



Honeyguide

W I L D L I F E H O L I D A Y S 2 0 1 6



Helping you enjoy wildlife



Helping to protect wildlife



Honeyguide

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More information

In this brochure we give a flavour of the holidays on offer. You are welcome without commitment to have a pack of information about any holiday, including a previous holiday report and itinerary. Holiday reports are also on www.honeyguide.co.uk

Honeyguide conservation programme

£40 of the price of your Honeyguide holiday goes to a conservation body, often the bird protection society of the host country, towards its current conservation work. The societies and projects we support are described under each holiday.

HONEYGUIDE CHARITABLE TRUST

A donation to a local conservation project has been part of the holiday price since the start of Honeyguide in 1991. To date (August 2015), we have raised £101,740 for conservation projects, mostly in Europe.

The Honeyguide Wildlife Trust Limited was registered as a charity in June 2004, registered charity number 1104606. The object of the charity, in summary, is "To help conserve... the natural environment and wildlife".

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Holidays for the year 2016

Welcome to the 26th season of Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays.

A quick glance at the contents & calendar (left) and you'll see there are lots of changes in the next Honeyguide programme. Crete and Bulgaria's Western Rhodopes are the only two holidays running much as in 2015.

There are four new holidays, including the first two brochure pages for Valencia and Morocco. Northeast Portugal and Estonia follow successful recce trips and there are recce reports for these along with much else on www.honeyguide.co.uk.

The Peloponnese, Dordogne, Poland and Hungary are all destinations returning after a break. The Peloponnese is already nearly fully booked with a good proportion of the many 'pencil' bookings that always come in early.

Two Spanish holidays are to familiar places at unfamiliar times. Chris Gibson returns to the Spanish Pyrenees in June with a focus on butterflies, moths and the High Pyrenees. Extremadura moves to late September / early October: it'll be fun to explore the area in a new season and see what autumn brings.

Our South Africa holiday, to the Drakensberg Mountains and Zululand, is in very early 2017. There's a steady trickle of Honeyguiders visiting southern Africa at other times with Geoff Crane's guidance and that's easy to arrange. If anyone's thinking of doing that and would like to see if a group is possible through the Honeyguide network, do get in touch.

Other holidays may get added to the programme on www.honeyguide.co.uk. One of these is a 'wallcreeper and woodpecker break' led by Paul Tout, based in Istria 9 – 13 March 2016. An additional autumn holiday is very possible.

I must mention that flight schedules keep changing. The flights in the brochure are a best guess at the time of writing and we are happy to see if there are suitable flights from an airport near you.

We passed the milestone of £100,000 in conservation donations earlier this year, as ever donations going through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust. Honeyguiders should feel proud of what you have achieved.

I hope you can join us on a wildlife holiday in 2016.

Chris Durdin

Chris Durdin
August 2015



The air holidays shown are ATOL Protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3253. ATOL protection extends primarily to customers who book and pay in the United Kingdom.



Our logo is a greater honeyguide (*Indicator indicator*), an African bird that guides people or honey badgers to bees' nests. Those guided and the bird then enjoy the honeycomb. Honeyguide wildlife holidays also have enthusiastic leaders to guide you to nature's best.

We would be very grateful if everyone booking a holiday who is a UK taxpayer could complete the simple gift aid declaration on the booking form.

We also welcome additional donations or legacies through the Honeyguide charity.

We are very grateful to the Wildlife Outreach Network in Essex, which provided extra support for our projects for several years.

A benefit of being a charity is that, through Gift Aid, we can claim tax from HM Customs & Revenue against the contributions from Honeyguiders. This can raise an additional 25p in the pound, which brings in more than £1000 each year. This tops up the donations we make to the conservation projects linked to our holidays through LPO, SEO, HOS, SPEA and others.

Trustees of the charitable trust are Helen Crowder, Malcolm Crowder OBE (secretary) and Chris Durdin (chairman).

Your leadership team 2016



Chris Durdin, this year leading in **Valencia, Morocco, Crete, the Dordogne and Extremadura**, is the driving force behind Honeyguide, running holidays since 1991. For many years he combined this with his work for the RSPB in Eastern England, often the Society's spokesman, but has been concentrating on Honeyguide full-time since 2009. Chris is the co-author of a book about Norfolk's cranes and runs regular guided walks on his local patch, Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Thorpe Marshes nature reserve. He's also a qualified soccer coach, for one son's under 13 year group. As a naturalist, Chris is an all rounder.

Valencia

Chris Durdin – see above

Morocco

Richard Hobbs and Sally Ward run Norfolk & Suffolk Wildlife and Walking Holidays, our partners in this joint holiday.

Chris Durdin – see above

Peloponnese

Robin Hamilton has a wide knowledge of western and central Europe and its wildlife, especially birds. He worked for many years for English Nature. **Rachel Hamilton** spent her working life teaching natural history and conservation with the Field Studies Council and at Otley College in Suffolk. She is an enthusiastic all round naturalist, though her first interest is botany. Robin and Rachel, both of whom are experienced wildlife leaders and keen linguists, are our regular leaders in the Peloponnese.

Crete and the Dordogne

Chris Durdin – see above

Poland

Artur Wiatr is a wildlife enthusiast involved in nature protection and ecotourism development within the Biebrza River valley. He works both for the Biebrza National Park and since 1998 as a holiday leader. He's a licensed guide and is co-author of a pocket guidebook on Biebrza National Park.

Northeast Portugal

Domingos Leitão works for SPEA, the Portuguese BirdLife partner, and alongside this is a holiday leader in his home country. Honeyguiders have particularly enjoyed his ability to find reptiles and amphibians. **Rob Macklin** was the RSPB's area manager on the Suffolk coast, covering Minsmere and North Warren among several nature reserves. He now lives in Devon and uses his years of experience in nature conservation as an environmental consultant.

Hungary

Gábor Orban, with his partner Andrea, runs Ecotours, which specialises in wildlife groups in Eastern Europe and in Latin America, where they spend several months each year. But in Kiskunság National Park we're on their home patch, not least as we stay in their accommodation at Kondor Lodge.

Estonia

Ivan Nethercoat is learning & development manager for the RSPB. He is a regular and well-travelled Honeyguide leader, including holidays in the Balearics, Crete and French Pyrenees. His degree, many moons ago, was in photography, and he is very happy to help any photographers in the group. He will be co-leading with **Rein Kuresoo** and colleagues from our Estonian hosts, NaTourEst.

Spanish Pyrenees

Chris Gibson is a marine conservation specialist for Natural England based in north Essex, an author of several wildlife books and has led many holidays for Honeyguide. He is an outstanding all rounder, from birds through flowers to moths, recognised as a 'naturalist of distinction' by the British Naturalists' Association.

Bulgaria

Vlado Trifonov is the botanist from our hosts Neophron, the Bulgarian authority on the threatened *Lilium rhodopaeum*, and Honeyguide's regular co-leader in Bulgaria. **Tim Strudwick** is the RSPB's Site Manager for the Mid Yare nature reserves in Norfolk – Strumpshaw Fen and nearby. Naturally Tim knows his birds from his work, 40 years of birdwatching and leading for Honeyguide in Bulgaria and Crete. He's also a keen botanist and is an expert on solitary bees and wasps, for which he is the Norfolk county recorder.

Extremadura

Martin Kelsey OBE is our regular leader in Extremadura where he lives with his family, close to Finca Santa Marta. Martin's background in ecology includes a study on marsh warblers, three years in the Amazon rain forest with the British Ornithologists' Union and work for BirdLife International, before a period working for Save the Children. **Chris Durdin** – see above

South Africa

Geoff Crane is the man behind Crane's Cape Tours & Travel, both local leaders and ground agents for Honeyguide in South Africa. An experienced guide himself, he co-leads all Honeyguide's holidays in southern Africa.

Carbon offsets

Realistically, most of our travellers will fly. Air travel makes only a small fraction of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions at present, but that fraction is growing. Recognising this, Honeyguide has included carbon offsets in the price of our holidays since 2007 and was one of the first travel companies to do so.

