privately owned land. We noticed that modern agricultural vehicles were rare: the standard transport is still horse drawn wooden carts. Towards Tulcea we began to pass through steppe country, most of which is now farmed. On the borders of fields and beside the road there were many colourful flowers, including the lovely blue Eastern Larkspur. There were also numerous bronze-age burial mounds, while bird interest was provided by occasional Rollers on the wires, and a single Lesser Grey Shrike.

Five hours from Bucharest, including a stop half way for refreshments, we arrived in Tulcea. We dumped belongings in the Hotel Europolis and then took the short walk to the Restaurant Select for our first Romanian meal.

Sunday 4th June – Mahmudia, Saraturi and Plopu

The hotel is basic but the beds comfortable and the plumbing good, though a wedding party downstairs meant a disturbed night for some. Breakfast of bread, jam and omelettes was good, and soon it was nine o'clock and the minibus was outside. We were soon out of Tulcea, with the outlying marshes of the Danube delta to our left and the peasant farmers busy at work in the fields to the right. Immediately there were interesting birds: Whiskered Terns flitting low over a field, and a Syrian Woodpecker dashing across in front of us to land on a telegraph pole. It was tempting to stop every few yards, but Daniel had a stop in mind near the village of Victoria. We pulled off the road by a low sand quarry and watched spellbound as 40 or more Bee-eaters swooped and pirouetted around us or perched by their nest holes. What wonderful colours. Also in residence was a pair of Rollers, and we all had fine views in the telescope. On the other side of the road a Little Owl perched on a telegraph pole for all to see. It watched us intently with those staring yellow eyes at first, but soon got bored with us and spent the rest of our time there looking the other way. A Hobby, Long-legged Buzzard and two overflying Dalmatian Pelicans were also seen, and there were both Tree Sparrows and Corn Buntings.



Meanwhile, Mihai was busy with the flowers, and we noted a confusing mix of ruderal species and typical steppe species (see list at end). Pick of the flowers for me was a pretty little blue flowered flax *Linum austriacum*.

The next stop was in the Bestepe Hills above the little port of Mahmudia. From here there was a wonderful view over the great watery expanse of the Danube Delta. The hills are not cultivated, so they have a relict steppe flora. Most noticeable were the white spikes of Grecian Foxglove, also a delightful yellow-flowered Yarrow *Achillea depressa* and a rare little Pink *Dianthus nardiflorus*. Given the number and variety of flowers, there were surprisingly few butterflies. Rather elusive brown ones proved in the end to be Meadow Browns when I finally managed to catch one in the net. In view of the energy I had expended in catching one, Daniel was much amused to learn that it is one of the commonest butterflies in England. A larger and much more showy butterfly proved to be Silver-washed Fritillary. This was to prove one of the commonest butterflies of the trip, and we saw it everywhere except in the Delta itself.

It seems as though the hills attract birds of prey. We watched three red-footed Falcons mobbing a pale phase Booted Eagle, and a little while later most of us had superb views of a White-tailed Eagle that dwarfed an attendant Long-legged Buzzard. A Tawny Pipit sang his monotonous “too-lee” song, and gave reasonable views, and three Hawfinches zipped past and disappeared into some scrub. Finally, Daniel pointed out what could only be described as a swarm of White Pelicans wheeling over a lake out in the delta. There were certainly many hundreds if not thousands of birds – this is the only place in Europe where it is possible to see such a site, and it provided a mouth-watering taste of things to come.

By now it was getting hot, and we were all glad to climb back into the minibus and hand round bottles of mineral water from the cool box. We then proceeded to our first wetland habitat of the day – the saline Lake Saraturi. We had been warned about mosquitoes, but fortunately there was a stiff breeze that kept them at bay as well as reducing the temperature to acceptable levels. On the lake there was a number of Black-necked Grebes among the Pochard and other waterfowl. Around the margins were Black-winged Stilts, and a number of Mediterranean Gulls, which evidently nest here. Great Reed Warblers sang all around us and one even perched high in a reed for all to see. Meanwhile, Mihai pointed out a range of salt-tolerant plants, and a Bath White butterfly was trapped. Soon it was lunchtime, and we settled under the shade of roadside trees to eat our packed lunches. As with all the roads in the area, there was virtually no traffic, and what there was was mainly horse drawn.

After lunch we moved on to another lake at Plopul. Birds of interest here included a party of about 30 Little Gulls sitting out the heat on a muddy promontory, a single Golden Plover in smart breeding dress, and a pair of rather distant Kentish Plovers. Again, there were plenty of Black-winged Stilts, and also a few Avocets.

Last stop of the day was at a marshy roadside spot by the Gulf of Fundea. There were good close views of a pair of Ferruginous Ducks and several male Garganey, also a small party of Ruff and overflying Purple Herons and Spoonbills. A roadside ditch was full of frogs, mostly the greenish, striped Edible/Pool frogs, but also a few Eastern Spadefoot Toads that were brown and spotty.

Monday 5th June

First stop of the day was at a Poplar grove near the Denisla Hills. This was a site for Spanish Sparrow, which we duly spotted among the more familiar House Sparrows. There were also good views of Lesser Grey Shrike and Syrian Woodpecker. A Golden Oriole was singing in the trees, but proved typically elusive. We then drove the short distance up a track to the base of the hills where we watched a Long-legged Buzzard hunting Susliks. There were plenty of Susliks near the bus, and we had good views of a Short-toed Lark. There were also distant views of a Short-toed Eagle, so the hill was renamed the Short-toed Hill! Eastern Larkspur and Delphinium created patches of colour in the crops.

We then headed south through the historic town of Babadag, which has a substantial Turkish population and has the oldest Mosque in Romania, built in 1522 but now abandoned. However, it was the forested hills beyond the town that were our aim. No sooner had we stopped than a Silver-washed Fritillary was trying to get in the van. It failed, but it did make it into the butterfly pot for close

inspection. This species was abundant, and we also found Marbled Fritillary. A Nightingale was singing from dense forest on one side of the road, but we followed a track on the opposite side, where Mihai was soon in full flow, telling us about the many species of tree to be found here in this typical example of Balkanic Forest. For the more ornithologically inclined it proved to be difficult to take all this in because there seemed to be Hawfinches everywhere. As usual they proved hard to see, but Daniel spotted one high in a tree. It was only a silhouette and it was facing away, but its stocky build and incredibly thick neck were sufficient to identify it, and it stood still long enough for most of the group to see it through the telescope.

A little further down the track, an unfamiliar, rather tit-like song, proved to be the song of a Red-breasted Flycatcher. A young male unfortunately, with not a trace of red on the breast. A little further again and we heard the manic song of an Icterine Warbler. This one was a particularly fine mimic, and we picked out calls or song phrases of Golden Oriole, Bee-eater, Song Thrush, Swallow and Corn Bunting among many others.

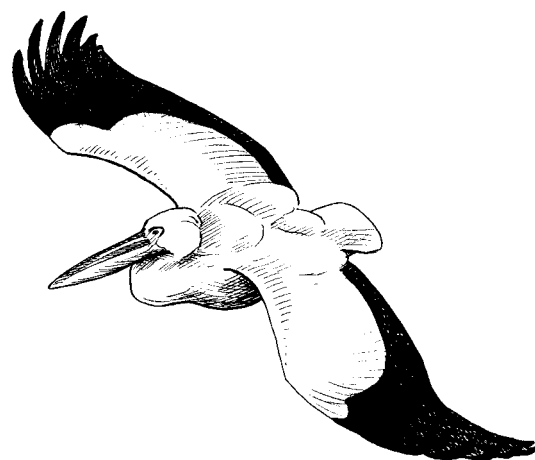
We had left Shirley at the entrance to the wood with instructions on how to identify a Levant Sparrowhawk should a Sparrowhawk species appear overhead. We now returned to find that she had not let us down. She had seen what proved to be the only Levant Sparrowhawk of the week. One up to her.

The remarkable thing about this forest is the way in which it changes character over a very short distance. Driving a few miles further south we came to dryer, steppe forest with many different tree species. We again split naturally into two groups, with Mihai leading the more botanically inclined into the thicker part of the forest, while Daniel and I took the birdwatchers down what ironically proved to be a flower rich track. However, it was really hot now, and the botanists were perhaps the better rewarded, with plants such as Birds-nest Orchid, Violet Birds-nest Orchid and Red Helleborine. Birdwatching was rather difficult, but we did hear a churring Nightjar (!) and there were plenty of Oortolans singing in the scrub. Best of all though was what we all agreed to be a spectacularly ugly bush cricket. It was bronzy-black; about four inches long and very stockily built.

The group met up lower down the track at the parked minibus, and then set off again for a short, hot walk to the lunch-stop. Chris spotted a fine Ilex Hairstreak butterfly, and Chestnut Heath was numerous. There was a whole range of other butterflies too, including Grayling and Silver-studded Blue. A few of the group had brief views of Sombre Tit, but they proved very elusive. Even when seen, this species is not very spectacular: rather like a Great Tit with all the colour washed out.

Lunch can best be described as idyllic. The bus driver had found a shady patch under the trees, and there was a wonderful spread of cheese, sausage, succulent sliced cucumbers and tomatoes, and bread. To follow was a huge pile of ripe cherries. Several members of the group mentioned this as one of the best moments in the week. Daniel pointed out a Golden Oriole's nest made partially from toilet paper (!), and Mary found a fine male Green Lizard with a deep blue head, that posed long enough to have its photograph taken.

After lunch we pressed on to the marshes at Histria. Here the road crosses the marsh to a famous archaeological site. There is a thin fringe of reeds beside the road, and beyond that a series of what were now half dried-up pools which were very productive for birds. The small waders were mainly Little Stints, but with a scattering of Curlew Sandpipers and Marsh Sandpipers. We spent some time here explaining how each of the different waders could be identified. At the back of one pool was a fine group of White Pelicans, with two Dalmatian Pelicans at one end for easy comparison. Through the telescope we also had good views of a Caspian Tern perched at the water's edge, and overhead 30 or so Collared Pratincoles were feeding on flying insects. From time to time a few more Pelicans would fly gracefully in over our heads, and we would get an impression of their enormous size as they swept in low over the waders.

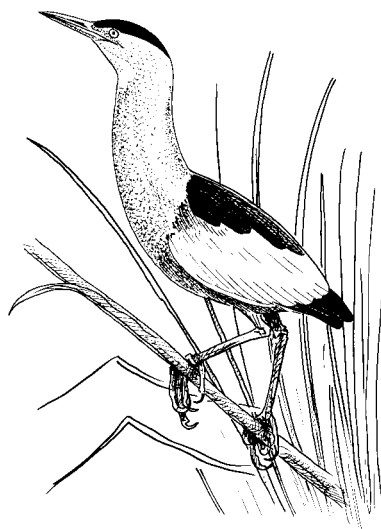


Further on, a large dead snake proved to be a Dice Snake, which is the south-east European version of the Grass Snake. Daniel told us that this was a good spot for Paddyfield Warbler, a rare species in Europe. However, although several small warblers flitted across the road, none settled in view, and we were not able to convince ourselves that they were anything more exciting than ordinary Reed Warblers. Still, with Spoonbills and Great White Egrets flying about, gaudily plumaged Blue-headed and Black-headed Wagtails in the pasture and a Hoopoe perched on a distant tree, it hardly mattered.