It's a challenge to find carbon offsets projects that achieve the 'gold standard' in terms of measuring carbon savings while also contributing to nature conservation – both are priorities for us. We will be buying carbon credits that will help protect tropical forest in and near the Gola Rainforest National Park in Sierra Leone. The project is managed by the RSPB's International Department, with local partners.

For more information see www.honeyguide.co.uk.



Pau Lucio



Artur Wiatr



Rachel Hamilton



Robin Hamilton



Rob Macklin



Domingos Leitão



Gábor Orban



Ivan Nethercoat



Chris Gibson



Tim Strudwick



Martin Kelsey



Geoff Crane



Paul Tout

Paul Tout is leading a wallcreeper and woodpecker break based in Istria 9 – 13 March 2016. Details on www.honeyguide.co.uk

Our holidays have been designed with the general naturalist in mind. Beginners are especially welcome but all holidays offer much to the more experienced naturalist. Some holidays are loosely based on 'birdwatching without blinkers'; some are a mix of birds, flowers and other wildlife. Several holidays can be good for butterflies. Local history, culture and food play a part in every holiday.

The holidays lend themselves to anyone wishing to leave the organised programme to sketch, paint, write or just potter.

25 February – 2 March 2016

Valencia

Winter birdwatching in eastern Spain

Spain is always an appealing destination and Valencia is an undiscovered region for Honeyguiders and British naturalists in general. This winter birdwatching break – in some warm Mediterranean weather, we hope – leans on the local knowledge of Honeyguide's La Mancha leader, Pau Lucio. Pau lives near Valencia and that local knowledge is key to visiting the protected areas and wildlife hotspots of marshes, mountains and steppes among the developed coast and intensive arable elsewhere.

Paddy fields, a huge 14,000 hectares, are the third largest wetland in Spain. Flooded in winter, we arrive just after the end of the shooting season as the area begins to dry. In late February and early March there are just few fields with water that can be packed with birds. Last year sightings included flocks of more than 2,000 greater flamingos, 1,400 black-tailed godwits, some 400 glossy ibises and hundreds of ruffs and golden plovers. There are wintering marsh harriers and booted eagles.

Waders may also be at the salt pans of Santa Pola, which are especially good for gulls: slender-billed, Audouin's and Mediterranean gulls can be here. Osprey, spoonbill and great white egret are also frequent species during winter.

Elsewhere, the Mediterranean shore gives an opportunity to look for seabirds, especially Balearic and Levantine shearwaters and Sandwich terns. Along the shore, sanderlings, little stints and grey plovers are usually seen and on the dunes there is a good range of specialist plants.

The Natural Park of El Fondo is a man-made reservoir with some 70 breeding pairs of white-headed ducks, a few red-knobbed coots and it is probably the best place in Europe for watching marbled ducks. Another interesting species is the rare greater spotted eagle. This eastern European species is now a regular wintering bird in this part of coastal Spain. There aren't many of them and the chances of seeing one are probably less than 50:50, but there's no better area to search.

A fourth wetland type, with reedbeds, is Pego Marshes. This is one of the many small wetlands spread along the Mediterranean coast that play a vital role for many migrants as re-fuelling places. From mid-February to June, a ringing group carries out an intensive ringing project to study the effect of climate change on resident and migrant warblers. We will attend a ringing session where we hope to see one of the resident moustached warblers and wintering species such as reed bunting, penduline tit, bluethroat, kingfisher or Cetti's warbler.

Away from the coast there is a variety of varied habitats, including botanical reserves, cork oak and the gorge of the Monnegre River. This is a moon-like landscape with birds such as black wheatear, rock bunting, black redstart, crag martins, blue rock thrush and maybe early breeders such as red-

rumped swallow. At the end of the gorge there is an impressive crag recently occupied by a colony of griffon vultures.

A key area is the steppes of East Albacete, a Special Protection Area with traditional farming. Here some of the birds we expect to see are lesser short-toed, calandra and Thekla larks, stone-curlew, great and little bustards, corn bunting, rock sparrow, black-bellied and pin-tailed sandgrouse, red kite and little owl. Temporary lagoons scattered among the steppes have wildfowl, such as white-headed duck, black-necked grebes and red-crested pochards.

Our base is the rural hotel Font Salada, set in orange groves near the Pego Marshes Natural Park and just one kilometre from the coast.

Birds

Spring comes early to coastal Spain, and we expect to see early migrants such as swallows, martins and passage waders. Scrub has Dartford and Sardinian warblers. Elsewhere we hope to see red-billed chough, crested tit, short-toed treecreeper and firecrest.

Other wildlife

We hope for warm weather to bring out a few early butterflies such as western dappled white, clouded yellow and Lang's short-tailed blue. As on any Honeyguide holiday we will take a keen interest in early flowers and other wildlife. There's an unusual violet sea-lavender *Limonium virgatum* and a chance of early orchids.



Western dappled white

Itinerary

As well as the places noted above, there are salt pans at Calpe and the foothills of the Monduver mountain, which has resident Bonelli's eagles and a wintering population of alpine accentors. Our itinerary includes Gandia's port where shearwaters and gannets follow fishing boats, and a wine-tasting co-operative.

Conservation project

Our leader Pau's ringing group Grupo de Anillamiento Pit-Roig runs bird ringing stations in Valencia. The group is studying the survival rate and dispersion of moustached warbler. Data loggers placed on Savi's and reed warblers are tracking their migratory movements. Support pays for nets and other ringing equipment



Price: £990 per person in twin or double room for six nights (Thursday to Wednesday)

Single room supplement: £100

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flights London Gatwick to Valencia

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Pau Lucio and Chris Durdin



Glossy ibises



Alpine accentor



Pego marshes / Steppes of Albacete (below)



15 – 22 March 2016

Morocco

In the foothills of the Anti Atlas

Honeyguide's first dip into North Africa is just a small hop over the Mediterranean but certainly adds natural history spice. Just a short distance inland from coastal Agadir – with its pallid and little swifts – even many garden birds are unfamiliar. There's a touch of glamour about Moussier's redstart, house bunting and bulbuls, all widespread here.

Oued Massa – part of the Souss-Massa National Park – is a coastal wetland with easy birdwatching. Waders, terns and passerines of many species pass through, and we are here at an ideal time for passage birds including wagtails, swallows and bee-eaters. Inevitably there are herons, spoonbills, egrets and probably flamingos. Black-headed tchagra – a bush-shrike - is more African than Mediterranean, though it can be skulking and tricky to see.

Low cliffs support the last truly wild population of the northern bald ibis. One of Europe's rarest birds, intensive conservation efforts have brought it back from the brink of extinction.

Part of the attraction of Morocco is the cultural charm, such as flat-roofed Berber villages, herds of sheep and goats and a distinctive cuisine. These are all in evidence at our holiday base, the Atlas Kasbah Eco-lodge, which has a feel of a small castle with its towers and ramparts. It provides friendly and comfortable accommodation run by owners Hassan, a Berber, and his wife Hélène, who is French, providing employment for local people in the kitchen and garden. We have heard good reports of the food: gently spiced, with couscous, tagine and an excellent mix of meats and vegetables, often with a French twist. Mint tea is a local speciality.

The eco-lodge – so named as it has strong environmental values, such as using local produce, solar power and on water treatment – is situated in the Argan Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The area is called the 'Anti Atlas', though here we are in low hills, only 20 minutes from Agadir but a useful distance away from more developed coastal areas where tourism is concentrated.

This holiday is run jointly with our friends in N & S Wildlife & Walking Holidays, using one of Richard and Sally's established bases. The itinerary will need little adapting: like Honeyguide they take it slowly and enjoy all types of wildlife. Richard is a very experienced botanist, and knows the Moroccan specialities that grow alongside more familiar Mediterranean flowers like Barbary nut iris, crown daisy and sand crocus.

Birds

Those above plus laughing dove, hoopoe, Bonelli's and short-toed eagles, black and black-eared wheatears, Barbary partridge, woodchat and great



House bunting

grey shrikes and spotless starling. The 'Maghreb' *mauritanica* subspecies of magpie is distinctive with blue facial skin, and a potential 'split' as a new species. The holiday is about enjoying the local birds and other wildlife, rather than travelling distances to see lots of Moroccan specialities.