Tuesday 6th June

After breakfast we again headed south. The first stop of the day was unplanned: Daniel had spotted a large bird of prey, and we all clambered out of the minibus in time to watch a magnificent Lesser Spotted Eagle gliding quite low directly overhead. This prompted a discussion on eagle identification, and I hope Daniel and I managed to explain why it was a Lesser Spotted. The first planned stop was at a White Stork's nest on the top of a telegraph pole, clearly an old nest and very large. So large in fact that there was room not only for four chicks on the top, but also a whole colony of Spanish and House Sparrows down below.

A little further on we stopped by a group of poplars that are home to a Red-footed Falcon colony in a rookery, the falcons evidently find old Rook's nests much to their liking. Here we were able to watch the fine slate-grey males and paler plumaged females flying around in good numbers. Even better though were the close views of several females perched in the trees. They really are handsome birds with their finely barred grey upperparts and creamy-orange head and underparts. Also in the trees was a family of Long-eared Owls: an adult perched against a tree trunk, and three youngsters of various ages peering sleepily at us from their hiding places lower down.



The next stop was Vadu, an extensive area of reed and marsh, with a series of artificial pools. This proved to be a particularly rewarding birdwatching area and there was a good range of wetland species. There were plenty of Purple Herons and Spoonbills flying over, and occasionally a Little Bittern (pictured) would fly up from reeds nearby. At one pool there were many very young Dice Snakes. These were so small that one was actually eaten by a large Frog! Another, much larger pool had a breeding colony of Collared Pratincoles, and we watched their mating behaviour through our telescopes. Other pools produced a Gull-billed Tern a single Ruddy Shelduck, Marsh Sandpipers, Night Heron, and Glossy Ibis. Best of all though were two pairs of White-tailed Plovers. It is a very rare bird in Romania, and this is the first time that the species has settled to nest anywhere in Europe, so we were very lucky to see them. Not only are they rare, they are also very handsome. They have long yellow legs, creamy-buff

head and upperparts and white underparts, while in flight they have a bold black and white pattern. Interestingly, I later learnt that several White-tailed Plovers had (very unusually) been seen in Lesbos in the spring, and it seems quite likely that these would have been the same birds.

This was another site where we searched in vain for Paddyfield Warbler. However, Chris and I did spot a Marsh Warbler: identifiable by its mimetic song, long primary extension and Reed Warbler-like supercilium. The only butterfly of note here was Large Copper. This is a fine insect, and it is a great pity that it is extinct in England.

By now it was nearly time for lunch, so we climbed back into the minibus, and were driven down a rough track to a remote spot in the dunes on the Black Sea coast. En route Mihai spotted Lax-flowered Orchid, so there was a brief stop to admire it. At the beach most of the party paddled and Chris tried swimming but found the water rather gritty. Offshore we were very surprised to see an Arctic Skua harrying the local Sandwich Terns, and a Caspian tern flew by. The top prize here though goes to Bill Syrett, who found a fine seashell that we were all very envious of.

It was a hot day again, and after another excellent lunch we were glad to be back in the air-conditioned minibus. We were driven inland on quiet country lanes for about two hours, during which journey I think most of us fell asleep. A pair of Calandra Larks flying in front of the bus rewarded those who stayed awake. The countryside was open, flat steppeland the whole way, but then we suddenly began to descend into a limestone gorge. This was Cheile Gorge: our next stop. Back out in the heat, we soon had our first views of a splendid male Pied Wheatear singing from a rock. There were several pairs here, and also a pair of Common Wheatears with recently fledged young. Our second Lesser Spotted Eagle of the day flew over, and Daniel spotted a Kestrel's nest in a hole in a cliff. Mihai lead some of the group on a botanical excursion down the gorge. Rarer plants included no less than two species of *Moehringia* growing on a rock outcrop, both of which have very restricted ranges.

There were plenty of Susliks, but they proved difficult to photograph. Only Chris had enough patience to wait for them to emerge again after they had bolted down their holes. Butterflies proved hard to catch, but finally we had a fine Chequered Blue in the butterfly pot. There were also some much larger, rather spectacular looking blues, but they proved too difficult for a tired, hot leader to catch!

All in all, this site proved to be a diverting stop, and it was 7 o'clock by the time we had all climbed back into the bus. It was going to be quite a late dinner. It was also going to be our first dinner on board the pontoon. Our luggage had now been transferred there, and after quickly settling into our new accommodation, we congregated in the comfortable dining area on the top deck.

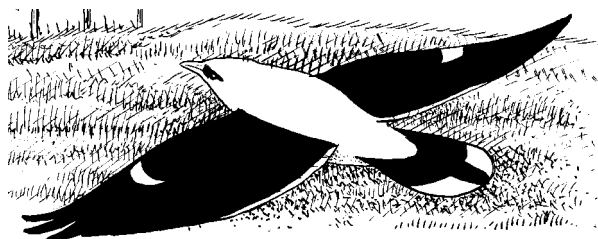
Wednesday 7th June

Pre-breakfast there was a Syrian Woodpecker in the tree opposite our mooring in Tulcea, and Banded Demoiselle Dragonflies perched daintily on the jetty. These were to be a constant feature over the next three days as we explored the backwaters of the Danube Delta.