Common bulbul

Flowers

Near the coast there are bright yellow broomrape-like *Cistanche phelypaea*, pink *Frankenia* and some astonishing large spurges, which at first glance appear to be large, prickly cacti. There are also more familiar plants such as wild lavender and thyme, plus mountain germander, rockroses, shrubby milkwort *Polygala balansae* and the interesting sounding *Periploca* – an odd milkweed relative. There are restharrow in pink and yellow, campanulas, toadflaxes and an endemic bugloss. An unusual annual is *Papaver setigerum*, a white poppy with a purple centre. Spring bulbs can include *Dipcadi*, a brownish 'bluebell'.

Other wildlife

Barbary ground squirrel, Moroccan subspecies of spur-thighed tortoise, several species of lizards and geckos.



Bald ibis

Conservation project

A team of wardens safeguards nesting and feeding areas of the critically endangered northern bald ibis. The work is run by GREPOM, a small NGO and the new BirdLife partner for Morocco, supported by SEO/BirdLife Spain.



Oued Massa

Price: £1,300 per person in twin or double room for a full week (Tuesday to Tuesday), price does not include lunches.

Single room supplement: £120

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flights London Gatwick to Agadir

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (2/3 leaders): 14

Leaders: Richard Hobbs and Sally Ward from N & S Wildlife & Walking Holidays and Chris Durdin



Moussier's redstart



Barbary nut iris



Cistanche phelypaea

Price: £1,430 per person in twin room for a full week (Tuesday to Tuesday).

Single room supplement: £150

En suite facilities

Scheduled flights London to Athens, probably easyJet from Gatwick or BA from Heathrow

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Robin and Rachel Hamilton

19 – 26 April 2016

Peloponnese

Traditional, rural Greece

Three fingers of the Peloponnese, pointing south towards Crete, form the distinctive shape of Greece's southern tip. Already culturally and ecologically different from mainland Greece, this was reinforced when, in 1893, the Corinth Canal was cut through and the peninsula effectively became an island.

Bridges mean access is straightforward, but the separation is reflected in the wildlife community – such as Peloponnese cyclamen and two endemic lizards – and in everyday life. In today's increasingly urban Greece, here is an area where links to the land, small communities and a slow pace of life persist – Greece as it used to be. Donkeys used as working animals remain a common sight. The region has its own language, still spoken by older residents.

We're based in the Tyros-Livadi area on the coast of Arcadia, facing east into the Aegean Sea. Tyros is a small village with a long sea front and a fishing harbour. It is not on the main tourist trail; the majority of visitors are Greek. We stay in holiday apartments at nearby Livadi, a quiet coastal village with a friendly taverna for our evening meals.

With a coast running north-south, it's well placed for migrant birds. Some drop in to refuel on the brackish lake at Moustos and on the intertidal flats near Nafplio – the latter an unusual habitat in the scarcely tidal Mediterranean.

Breeding birds are a fairly typical southern European mix: short-toed eagle, woodchat shrike, Sardinian and subalpine warbler, for example. Rock nuthatches pop up in villages and historical sites, such as Mycenae.

Carob, citrus, fig and Judas trees emphasise the Mediterranean feel. Spring wild flowers are a rich, colourful mix including purple vipers bugloss, orchids and the local endemic Parnon alkanet.

Uncovering more about the Peloponnese is why we're here: Honeyguide is following a Honeyguider. Sue Davy moved here in 2006 and has a passion for the area's wildlife and way of life. She likes to share it with us – and glean information from the combined wildlife expertise of a Honeyguide group and leaders.

Trees and shrubs

In Greece, Syrian juniper is confined to this area. Other conifers are Aleppo and black pines and Grecian fir. Both species of strawberry trees occur, sometimes growing side by side. Kermes oak, lentisc, Jerusalem sage and various cistuses are common shrubs. Hillsides have evergreen maples and wild olives; we expect to find almond leaved-pear and Valonia oak. Around villages chaste tree is common, as is the pretty but invasive lantana.



Flowers

Spring flowers could include peacock and crown anemones, tulips *Tulipa orphanidea* and *Tulipa goulimyii*, *Cyclamen peloponnesiacum*, widow iris, *Gagea graeca*, four-spotted and few-flowered orchids, *Fritillaria messanensis* and old friends like crown daisies and pitch trefoil.



Peloponnese cyclamen

Reptiles and mammals

The area boasts two endemic lizards. Greek rock lizards – distinctively unstriped – and chunky Peloponnese wall lizards are found nowhere else. That's if the books are right: we wonder as nature guides show no wild boar here, but in chestnut forest we have found clear evidence from rootings, backed up by locals' reports. Golden jackal occurs but is tricky to see: mammals more likely to be seen include stone marten and eastern hedgehog. Other reptiles include geckos, Balkan green lizard and margined tortoise.

Birds

Those noted above plus little bittern, slender-billed gull, buzzard, black-winged stilt, rock partridge, red-rumped swallow, blue rock thrush, crested lark, sombre tit, firecrest and girl bunting.

Other wildlife

Spring butterflies include southern swallowtail, Cleopatra, southern festoon, southern comma and southern white admiral. The supporting cast includes Egyptian locust and violet carpenter bee.

Itinerary

Local walks and minibus trips, coastal and into the hills, all within the eastern part of the Peloponnese peninsula.

Conservation project

The Management Body of Mount Parnon & Moustos Wetland record and protects biodiversity in the protected area. For mammals such as jackals and otters this is a challenge as they avoid human contact, and Honeyguide has already helped by supplying infra-red cameras.

SUPPORTING



Woodchat strike



Greek rock lizard (L) and Peloponnese wall lizard (R)



Corinth canal; Aegean coast; spring flowers.

19 – 26 April 2016

Crete



Island birds and flowers in the cradle of civilisation

Crete is a magical and mysterious island. Home of Europe's earliest civilisation, influenced by many nations, yet it retains its own identity and culture of which its people are justifiably proud.

The island's position in the Mediterranean has not only played a crucial role in its history but is an important migration route for birds on their way north in spring. Crete in April is free of crowds, the days can be warm and the hillsides are full of flowers.

This, the largest and most southerly of all the Greek islands, is dominated by a backbone of mountains through which cut many deep gorges. These are as spectacular as they are rich in wildlife, be it migrant birds, nesting vultures or endemic wild flowers.

Nature and history are difficult to separate on Crete, with wildlife close to important archaeological sites. We will sample Minoan ruins at Phaestos and Ayia Triada.

We are based at the small and friendly Sophia Hotel in the small town of Plakias on the south coast. It is ideally placed for local walks and excursions and has an impressive backdrop of gorges and mountains.

Flowers

Crete's rich flora of 1600 native species includes 140 endemic to the island, such as Cretan cyclamen and Cretan ebony. In April many orchids are at their peak with Cretan bee, naked man, few-flowered, rainbow, four-spotted and bumblebee orchids among 20 or more species. Shrubs like Jerusalem sage and cistus contribute to colourful and aromatic hillsides.

Birds

The mountains and gorges of Crete are a stronghold for birds of prey, with the largest population of griffon vultures in Greece. Lammergeier, Bonelli's and golden eagles and buzzard all breed, as do crag martin, blue rock thrush, chough and raven. The hillsides and

scrub support both Sardinian and the much rarer Rüppell's warbler. At this time of year many birds pass through on migration, pausing especially at wetlands, however small. These might include red-footed falcon, alpine swift, bee-eater, squacco heron, little bittern and various waders and warblers.

Other wildlife

Even at this time of the year there are butterflies such as swallowtail, scarce swallowtail, Cleopatra and Cretan festoon. We often see freshwater crabs; reptiles can include Balkan (stripe-necked) terrapin and Balkan green lizard.

Excursions

As well as local walks, our minibus trips this week include visits to Moní Préveli, Kourtaliótiko and Kotsiphos Gorges, Frangokastello, Spili, Ayia reservoir and, probably, the mountain plateau at Omalos.

Conservation project

The lammergeier conservation project is run by the Hellenic Ornithological Society, BirdLife Greece. In south-east Europe, lammergeiers are now extinct in the Balkans and are only found on Crete. Alongside survey and monitoring, the long-term survival of Europe's rarest vulture is being tackled by site protection, food provision and the encouragement of traditional grazing systems.