Having breakfasted we boarded the smaller observation boat and set off down the Danube, passing the assorted rusting hulks of barges, patrol boats and naval vessels. After a short while we turned into the much narrower Mila 35 channel, with willows and poplars on either side. The boat's engine was cut, and we had arrived in one of Europe's last great wilderness areas. Redstarts sang all around us, Little Egrets fished in the shallows under the trees, and Kingfishers perched on overhanging branches. Continuing down the channel, there were our first close views of Glossy Ibis, Squacco Heron, and Night Heron. A splendid Red-necked Grebe swam just in front of the boat, and White Pelicans passed over in groups of up to a hundred. A tall, yellow flowered plant on the bank was identified as Marsh Spurge, and there was also Flowering Rush. Penduline Tits were heard every few hundred metres, but none were seen. Also seen but not heard were Thrush Nightingales, distinguished from Nightingales by their much slower delivery – like a Nightingale at half speed.

An unexpected personal highlight was a Black Woodpecker preening in the dead top of a willow taking not the slightest notice as we glided past. A real bonus this, as it is normally a difficult bird to see. There were plenty of Rollers too, either perched in treetops or flying over the channel in front of us. Soon we began to see Pygmy Cormorants: much smaller the Cormorants with short necks, bulging heads, and distinctly quicker wing-beats. We saw more and more pelicans, and then finally, at a point where two channels met, there was a party of perhaps 200 on the water in front of us, together with many Pygmy Cormorants. We approached to within 200m: a really spectacular sight.

Continuing towards Lake Fortuna, birds of prey flying over the boat included a fine White-tailed Eagle, Hobby, Red-footed falcon, and an Osprey: the first one Daniel had seen that year. We also saw the rufous form of Cuckoo, and a Golden Oriole flew alongside the boat before disappearing into treetops.



Arriving in Daniel's home village of Maliuc at lunchtime, we were surprised to see that our pontoon had not yet arrived. A phone call confirmed that the tug's engine had failed, and that it would be a few

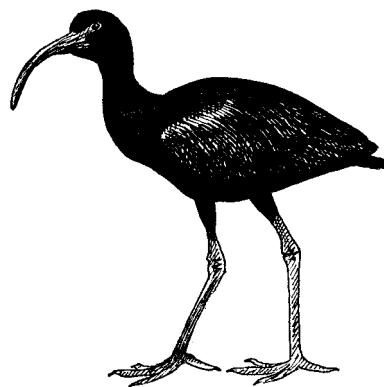
hours before it arrived. Daniel rose to the challenge, however, and lunch soon materialised. We ate it under the trees of the riverside park. An obliging Grey-headed Woodpecker searched for ants close by, and both Great Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers were also feeding in the trees. There were also a number of Olivaceous Warblers, a fine male Redstart, and a Stork's nest afforded good photographic opportunities.

After lunch there was still no sign of the pontoon, so we set out on a slow amble through the wetlands adjacent to the village. It was hot though, so we didn't get very far. Penduline Tits were again elusive, though we did see a nest. Plants included Frogbit and Greater Bladderwort.

Returning to the village, we were relieved to see that the pontoon had finally arrived. To make up some time, it was decided that we would head downstream on the pontoon to Caraorman. After freshening up, we therefore had dinner as we made our way down the main channel of the Danube. After dinner we sat out on the deck, with Whiskered Terns all around. Eventually, the tug led us off the main channel and we passed a small group of Black-tailed Godwits and a stray White-fronted Goose before mooring at the end of the channel near the village of Caraorman itself in failing light. Although we were now in the heart of the delta, the setting was not quite so idyllic as it might sound. Towering above us were the cranes and buildings of a metal extraction plant that had never been finished! The idea had been to extract metals from the sand: an uneconomic proposal that had stopped in its tracks when Ceaucescu was deposed. Thank goodness for common sense, otherwise this part of the delta would have been destroyed.

Thursday 8th June

Two intrepid enthusiasts (George Preston and Bill Elliot) joined me for a pre-breakfast walk around the bizarre surroundings. Black Redstarts, ever appreciative of ugly buildings, were singing from the cranes and half-complete warehouses, although they proved difficult to spot. Behind the buildings was a series of artificial pools where there was a good variety of birds including three male Red-crested Pochards, several Ferruginous Ducks, a pair of Glossy Ibis, Avocets, Black-winged Stilts and the ever present Whiskered Terns. Perhaps the best bird though was a Hobby that flew close by giving good views.



After breakfast we set out through the village of Caraorman. Daniel explained that this was predominantly a Ukrainian village, and very attractive it was too with its wooden houses and carefully tended gardens. Luckily for us it was Ascension Day, and the local tradition on this day is to give gifts to travellers. Since we were likely to be the only travellers passing that way for some time (there is no road to the village), we were showered with gifts of painted eggs and thick slices of cake. Having just finished breakfast it was no easy matter to eat all this but we managed somehow! It was interesting to stop and chat (through Mihai) to some of the inhabitants. One old lady wanted to compare pensions and prices with Delphine and Brenda and was amazed to learn that anywhere could be more expensive than Caraorman.

We returned to the pontoon and set off towards Mila 23, lurching en route. Before re-joining the main channel we boarded the observation boat for a delightful short journey through narrow channels to a small lake. Here we learnt about floating reed islands and their impact on navigation within the delta. Marsh Fern, which is apparently a typical component of these islands, seemed bigger and lusher than at home in the fens.

Back on the pontoon, we continued on a quiet channel north of Mila 23 and eventually moored on the edge of the reeds at a junction with another channel. A few White Pelicans sat on a branch out in the channel, and watched us unconcernedly. Then we boarded the observation boat again and set off down the side channel to a small nesting colony. Here we had close views of Night Heron, Squacco Heron and Pygmy Cormorant at the nest. We drifted among water lilies with Red-necked Grebes and Whiskered terns all around us, together with our only Black Terns of the holiday. It was a lovely calm evening, and we could hear the distant reeling of a Savi's Warbler – very like a Grasshopper Warbler

but with a lower pitch. Back at the pontoon there was time for a quick beer on the deck before dinner. The White Pelicans were still perched on their branch, a Penduline Tit was still calling from the willow to which we were moored, and we still couldn't see it!

Friday 9th June

The group was out on deck before breakfast to soak up the atmosphere of our last morning in the Delta. Another Savi's Warbler was reeling nearby, but try as we might we could not see it. However, a pair of Bearded Tits gave good views in the reeds nearby, and there was a constant stream of birds flying this way and that overhead. There were literally hundreds of both Pygmy and ordinary Cormorants. It reminded me of the rush hour in London. Various herons also passed over in smaller numbers, including both Purple and Night Heron.

The White Pelicans had now been joined by a few Herring Gulls and through the telescope we were able to confirm what we had started to suspect: they all had pink legs. In this part of the world they should have yellow legs, but we never saw one with legs that could really be described as yellow. Back home I checked every book I could find, but they all agree that only Yellow-legged Gulls (a recently split species) occur in Romania. It looks as though somebody needs to do some research!

After breakfast we made the short journey down the channel to the village at Mila 23. En route we heard more Savi's Warblers and sharp-eyed Shirley spotted one singing from the top of a reed. We also heard both Greater Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers calling. Someone asked how you distinguish the two. Having been put on the spot, I decided that the call of a Syrian is like a Great Spotted calling from inside a teapot!

We moored at Mila 23 and had an interesting walk through this Lipovan village (Russian Orthodox). The Lipovans fled from Russia in the late 18th century to escape religious persecution, and have been here ever since. The village has no agriculture as such, and 90% of the families live by fishing, although there are a few cattle. The old wooden church was destroyed during an exceptional flood, although the altar and domed wooden tower still stand. The tower looks very unsafe, but a typically fair-haired Lipovan boy climbed to the top and waved from the upper balcony. We later saw him carrying home pigeon chicks for the pot.

The communists did not allow churches to be built, so the local people were faced with a dilemma. They solved it by constructing a new church close by almost overnight. There were attractive frescos on the doors and porch.

Olivaceous Warblers were common here, and there were also Lesser Whitethroats with a rather different song to the ones at home. A Caspian Tern flew over.

We re-boarded the pontoon and set off on the long journey through the back channels towards Tulcea. We moored near Lake Fortuna in the late morning beside a belt of willows. Yet another Penduline Tit teased us here, and we had close views of a spectacular orange and black butterfly with a purple sheen. This was a local subspecies of the Lesser Purple Emperor.

This was the first day of the fishing season, so lunch was three courses of fish! Not to everyone's taste but some of the group seemed to be in their element. After lunch we set off on a final excursion in the observation boat. This time the channels were so narrow that willow branches all but impeded our progress, and it was with some relief that we emerged into a shallow lake. Here was a party of about 150 Black-tailed Godwits and a few White pelicans. After lunch I decided on a quick snooze down below. I emerged to find that we were on the move again, and that the rest of the party had had excellent close views of the Penduline Tit at its nest in the willow. I concluded that there are good times and bad times to have a nap.

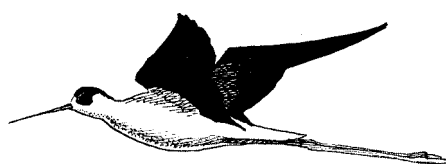
The rest of the journey back to Tulcea was very relaxed. There were more Rollers, Glossy Ibis, Squacco Herons, Pygmy Cormorants and Red-footed Falcons, but these were all familiar now, and we just soaked up the atmosphere. The mood was typified by Chris, who sat with his legs dangling over the side of the pontoon, beer to one side and binoculars resting on the other – just in case. There was one flurry of excitement though. We made a collection for the leaders and crew, and in the process a

gust of wind snatched a twenty-pound note from my hand and deposited it in the Danube. Now £20 is no small amount in Romania, and Daniel, who had seen what had happened, quickly set off in pursuit in the observation boat. It transpired that they had spotted it just as it sank irretrievably into the depths of the Danube.

Daniel's father Eugen, who is the Romanian Ornithological Society's conservation officer for the Danube Delta, joined us for dinner. Afterwards we presented him with a number of field guides for the local young ornithologists group, and he in turn presented us with a number of posters. We thanked our Romanian guides for a memorable week.

Saturday 10th June

After a last night on the Danube, we boarded the minibus and headed back towards Bucharest. There was just time for a quick stop at a roadside lake (Ghiolul Hazardic). This seemed to hold small numbers of just about all of the Danube's wetland specialities. Finally after another stop for a picnic lunch at the halfway point, we were back at the Airport.