SUPPORTING



Freshwater crab

Price: £1,390 per person in single or twin room, for a full week (Tuesday to Tuesday)

This includes taverna evening meals, with wine and coffee plus picnics or a taverna lunch.

En suite facilities

EasyJet flights, Gatwick to Heraklion

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 14, with two leaders

Main leader: Chris Durdin



Little bittern



Orchis boryi - Spili



Plakias Bay

Price: £1,450 per person in a twin room for a full week (Thursday to Thursday)

Single room supplement: £150

En suite facilities

Scheduled Ryanair flights Stansted or Flybe Exeter to Bergerac. Flights from other UK airports may also be possible

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 12

Leader: Chris Durdin

12 – 19 May 2016

Dordogne

A taste of the good life

The department of the Dordogne in south-west France is justly famous for its pretty villages, cave paintings, elegant towns and landscapes of river valleys and quiet countryside. Less discovered is the wildlife: a charming mix of flowers, birds and butterflies.



Meadows thick with yellow rattle, banks with meadow clary, tassel hyacinth, milkwort and a range of cranesbills, flaxes and rockroses are just a few of some 250 plant species. Shrubs include dogwood, fly honeysuckle and Montpellier maple.

Birds

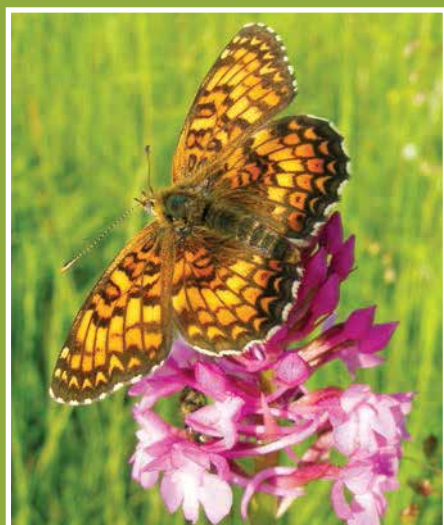
Serins, Bonelli's warblers, short-toed treecreepers and hoopoes are all found around Castang or close to home. Black kites and buzzards are the most frequently seen birds of prey; hobbies and peregrines are also likely.

Other wildlife

Butterflies on the wing in mid-May include scarce and common swallowtails, black-veined and wood whites, Cleopatra, Glanville fritillary, green hairstreak, large copper and small blue. Elegant yellow and black ascalaphids – something between a lacewing and an ant-lion – hunt over meadows. Other invertebrates include violet carpenter bee and hummingbird hawkmoth. After dark, a short walk away, midwife toads are carrying their eggs.



View near Castang



Knapweed fritillary on pyramidal orchid



Woodcock orchid

Orchids are the most striking natural asset: up to 25 species can be found. Half of these are around our base at Castang. Birds on the doorstep include curl bunting, melodious warbler, wryneck, honey buzzard, firecrest and black redstart.

Castang

Castang is a hamlet close to the Dordogne river above the village of Le Coux et Bigaroque, not far from St Cyprien. Cathy and Keith Parker are our hosts; Cathy is from Montcaret, a little farther west along the Dordogne valley, and Keith is from England. The house was once a Pergordian tobacco farm of great character and charm, parts of which are thought to be more than 400 years old. The farmhouse, together with its complex of converted barns, provides comfortable accommodation around a sunny terraced courtyard. Dinner, after a leisurely aperitif, is one of Castang's great features. Five courses of the best of the region's cuisine, from soup to dessert, accompanied by local wines, are prepared and cooked by Cathy.

Castang's large meadow has many hundreds of green-winged orchids along with tongue and pyramidal orchids. Loose-flowered orchids grow where the meadow gets damper down the hill, close to where golden orioles and nightingales can be heard and, with a little luck, seen. Beyond the orchid field, the area is a mix of meadows, cropped land and woods, cut by the wide river valleys of the Vézère and Dordogne.

Flowers

Lady, man, burnt-tip, fly, woodcock, narrow-leaved helleborine and greater butterfly are among the orchids, and two great surprises this far north are sombre bee orchid and long-lipped serapias.



Midwife toad

Itinerary

Two days will be on walks around Castang. Three days will be gentle walks a little farther afield, combined with visits to the village of Limeuil, at the confluence of the Vézère and Dordogne rivers, and a morning on market day in the town of Le Bugue. Our cave walk includes an optional visit to the crystal cathedral cavern of the Gouffre de Proumeyssac. The sixth day includes a visit to the caves of Font de Gaume at Les Eyzies to see prehistoric paintings of bison, horse and reindeer; and to Roque St Christophe for crag martins, peregrines, woodland and meadow flowers at a site known for its cave dwellers since the days of Cro Magnon man.

Conservation project

La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (French Bird Protection League) has set up a network of no-hunting sanctuaries throughout France. LPO is also battling French hunters to prevent an extension of the shooting season into the spring.



14 – 22 May 2016

Poland

Biebrza Marshes and Białowieża Forest

Biebrza Marshes forms a formidable but beautiful barrier between solid land in northeast Poland and Belarus. The primeval Białowieża Forest also lies along that same international border, and together they form one of Europe's greatest natural experiences.

The River Biebrza consists of some 100 miles of meanders and ox-bows within its basin of about 3,000 square miles. Winter is long lasting, while summers are short and rich. Floods of unpredictable length can last into early summer.

These produce habitats ranging from swampy, impenetrable forest, much beloved by breeding cranes and black storks, to huge grasslands, covered with millions of marsh marigolds in spring with nearby water hosting many breeding marsh terns. The area supports many of the 50,000 pairs of white storks that breed in Poland. The evening murmuring of fire-bellied toads is one of the more memorable sounds, especially if accompanied by the bugling of cranes and the rasping of corncrakes.

Białowieża too has its wetlands but is most admired for the majesty of its forest. Here, famously, several hundred European bison roam. Beavers abound – Bobra in Polish, which was the original name of the Biebrza – and are sometimes even seen from the bridge in the village of Białowieża.

One piece of the forest that once covered much of central Europe, Białowieża was originally preserved for private hunting by Polish kings and Russian Tsars. Modern protection is a National Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mixed oak, lime and hornbeam is the commonest of the six main forest types in the Polish part of Białowieża; in Belarus there is more coniferous forest. Never felled, with giant trees and large amounts dead wood, both standing and fallen, this unruly wilderness seems to invite architectural similes. Cathedral-like in the more spacious parts, it is dense in others. For many the highlight of any visit is to enjoy a walk with a local expert guide in this ancient forest.

Birds

Spring brings strutting hordes of ruffs to the marshes together with dancing brigades of white-winged and black terns. Thrush nightingale, great reed warbler and white-spotted bluethroat arrive early and sing delightfully often from exposed positions. Soon they are joined by scarlet rosefinch, red-breasted flycatcher, aquatic, river and barred warblers together with the fluting golden oriole. Raptors such as white-tailed eagle and Montagu's harrier show frequently, while penduline tits bring extra delight by building much-admired nests. Eight species of woodpecker are present in Białowieża forest, including black and white-backed. Their holes provide homes to flycatchers, starlings and pygmy owls. Other woodland birds include lesser spotted eagle, nutcracker and

hazel hen; red-backed shrikes can be common in surrounding fields and meadows.

Mammals

As everywhere, mammals can be difficult to see, though in Biebrza and Białowieża the chance of sightings are quite good. Elks can usually be seen grazing or loping in the marsh. Wild boars may be surprisingly obvious; there are many hares, but no rabbits. Pine marten is possible, as are red squirrels. Tarpan or Konik horses, now frequent inhabitants of British nature reserves, are being bred to revive a species close to the original wild horse of Europe.

Other wildlife

Marsh, edible and green tree frogs join the fire-bellied and grey toads in suitable wetlands. Dragonflies are not numerous in May but include Siberian winter and white-legged damselflies. Among early butterflies, Camberwell beauty and large tortoiseshell are popular with British visitors.