Birds

Little Grebe	Levant Sparrowhawk
Great Crested Grebe	Common Buzzard
Red-necked Grebe	Long-legged Buzzard
Black-necked Grebe	Lesser Spotted Eagle
Cormorant	Booted Eagle
Pygmy Cormorant	Osprey
White Pelican	Kestrel
Dalmatian Pelican	Hobby
Little Bittern	Red-footed Falcon
Night Heron	Pheasant
Squacco Heron	Moorhen
Cattle Egret	Coot
Little Egret	Black-winged Stilt
Great White Heron	Avocet
Grey Heron	Collared Pratincole
Purple Heron	Little Ringed Plover
White Stork	Kentish Plover
Glossy Ibis	Golden Plover
Spoonbill	Lapwing
Mute Swan	White-tailed Plover
White-fronted Goose	Little Stint
Ruddy Shelduck	Curlew Sandpiper
Shelduck	Ruff
Gadwall	Black-tailed Godwit
Teal	Curlew
Garganey	Redshank
Mallard	Marsh Sandpiper
Shoveler	Greenshank
Red-crested Pochard	Green Sandpiper
Pochard	Wood Sandpiper
Ferruginous Duck	Arctic Skua
Tufted Duck	Mediterranean Gull
White-tailed Eagle	Little Gull
Short-toed Eagle	Black-headed Gull
Marsh Harrier	Herring Gull sp.

Gull-billed Tern
 Caspian Tern
 Sandwich Tern
 Common Tern
 Little Tern
 Whiskered Tern
 Black Tern
 Woodpigeon
 Collared Dove
 Turtle Dove
 Feral Pigeon
 Cuckoo
 Scops Owl H
 Little Owl
 Long-eared Owl
 Nightjar H
 Swift
 Kingfisher
 Bee-eater
 Roller
 Hoopoe
 Grey-headed Woodpecker
 Black Woodpecker
 Great Spotted Woodpecker
 Syrian Woodpecker
 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker H
 Calandra Lark
 Short-toed Lark
 Crested Lark
 Woodlark
 Skylark
 Sand Martin
 Swallow
 House Martin
 Tawny Pipit
 Black-headed/Blue-headed Wagtail
 White Wagtail
 Thrush Nightingale H
 Nightingale H
 Black Redstart
 Redstart
 Whinchat
 Wheatear
 Pied Wheatear
 Blackbird

Savi's Warbler
 Sedge Warbler H
 Marsh Warbler
 Reed Warbler
 Great Reed Warbler
 Olivaceous Warbler
 Icterine Warbler
 Lesser Whitethroat
 Whitethroat H
 Blackcap
 Chiffchaff H
 Willow Warbler H
 Red-breasted Flycatcher
 Bearded Tit
 Long-tailed Tit
 Sombre Tit
 Blue Tit
 Great Tit
 Nuthatch H
 Short-toed Treecreeper
 Penduline Tit
 Golden Oriole
 Red-backed Shrike
 Lesser Grey Shrike
 Jay
 Magpie
 Jackdaw
 Rook
 Hooded Crow
 Staling
 House Sparrow
 Spanish Sparrow
 Tree Sparrow
 Chaffinch
 Greenfinch
 Goldfinch
 Linnet
 Hawfinch
 Yellowhammer
 Ortolan
 Reed Bunting
 Corn Bunting

H – heard only

Butterflies

Bath White
 Ilex Hairstreak
 Large Copper
 Common Blue
 Holly Blue
 Chequered Blue
 Silver-studded Blue
 Brown Argus
 Adonis Blue
 Lesser Purple Emperor (subspecies *clytie*)
 Camberwell Beauty

Painted Lady
 Silver-washed Fritillary
 Marbled Fritillary
 Marbled White
 Grayling
 Meadow Brown
 Small Heath
 Chestnut Heath
 Skipper sp.

Other notable insects

Bush Cricket – a very large bronzy black species not specifically identified

Mammals

Suslik
Muskrat
Brown Hare
Roe Deer

Reptiles and Amphibians

Green Lizard
Dice Snake
Edible/Pool Frog
Eastern Spadefoot Toad
Great Crested Newt

Plant list

Mihai Petrescu provided the following list of the plants we saw at each location. English names are added where available, together with brief notes.

Note: numbers 1-14 below refer to sites on the Danube map.

4 June.

1. Victoria Bee-eater colony – a ruderal community with some plants familiar to us in England, plus a peculiar mix of Mediterranean, SE European and steppe species.

Achillea setacea Yarrow sp. white flowered, SE European steppe species
Agropyron cristatum Couch - a typical steppe grassland species
Allium rotundum Leek sp.
Artemisia absinthium Wormwood – a ruderal
Artemisia austriaca
Cirsium arvense Creeping Thistle
Dactylis glomerata Cocksfoot grass
Kochia prostrata
Linum austriacum Flax species with blue flowers
Onopordum tauricum Scotch Thistle species – a SE European species
Salvia nemorosa Clary sp. – a typical steppe species
Verbascum chaixii Mullein sp. A Mediterranean species.
Vicia cracca Tufted Vetch

2. Bestepe Hill (overlooking Danube Delta) a rich steppe flora

Achillea depressa a yellow flowered Yarrow
Agropyron cristatum Couch - a typical steppe grassland species
Ailanthus altissima Tree of Heaven (introduced)
Carduus nutans Musk Thistle
Coronilla varia Crown Vetch – Mediterranean species
Dianthus nardiformis a small Pink – Asiatic species
Digitalis lanata Grecian Foxglove
Euphorbia seguieriana a spurge – typical steppe species
Festuca callierii a Fescue grass
Marrubium peregrinum Horehound species of SE Europe
Onobrichis gracilis a Sainfoin – SE European species
Onopordum tauricum Scotch Thistle species – a SE European species
Rosa turcica Sweet Briar: a SE European species
Sedum hillebrandtii
Stipa capillata Needle-grass – a typical steppe species
Teucrium chamaedris Wall Germander – Mediterranean species

Teucrium polium Felty Germander – Mediterranean species
Tragopogon dubius Goatsbeard
Thymus zygoides a Thyme
Xeranthemum annuum Pink Everlasting – SE European species

3. Saraturi Lake degraded steppe habitat with some saline species around fringe of lake

Anchusa barrelierii an Alkanet sp.
Artemisia santonicum Wormwood sp. – a steppe species
Carduus nutans Musk Thistle
Euphorbia stepposa a spurge – typical steppe species
Juncus gerardii Saltmarsh Rush
Obione pedunculata a saline plant with Asiatic distribution
Salicornia herbacea a Glasswort (saline species)
Scirpus tabernaemontani Grey Club-rush
Spergularia salina a Sand Spurrey with pink flowers (saline species)
Suaeda maritima Annual Seablite
Verbascum phlomoides Orange Mullein – Mediterranean species

4. Beibugeac (Plopu) Lake saline vegetation

Atriplex prostrata Spear-leaved Orache
Bassia hirsuta Hairy Seablite
Phragmites australis var. *humilis* Common Reed
Salicornia herbacea a Glasswort (saline species)
Scirpus tabernaemontani Grey Club-rush
Spergularia salina a Sand Spurrey with pink flowers (saline species)
Suaeda maritima Annual Seablite

5. Sarinasuf (marshes by Lake Razim) freshwater

Hydrocharis morsus-ranae Frogbit
Lathyrus tuberosus Tuberous Pea
Potamogeton crispus Curled Pondweed
Schoenoplectus lacustris Common Club-rush

5 June

6. Deniztepe Hill weeds in cultivated land included:

Cannabis sativa Hemp
Consolida orientalis Eastern Larkspur
Delphinium fissum
Papaver rhoeas Common Poppy

7. Babadag Forest (Seremet Valley) – Balkanic Forest

Quercus polycarpa an Oak – south-east Europe
Tilia tomentosa Silver Lime – south east Europe and Asia
Carpinus betulus Hornbeam
Carpinus orientalis Eastern Hornbeam – south-east Europe
Fraxinus ornus Manna Ash
Fraxinus excelsior Ash
Fraxinus coriariaefolia an Ash species
Ulmus procera English Elm
Sambucus nigra Elder
Sambucus ebulus Danewort
Alnus glutinosa Alder
Pinus sylvestris Scots Pine
Crataegus pentagyna Five-seeded Hawthorn – eastern Europe

Cornus mas Cornelian Cherry
Ligustrum vulgare Wild Privet
Euonymus europaea Spindle Tree
Euonymus verrucosa Rough-stemmed Spindle Tree
Paeonia peregrina Peony – eastern Mediterranean
Nectaroscordum siculum ssp. *Bulgaricum* like an Allium – eastern Mediterranean
Mercurialis ovata Dog's Mercury (different species to ours)
Myrrhoides nodosa
Oryzopsis virescens
Polygonatum latifolium Broad-leaved Solomon's Seal
Stachys sylvatica Hedge Woundwort
Humulus lupulus Hop
Clematis vitalba Old Man's Beard
Geum urbanum Wood Avens
Arum orientale south-east European species of Cuckoo-pint
Astragalus glycyphyllos south-east European species of Milk Vetch
Galium aparine Cleavers

8. Babadag – Submediterranean Forest area (second stop and lunch area)
 (Steppe-woodland, with steppe flora in clearings)

Quercus pubescens Downy Oak
Quercus virgiliana a southern European oak species
Quercus pedunculiflora south-east European Oak species
Fraxinus ornus Manna Ash
Carpinus orientalis Eastern Hornbeam
Cotinus coggygria Smoke Tree
Acer tataricum Tartarian Maple
Viburnum lantana Wayfaring Tree
Prunus mahaleb Saint Lucie's Cherry
Maclura pomifera Osage Orange
Clematis vitalba Old Man's Beard
Ononis pusilla a Mediterranean species of Restharrow
Campanula sibirica a Bellflower
Astragalus spruneri a large flowered Milk-vetch of SE Europe
Stipa ucrainica a Needle-grass (steppe species)
Thymus zygoides a Thyme
Globularia aphyllantes a Globularia
Iris sintensii a small Iris
Thalictrum aquilegifolium Great Meadow-rue
Viscaria vulgaris
Orchis purpurea Lady Orchid
Neottia nidus-avis Bird's-nest Orchid
Limodorum abortivum Violet Bird's-nest Orchid
Cephalanthera rubra Red Helleborine
Cephalanthera damasonium White Helleborine
Anacamptis pyramidalis Pyramidal Orchid
Polygala vulgaris Milkwort
Centaurea rutifolia ssp. *Jurineifolium* a Knapweed
Centaurea solstitialis St. Barnaby's Thistle
Vincetoxicum hirundinaria Vincetoxicum
Achillea clypeolata a yellow flowered Yarrow of SE Europe
Adonis vernalis Yellow Adonis
Asparagus verticillatus
Asparagus tenuifolius
Euphorbia stepposa
Euphorbia seguieriana
Koeleria brevis Hair-grass species
Ajuga laxmannii a Bugle of SE Europe
Galium dasypodium