Plants

Biebrza holds a multitude of water-loving plants such as water soldier, sundew, yellow marsh saxifrage and a range of marsh orchids. Trees are much admired in Białowieża with certain individuals famous for their size. On the woodland floor there are hepatica, anemones, lungwort, sweet woodruff and carpets of ransoms. A curious mix of northern, alpine and eastern species can include long-leaved speedwell, bastard balm, spiked rampion and, we hope, lady's slipper orchid.

Itinerary

Three days at Białowieża, followed by moving to Biebrza marshes for the remaining four days of the holiday. In Białowieża we will stay in the village, close to the Tsar's Palace Park. In Biebrza we stay close to Goniadz, surrounded by meadows and woods.



Price: £1,490 per person in twin room for nine days (Saturday to Sunday)

Single room supplement: £120

En suite facilities

Scheduled Wizz Air flights
London Luton – Warsaw

Deposit: £200

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Main Leader: Artur Wiatr



White-winged black tern



Lady's slipper orchids



Białowieża forest

Conservation Project

The Workshop of Living Architecture runs environmental projects in and near Biebrza Marshes. This includes building new nesting platforms for white storks, often in response to storm damage or roof renovation, or simply to replace old nests.



More information visit www.honeyguide.co.uk 9

Price: £1,450 per person in twin or double room for a full week (Sunday to Sunday)

Single room supplement: £150

En suite facilities

Scheduled Ryanair flights London Stansted or easyJet from London Gatwick to Porto, depending on next year's schedules.

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Domingos Leitão and Rob Macklin

15 – 22 May 2016

Northeast Portugal

... and a bit of Spain



Tucked away in the top right hand corner of Portugal are two natural parks, little-known to naturalists from the UK. Douro Internacional and Montesinho Natural Parks provide the focus for this two-centre holiday, plus a day over the border in Spain to see the wetlands and steppe of Villafáfila.

Douro Internacional Natural Park

is dominated, visually, by the 'grand canyon' of the Douro River that forms the border with Spain. This area is the European stronghold of the fast-declining Egyptian vulture, with some 120 pairs. These are outnumbered by griffon vultures and both golden and Bonelli's eagles can be surprisingly easy to see – there are several pairs of each spread fairly evenly along the many miles of cliffs. It's no surprise that the gorge has alpine swifts, crag martins and blue rock thrushes, and the sometimes elusive rock sparrow shows quite readily, often around buildings.

Alongside the gorge are areas of open scrub that can make for comfortable natural history exploration. Here is the scratchy song of subalpine warblers and the evening air fills with the sound of nightingales. Turtle doves, woodlarks, bee-eaters, hoopoes and melodious warblers are frequent.

Botanically the area is fascinating – or complicated, depending on your point of view – with many common flowers not illustrated in our usual field guides. Examples of these are a pale blue toadflax *Anarrhinum bellidifolium*, a squill *Scilla ramburei* and Spanish foxglove.

With the flowers comes an attractive range of butterflies and the bare and rocky areas have reptiles, such as spiny-footed lizard and ladder snake, that our leader Domingos is expert at finding.

Villafáfila

in Spain, is a Special Protection Area where wetlands are surrounded by steppe. The lagoons, so long as winter rains have come, have avocets, black-winged stilts, gull-billed terns and the usual range of wetland birds that make birdwatching in the Iberian peninsula such a draw.

Around the wetlands, the mix of low-intensive arable, fallow and alfalfa is ideal for Europe's largest population of great bustards, around 2,500 birds. These are fairly reliable to see, though to find other steppe birds, like little bustards, stone-curlews and black-bellied sandgrouse needs luck or hard work. Montagu's harriers and lesser kestrels are easier: for the latter there are several purpose-built and restored buildings where they nest.

Montesinho Natural Park

by contrast, is a gentler, greener landscape. From a farmed mosaic in the valleys you move into open woodland and scrub with Bonelli's warblers and girl buntings. As you climb, this leads into rocky heathland with water pipits, Dartford warblers, rock buntings and whitethroats. Acid soils bring a different range of flowers such as yellow *Halimium* rock-roses, the heather *Erica umbellata* and mountain sandwort.

Flight schedules permitting, we also walk in the open cork oak woodland at the Geopark Terras de Cavaleiros just off the route back to Porto.

Our first base is the Parador Santa Catarina in the city of Miranda do Douro, with spectacular views over the canyon. In Montesinho we stay at Gimonde, a community-based accommodation with a restaurant that regularly wins gastronomy prizes, especially for its locally-produced pork.

Birds

Those above plus white and black storks, red and black kites, honey buzzard, short-toed lark, red-rumped swallow, tawny pipit, Iberian grey, woodchat and red-backed shrikes and azure-winged magpie.

Butterflies

Both natural parks have plenty of places to stop and search for butterflies. Our list on the recce visit included many with geographically apt names such as Spanish and western marbled whites, Spanish and southern gatekeepers, Spanish argus, southern white admiral and Queen of Spain fritillary.

Conservation project

'Rupis' is a project for conservation of Egyptian vultures and Bonelli's eagles in the Douro Canyon run by the Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves (SPEA, BirdLife in Portugal). This is a four year project, started in 2015 to increase food availability and breeding success of these species through nest surveillance, vulture feeding stations and managing wild prey. Preventing electrocution on power lines and the illegal use of poison will be tackled.



Bonelli's eagle



Linaria triornithophora



Golden eagle

Douro canyon from hotel; spiny footed lizard (right)



SUPPORTING
spea
Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves

24 – 31 May 2016

Hungary

Kiskunság National Park

Imagine a day with rollers, bee-eaters and golden orioles where you're staying, then a wetland with pygmy cormorants and whiskered terns within easy striking distance. Not far away are great bustards on extensive open plains.

All this is in the little-known Kiskunság National Park, south of Budapest. The National Park is in several parts, covering some 570 km² of the Great Hungarian Plain between the River Danube to the west and the River Tisza to the east. The mix of wetlands, plains and open farmland in a fairly compact area makes it ideal for a varied but relaxed wildlife holiday in the Honeyguide style.

Kondor Lodge is in a shady spot, ideally located in the middle of this area. Around the garden there are redstarts, scops owl, red squirrel and green lizard – plus those calling golden orioles.

Two minutes' walk away and you can be overlooking the reedbeds of Kondor Lake, which has easy walks on either side. There are wetland birds, like great white egrets, but more striking, perhaps, are rollers – the local population boosted by many nestboxes – bee-eaters, red-backed and lesser grey shrikes.

There are points in the wide, open steppes – the flat puszta – where everything in sight is natural. Great bustards can be seen here, but also sometimes in fields of lucerne. Clumps of trees hold small colonies of red-footed falcons. Viewing platforms give shade, shelter and useful height to overlook plains and wetlands.

The abandoned meanders of the winding River Tisza form a series of sometimes large oxbow lakes. Some are packed with birds, including those pygmy cormorants, plus marsh terns, ferruginous ducks and purple, squacco and night herons. Once you are tuned in, you can hear the songs or calls of river, Savi's and great reed warblers and penduline tits.

Other wetlands in the National Park can have a more coastal feel, with avocets, stilts and shelducks, hinting at the once extensive inland Pannonian Sea. The slight saltiness in low-lying areas can make for naturally species-poor grassland, and accounts for the unusual sea lavender *Limonium gmelinii*.

Elsewhere, there is plenty of colour, especially from meadows of yellow rattle, patches of blue larkspur and the deep purple wild sage *Salvia nemorosa* on road sides.

Birds

Those noted above plus white and black storks, spoonbill, glossy ibis, black-necked grebe, Mediterranean gull, collared pratincole, stone-curlew, tawny pipit and Montagu's harrier. Saker falcons use nestboxes on pylons; cuckoos, turtle doves and tree sparrows are impressively common countryside birds.



Other wildlife

There are sousliks (ground squirrels) in grassland, and hares. The Danubian meadow viper *Vipera ursinii rakosiensis* – considered by some a local subspecies – is unlikely to be encountered in the wild. Sand lizards on mobile dunes and yellow-bellied toads in ponds are more likely.



The National Park also encourages rare breeds of traditional domestic stock, notably the impressively horned Hungarian grey cattle.

Invertebrates

Butterflies: close to the River Danube there is a chance of both Freyer's and lesser purple emperor, plus glider. Silver-washed fritillary, short-tailed and silver-studded blue, large tortoiseshell and abundant marbled whites are among others. White-legged damselflies and various dragonflies are likely.

Flowers

Eastern larkspur, *Veronica longifolia*, dark red helleborine and large blue alkanet are some of the showier species. Subtler specialities, many with an eastern bias to their distribution, include *Gypsophila paniculata*, Breckland catchfly, downy woundwort and 'wolf's blood' *Euphorbia seguieriana*.

Itinerary

There will be local walks around Kondor Lodge and bus trips to various parts of the National Park and river valleys of the Danube and Tisza.

Conservation project

The Kiskunság Bird Protection Association runs a ringing station – with the longest net system in Europe – monitoring moustached warbler, nightjar and many other species. The Association is rehabilitating Lake Kolon in the National Park, maintaining water levels suitable for birds and creating nature trails, lookout towers and hides.

SUPPORTING



Price: £1,450 per person in twin room for a full week (Tuesday to Tuesday)

Single room supplement (four): £120

En suite facilities

Scheduled Wizz Air flights, London Luton to Budapest

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 14

Main leader: Gábor Orban

Oxbow lake



Red-footed falcons



Silver-washed fritillary; white-legged damselfly.

More information visit www.honeyguide.co.uk 11

Price: £1,490 per person in twin or double room for a full week (Sunday to Sunday)

Single room supplement: £100

En suite facilities

Scheduled Ryanair flights London Stansted to Tallinn

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 12

Leaders: Rein Kuresoo from NaTourEst and Ivan Nethercoat

12 – 19 June 2016

Estonia

Flowers, mammals and birds

The most northerly of the Baltic states, Estonia has as much in common with Scandinavia as its neighbours to the south. It's a sophisticated, western-looking country that prides itself on its WiFi and internet use, and the end of the Soviet era in 1991 feels distant.

More importantly, Estonia has an attractive mix of wildlife habitats from grassland, hay meadows, pine forest and coast, plus the chance to see mammals, including brown bear.

The botanical richness may come as a surprise for a country as far north as the Orkneys. Thin soils over limestone bedrock support flower-rich swards mixed with juniper scrub. Elsewhere, wooded meadows are a special habitat: orchids, meadow rattle and cow-wheats in hay pastures under old oak trees.

The gentle coastline of the Baltic features strongly. Its scarcely tidal and semi-saline conditions sometimes makes it seem more like a large lake, with mute swans and freshwater ducks like gadwalls and tufted ducks as well as eiders, mergansers and Arctic terns. Inland, cranes are a routine part of the scene, small groups in fields or their evocative bugling calls alongside cuckoos and skylarks.

Seeing bears on this holiday is more than likely, thanks to a hide run by our hosts, NaTourEst. This option is overnight: an early evening arrival, bunk beds and sleeping bags for rest and an early morning departure. The rewards can also include wild boar, raccoon dogs and red squirrel.

Our accommodation on this two-centre holiday is in former manor houses, and wildlife close to home is a lovely feature of these, including calling corncrakes.

Itinerary

The western part of our itinerary (three nights) is in and around Matsalu National Park. It includes a visit to Haapsalu where the town lake has nesting Slavonian grebes, and an evening boat trip where we hope to see beavers and, with luck, an elk.



East of Tallinn, our focus is on Lahemaa National Park (four nights), much of which is forest of Scots pine and spruce. Here and there, on old stumps or the woodland floor, are the tiny blooms of twinflowers. This unusual member of the honeysuckle family is a northern speciality, often growing alongside May lily. Our itinerary includes a boardwalk into taiga – an expanse of peatland with pools and scattered pines. This subarctic habitat has breeding waders and a distinctive flora.

A visit to Tallinn is also planned, if flight times make it practical.

Birds

Easterly species like scarlet rosefinch, Blyth's reed warbler and thrush nightingale are frequent; spotted flycatchers are common, like England from decades ago. On our recce trip, a lake where we stayed had broods of both goldeneye and goosander. Wood warblers are common and wheatears and redstarts can be garden birds. A little effort (or luck) in woodland can turn up red-breasted and pied flycatchers and woodpeckers, including three-toed and black. There is a good chance of white-tailed eagles, little gulls and Caspian tern.

Flowers

Flowers rare in the UK include spiked speedwell, greater burnet saxifrage and lady's slipper orchids, the last in big clumps in open woodland. Taiga plants include dwarf birch, bog rosemary, Lavender tea and cloudberry.

Mammals

As well as mammals at the bear hide, we hope for a chance sighting of a pine marten or an elk – the latter surprisingly elusive, given their size.

Conservation project

The Estonian Fund for Nature (WWF Estonia) runs volunteer camps to restore natural habitats. A current project is on wet meadows for black stork conservation.

SUPPORTING



Brown bear



Slavonian grebe



Twinflower



Erratic boulders on the coast of Lahemaa National Park

15 – 22 June 2016

Spanish Pyrenees

Summer at Berdún

A stunning landscape and a wealth of wildlife make the Spanish Pyrenees attractive in any season. Our usual holiday here is in spring, but we are ringing the changes by visiting in June – though before the fierce heat of high summer – with a greater emphasis on butterflies, moths and the high Pyrenees.

We hope for high mountain butterflies like Apollo and clouded Apollo, alongside a host of blues, skippers, walls, hairstreaks, skippers, coppers and perhaps ten species of fritillaries, including silver-washed and Queen of Spain.

There are colourful day-flying moths, especially burnets, and in the evenings we plan to set a moth trap that can attract a big range of species, including hawk-moths and giant peacock moth.

But this remains an all-round wildlife holiday in an area known for its raptors. The foothills of the Pyrenees, where we are based, are acknowledged as having Europe's highest density of birds of prey. There are three vulture species: griffons are easily the commonest and increasing, Egyptian vultures are getting scarcer here and everywhere. We are at the heart of Europe's stronghold for the rare lammergeier. Red and black kites feed in the river valleys. Short-toed eagles hover as they search for snakes and lizards; booted eagles are regular too.

High pastures will be the best areas for flowers, with pinks, gentians, asphodels, lilies, bellflowers, rampions and saxifrages.

Berdún itself – host to Honeyguide holidays for 25 years – is a charming, fortified village perched on a hilltop in the Pyrenean foothills. Our base is Casa Sarasa, where Peter Rich and Melanie Hallam offer a warm welcome and fine food. The Pyrenees may sound quite strenuous, but our itinerary is fairly relaxed. Anyone reasonably fit will have no trouble keeping up.



Birds

Those mentioned above plus golden eagle, bee-eater, crested lark, golden oriole, black-bellied dipper, Cetti's, subalpine and Sardinian warblers, rock sparrow, spotless starling, chough, crag martin, blue rock thrush, citril finch and many more.

Butterflies and moths

There is a good chance of Camberwell beauty, great banded grayling, Cleopatra, large blue, black-veined white, mountain clouded yellow, Spanish and southern gatekeepers, scarce and common swallowtails ... we expect a long list!

Other wildlife

Mammals could include alpine marmot and isard – Pyrenean chamois – at the high tops, and red squirrel. Wall lizards are common and snakes seen with a little luck.

Giant peacock moth



Itinerary

Our trips lean a little more to the high Pyrenees for this later holiday, for example the valleys of Hecho, Aísa and Roncal. Gorges such as Biniés and Fago are always rewarding. Local exploration includes the rivers Veral and Aragón.

Conservation project

The Sociedad Española de Ornitología (Spanish Ornithological Society) manages 1600 acres of steppe, one of the most threatened bird habitats both here in the Aragón region and in Europe. Dupont's and lesser short-toed larks, pin-tailed and black-bellied sandgrouse and stone-curlews benefit from the establishment of this reserve at Belchite, near Zaragoza.

SUPPORTING



Price: £1,450 per person in twin room for a full week (Wednesday to Wednesday)

Single room supplement: £120

Nine rooms, two of which share a bathroom, the rest have en suite facilities.

Scheduled Ryanair flights London Stansted to Biarritz

Deposit: £300

Group size, and if we need a co-leader, will depend on the mix of twins and singles in the group.

Main leader: Chris Gibson



Griffon vulture



Above: Camberwell beauty, below: Berdún



Price: £1,400 per person in twin room for a full week (Wednesday to Wednesday).