Allium rotundum an Allium
Melampyrum cristatum Crested Cow-wheat

Histria – marsh and roadside vegetation

Phragmites australis ssp. *Humilis* Common Reed
Holoschoenus vulgaris Round-headed Club-rush
Juncus maritimus Sea Rush
Tamarix ramosissima a Tamarix
Dianthus polymorphus a Pink
Chrysopogon gryllus
Obione verrucifera a saline plant with Asiatic distribution
Ononis spinosa Spiny Restharrow
Althaea officinalis Marsh Mallow

6 June

Vadu – dune and shore vegetation

Orchis laxiflora ssp. *elegans* Lax-flowered Orchid (marsh)
Crambe maritima Sea Kale
Glaucium flavum Yellow-horned Poppy
Astragalus virgatus a very showy Milk-vetch
Linum austriacum like Perennial Flax
Argusta sibirica a borage typical of the Black Sea coast
Elymus sabulosus a Lime Grass
Convolvulus lineatus a bindweed
Holoschoenus vulgaris Round-headed Club-rush
Bolboschoenus maritimus Sea Club-rush
Centaurea arenaria a knapweed typical of sand dunes on Black Sea
Carduus nutans Musk Thistle
Silene conica Sand Catchfly

Cheile Dobrogei (Gorge) – limestone cliff vegetation

Alyssum saxatile Yellow Alyssum – widespread in eastern Mediterranean
Alyssum murale a yellow alyssum species of SE Europe
Silene cserei a catchfly
Campanula romanica a bellflower
Euphorbia stepposa
Minuartia adenotricha
Thymus zygioides
Celtis glabrata a Nettle-tree
Asparagus verticillatus
Ceterach officinalis Rusty-back Fern
Asplenium ruta-muraria Wall Rue Fern
Moehringia jankae a rare sandwort
Moehringia grisebachii another rare sandwort
Crataegus monogyna Hawthorn
Prunus mahaleb St Lucie's Cherry
Rosa turcica Sweet Briar

7 June – Danube Delta

9 - Channel 35, Sireasa, Sontea and Maliuc

Salix alba White Willow
Salix fragilis Crack Willow
Salix cinerea Grey Willow
Populus canescens Grey Poplar (planted)

Fraxinus pennsylvanica Red Ash (planted) – N American
Fraxinus americana White Ash (planted) – N American
Amorpha fruticosa a naturalised shrub from N America
Iris pseudacorus Yellow Flag
Butomus umbellatus Flowering Rush
Euphorbia palustris Marsh Spurge
Calystegia sepium Hedge Bindweed
Glyceria maxima Sweet-grass
Nymphaea alba White Water-lily
Vitis sylvestris Vine
Solanum dulcamara Woody Nightshade
Potamogeton pectinatus Fennel Pondweed
Senecio paludosus Fen Ragwort
Trapa natans Water Chestnut
Stachys palustris Marsh Woundwort
Tamarix ramosissima a low growing Tamarisk
Utricularia vulgaris Greater Bladderwort
Hydrocharis morsus-ranae Frogbit

8 June – Danube Delta

10 Caraorman Village – sandy areas and marsh

Calystegia sepium Hedge Bindweed
Juncus maritimus Sea Rush
Holoschoenus vulgaris Round-headed Club-rush
Silene conica Sand Catchfly
Orchis laxiflora elegans Lax-flowered Orchid (in garden)
Hippophae rhamnoides Sea Buckthorn
Tamarix ramosissima a low growing Tamarisk
Potentilla reptans Creeping Cinquefoil
Euphorbia seguieriana

11 Lakes and channels north of Caraorman

Salix alba White Willow
Thelypteris palustris Marsh Fern (in floating reed islands)
Nuphar lutea White Water-lily
Potamogeton pectinatus Fennel Pondweed
Potamogeton crispus Curled Pondweed
Viscum album Mistletoe
Salix cinerea Grey Willow
Lycopus europaeus Gipsywort
Hydrocharis morsus-ranae Frogbit
Stratiotes aloides Water Soldier
Trapa natans Water Chestnut
Sagittaria sagittifolia Arrow-head
Ceratophyllum demersum Rigid Hornwort

12 Lopatna Channel

Oenanthe aquatica Fine-leaved Water-dropwort

9 June

13 Mila 23 Village

Populus alba White Poplar
Phytolacca americana an introduced tree
Typha angustifolia Narrow-leaved Reedmace

Mentha aquatica Water Mint
Butomus umbellatus Flowering Rush
Althaea officinalis Marsh Mallow
Nymphoides peltata Fringed Water-lily
Verbena officinalis Vervain

14 Cruhlic Lake

Typha angustifolia Narrow-leaved Reedmace
Symphytum officinale Common Comfrey
Salix cinerea Grey Willow
Acer negundo Box-elder (introduced from N America)
Solanum dulcamara Woody Nightshade
Ceratophyllum demersum Rigid hornwort
Elodea canadensis Canadian Pondweed
Trapa natans Water Chestnut
Iris pseudacorus Yellow Flag

15 Sontea, Channel 35

Senecio paludosa Marsh Ragwort
Carex elata Tufted Sedge
Vitis silvestris Vine
Populus alba White Poplar
Populus nigra Black Poplar