Single room supplement: £100

En suite facilities

Scheduled Ryanair flights, London Stansted to Plovdiv

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 14

Leaders: Vladimir Trifonov and Tim Strudwick

22 – 29 June 2016

Bulgaria's Western Rhodopes

Wallcreepers, lilies and more



Few countries can rival Bulgaria's scenic splendour and diverse nature. The country's most valuable natural features are protected in three national parks, twelve nature parks and numerous wildlife and nature refuges.

The higher plants number about 3,500 species, including more than 400 Bulgarian and Balkan endemics and nearly 70 species of orchids. Bulgaria boasts the richest dragonfly and butterfly fauna in Europe.

This holiday concentrates on the mountains, meadows and gorges of the Western Rhodopes. The Rhodope Mountains are in southern Bulgaria, close to the border with Greece.

The mountains' pine-clad slopes are occasionally cut by rivers winding through deep gorges, one of which is the magnificent Trigrad Gorge. Its limestone cliffs are known for their wallcreepers. It's probably one of the easiest places in Europe to see this sometimes elusive bird, constantly flicking its crimson-and-black wings while investigating rocky nooks for food.



Wallcreeper



Trigrad gorge



Lilium rhodopaeum

In Trigrad Gorge we can enjoy birds like peregrine, alpine swift, crag martin, red-rumped swallow and dipper. Elsewhere in the forests, crags and mountain meadows of the Western Rhodopes we hope to find black woodpecker, alpine and pallid swifts, nutcracker, sombre tit, red-backed shrike and rock bunting.

The cultural heritage and traditions of Bulgaria include magnificent architecture from the 18th and 19th centuries in many towns and villages. Ancient icons, breath-taking murals and superb woodcarvings preserved in monasteries and churches, form just a part of the religious, historic and cultural wealth.

Other traditions include the tasty Bulgarian cuisine, salads especially, good local wines and, in our experience, a warm welcome in the mountain village of Yagodina. Here we are based at the family-run Hotel Yagodina, well located for walks around the village.

Flowers

Low intensity agriculture means that the Western Rhodopes have retained vast swathes of beautiful grasslands, with a dazzling array of wild flowers, a mixture of familiar species and local specialities.

In the gorges especially, there are several endemic species, one of the best known being *Haberlea rhodopensis*, which is related to African violets. Others endemics include *Valeriana montana*, Rhodope sandwort *Arenaria rhodoea*, a bellflower *Campanula orphanidea* and the saxifrage *Saxifraga stribnyi*.

There are four geum species, two foxgloves, three wintergreens, an unusual bugle *Ajuga lazmanii*, St Bernard's lily and many orchids – just a few names from so many in a rich and varied area for a botanist.

Perhaps the star species is the Rhodope lily, found only here and in nearby Greece. It's in flower-rich high mountain meadows, along with corncrakes and swarms of marsh fritillaries and other butterflies.

Butterflies

The bewildering variety – 72 species on a previous visit – includes many local or unusual species: Balkan zephyr blue, Balkan copper, powdered brimstone and poplar admiral. These mingle with butterflies found more widely in mainland Europe, such as spotted, Queen-of-Spain and Glanville fritillaries, Apollo, chestnut heath, Idas blue and more.



Pennant-winged ant-lion *Nemoptera sinuata*

Other wildlife

Red squirrel, pine marten and wild cat are found in the mountains, plus souslik in the lowlands. Agile frog and fire salamander occur. Among a big range of dragonflies, moths and other invertebrates, one of the most spectacular is the pennant-winged ant-lion.

Conservation project

The Rhodope lily *Lilium rhodopaeum* is a very scarce flower of the Western Rhodopes. It's found on just a handful of sites in Bulgaria and just over the border in Greece, about half of which have no official protection. Our local leader, Vlado, is the Bulgarian authority on this spectacular endemic, and with our help leads on its monitoring and conservation.

27 September – 4 October 2016

Extremadura

Early autumn in central Spain

Autumn rains bring the green back to the steppes and wood pastures of Extremadura after the long, dry summer. New life includes autumn bulbs and a host of passage birds, making their way south through the Iberian peninsula.

Many Honeyguiders know Extremadura from visits in late winter or early spring. This year we are offering the opportunity to rediscover a favourite region at the opposite end of the year.

The resident birds are a draw at any season. Birds of prey are remarkable in a country which is itself probably the best for raptors in Europe. It has the core Spanish population of black vultures, which breed here along with griffon vultures and both Spanish imperial and golden eagles. Bonelli's, booted and short-toed eagles add to the mix.

The steppes are famous for their sandgrouse, larks and bustards – though little bustards are becoming increasingly elusive. Added to these are the birds calling in during Extremadura's 'second spring'. Migrants are likely to include many scores of whinchats, wheatears and warblers. Tawny pipits feed in little groups and almost anywhere a redstart or pied flycatcher may perch and hunt.

Then there are the flocks of hirundines – swallows and martins – in addition to the locally breeding red-rumped swallows, coming towards the end of their nesting season. There can be little bursts of autumn song from woodlarks and wrens, and the first wintering robins may be arriving.

For a dry region, it's blessed with excellent wetlands, mostly reservoirs. Herons and egrets are easy to see, including great white egrets, along with purple swamp-hens, spoonbills and perhaps glossy ibis. Waders, like the passerines, pass through and take advantage of any feeding opportunities: migrant sandpipers, godwits and ruffs may be with more local black-winged stilts.



Merendera

Insects and flowers

Wetlands are also good places to look for dragonflies and damselflies in their peak season. The star of these is the Violet Dropwing, a recent coloniser in several parts of southern Europe: its iridescence and characteristic posture make it distinctive. Blue and Lesser Emperors, Red-veined and Scarlet Darters are likely and Epaulet and Long Skimmers are possible, alongside damselflies such as Iberian Bluetails.

Butterflies can include distinctive species such as cardinal, great banded grayling and two-tailed pasha.

The timing of autumn rains is unpredictable – any time from late August to early October. With the flush of green grass and wayside flowers come autumn bulbs, notably ground-hugging merenderas.



We stay at the charming Finca Santa Marta, a granite-built olive oil mill converted into a country inn, situated in the countryside south of Trujillo. It's a great place to see azure-winged magpies, that amazing, colourful bird of the east with an outpost in Iberia.

Birds

As well as those already mentioned, we should see many of the following: white and black storks, red and black-shouldered kites, peregrine, raven, hoopoe, blue rock thrush, little owl, Iberian grey shrike, Dartford and Sardinian warblers, hawfinch, cirl and corn buntings, calandra and Thekla larks, spotless starling and rock sparrow.

Itinerary

We will visit Monfragüe National Park, some 25 miles north of Trujillo. Moheda Alta is best known for its wintering cranes, but also has a very accessible area of holm oak dehesa – the distinctive wood pasture of the region. Other excursions will include exploration of the plains around Trujillo and local reservoirs, especially at Alcollarín. We also spend a morning in the wonderful old town of Trujillo with its striking central square.

Conservation project

Traditional low intensity farming, especially unirrigated arable farmland but also seasonal grazing, supports much of the special wildlife of Extremadura and can never be protected just by nature reserves. The conservation of the Spanish steppes and 'dehesa' wood pasture is a priority for the Sociedad Española de Ornitología (Spanish Ornithological Society / BirdLife Spain).

SUPPORTING



Price: £1,430 per person in twin room for a full week (Tuesday to Tuesday)

Single room supplement: £200

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flights Gatwick – Madrid

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Martin Kelsey and Chris Durdin



Violet Dropwing



Trujillo Plaza Mayor



Peña Falcón

Price: £3,950 per person in twin room for 13 nights plus two travelling days (Thursday to Friday)

Single room supplement: £200

En suite facilities

Scheduled flights, London to Johannesburg, probably SAA

Deposit: £500

Number: minimum of 4, maximum 14

Main leader: Geoff Crane

26 January – 10 February 2017

South Africa

Drakensberg Mountains and Zululand

Including Hluhluwe Game Park and Wakkerstroom wetlands



Drakensberg Mountains (4 nights)

The Golden Gate Highlands National Park – named after its ochre-hued sandstone rocks – is best known for its magnificent landscapes and rock paintings. Paleontology finds here have included dinosaur eggs and skeletons. Less widely known is the wildlife: beautiful flowers and a range of mammals and birds, rather different in character to lowland South Africa.

The highland habitat provides home to a variety of mammals. Black wildebeest, eland, blesbok, oribi, springbok and Burchell's zebra roam the lower foothills. Two legendary rare birds, the lammergeier and the southern bald ibis, breed on high ledges in the sandstone cliffs. Other birds of prey include Cape vulture, Verreaux's eagle and martial eagle.



Drakensberg mountains

Nerine, gladiolus, arum lily, watsonias, fire lilies and red-hot poker can be identified close to our accommodation and protea species can be found higher up the hillside.

The very local Drakensberg siskin, broad-tailed warbler and Gurney's sugarbird are in the Royal Natal National Park, below the sheer face of the Drakensberg escarpment. There are larks, swallows, swifts, chats, cisticolas, sunbirds and francolins.

The Drakensberg Mountains were once the hunting ground of the San people (Bushmen). Though the San no longer live in the area,

they recorded their exploits in the form of remarkable rock paintings. We will be visiting these paintings on one of our walks.

Hluhluwe Game Park (6 nights)

Zulu kings hunted here and put in place the first conservation laws. The park, near St Lucia, covers some 96,000 ha and contains an immense diversity of fauna and flora. Hluhluwe (also known as Umfolozi or Imfolozi) is characterised by hilly topography.

Today the 'big five' of African legend – lion, elephant, buffalo, leopard and both black and white rhinos – haunt the fertile savannah; but we also look out for the 'small five' – the lion ant, elephant shrew, buffalo weaver, leopard tortoise and rhino beetle.

There are viewing hides overlooking waterholes which help visitors to see animals and birds at close range. Early morning and afternoon drives will be the day plan, to avoid the midday sun, and a night drive for nocturnal animals is an option.

Birdwatching is always rewarding, especially in the northern section of the park. Raptors include tawny eagles and we hope to find the large, ground-foraging southern ground hornbill. Louries, mousebirds, bee-eaters, kingfishers, rollers, wood-hoopoes, hornbills, barbets, shrikes, starlings, widows, weavers and sunbirds are all well represented. Around the chalets, barn, white-faced and African scops owls roost in the trees, while mosque, red-breasted and grey-rumped swallows hawk insects over the camp, plus much more.

Wakkerstroom (3 nights)

The wetlands and grasslands that surround the small town of Wakkerstroom have been managed as a bird reserve for many years by BirdLife South Africa. Montane grasslands are rich in wild flowers such as orchids and aloes. Wakkerstroom is also steeped in history from the Anglo-Boer & Zulu wars.

Southern bald ibis, ground woodpecker, buff-streaked chat, Rudd's & Botha's larks and yellow-breasted pipit are a few of the local endemics that we will be looking out for.

The Wakkerstroom wetland at the edge of town is very productive, with bird hides that afford elevated views over the wetlands. Grey crowned crane, African snipe, African rail and a diverse selection of waterbirds can be seen from the hides. Dark-capped bulbul, red-throated wryneck, South African cliff swallow, Levaillant's cisticola and blue crane are all regulars in the area.

Conservation project

The second South African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2) is one of the most intensive monitoring programmes ever undertaken in South Africa. Many areas are difficult to access but critically need atlas work and ongoing monitoring work for BirdLife South Africa to understand the bird conservation challenges in these remote sites.



African fish eagle



Southern ground hornbill



White rhino



Blood lily



Young bushbuck



Cape Teal



African scops owl



Eland

More information visit www.honeyguide.co.uk

Our holidays

- are all round natural history holidays, tailored to get the best out of the wildlife of each area
- go at a relaxed pace
- usually stay at one place
- include good, local food
- use the best of leaders, with extensive conservation knowledge, natural history skills, good experience of the local area and the right personal skills
- are designed to benefit you, wildlife and the local people whose services we use
- include a £40 contribution from each participant to wildlife conservation



Holidays for natural history societies, RSPB local groups or other groups can be arranged.

Visit www.honeyguide.co.uk for holiday reports, photos and more.

Honeyguide booking form



Please use BLOCK CAPITALS and make cheques payable to Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays. Alternatively, from www.honeyguide.co.uk you can download, complete and email a 'form field PDF' version of this booking form.

Please reserve _____ place(s) on your holiday to _____

I enclose / have sent by bank transfer _____ deposit(s) at £300 (£500 for South Africa) totalling: £ _____

Single room supplement(s): please book _____ single room(s) at extra each _____

I understand that the balance will become payable eight weeks (12 weeks for South Africa) before departure.

Holiday insurance company and policy number (details can be sent later, if you prefer): _____

Passport number(s), issue dates and expiry dates: _____

Title	Forenames*	Surnames	Date of birth
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

*As written on your passport. Please note or underline what you like to be known as, if different from the first name

Address: _____

_____ Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Mobile _____ E-mail _____

Next of kin/home contact point in case of emergency (name & tel. no.) _____

Any special requirements (eg dietary). There is a medical report form on www.honeyguide.co.uk.

Non-Smoker ☐ Smoker ☐

_____ Signed _____
_____ Date _____

For couples, do you prefer twin beds ☐ a double bed ☐ or don't mind ☐

The price of all Honeyguide holidays includes £40 earmarked for a local conservation project. We would be very grateful if everyone booking could complete the following conservation contribution consent and gift aid declaration.

Please complete sections 1 and 2

1. CONSENT FOR CONSERVATION CONTRIBUTION

We agree that Honeyguide Wildlife Trust Ltd (registered charity no. 1104606) may apply £40 from the cost of this holiday on behalf of each person named on the booking form, to be donated to a wildlife conservation project in the country to be visited.

PLEASE TICK BOX

☐

Complete (a) or (b)

(a) Please print the name of each person on the booking form who qualifies to gift aid their contribution.

.....
.....
.....
Date.....

(b) If nobody on the booking form qualifies to gift aid their contribution, please tick this box.

☐

2. GIFT AID DECLARATION

If you pay UK income tax or capital gains tax, Honeyguide Wildlife Trust Ltd can reclaim from HM Revenue & Customs an extra 25p on every £1 donated, helping your conservation contribution go further. To qualify you must pay at least as much UK tax for the year in which you donate as the amount we are able to reclaim on your donation – currently £10 on each £40 contribution.

If you are a UK taxpayer, please give us the opportunity of increasing your donation in this way.

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Thank you

Please return to: Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays, 36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich NR7 0PX

Honeyguide booking details



How to book: a booking is made when the completed booking form (a photocopy or emailed PDF or scan is fine) plus deposit have been received and accepted by us. We are very happy to take telephone or email bookings, to be confirmed with the form plus deposit during the week following your call / email.

Deposit and payment: £300 per person (£500 for South Africa) deposit is payable by cheque or bank transfer with the booking, with the remainder due eight weeks before departure (12 weeks for South Africa). Payments by credit, debit or charge cards cannot be taken.

Cancellation by you: if you have to cancel, please telephone as soon as possible and confirm in writing. The cancellation will take effect from when it is received in writing. The scale of cancellation charges below is calculated by the time period before departure.

More than eight weeks	deposit only
5-8 weeks	30% of total price
2-5 weeks	60% of total price
1-14 days; on or after departure date	100% of total price

Travel insurance should cover you (less any excess) for cancellation charges if circumstances are beyond your control, such as ill health, and more than simply a change of mind.

Cancellation by us: in the unlikely event of this happening your money will be refunded in full. A decision to cancel would normally be made at the time of reminders for the remainder of payment, i.e. eight weeks before departure.

Single rooms and supplements: we don't like single room supplements but sometimes they can't be avoided, and we pass on the extra that the single room costs us. If you are willing to share but we don't find someone to share with you, you pay only half of any single supplement. Because we have often chosen small, community-based accommodation, single rooms may not always be available. It often helps to talk it through with us at an early stage.

Information: including detailed itinerary, information on books, maps, shopping, weather etc will be supplied as part of the package for enquirers or will be sent after booking. Previous holiday reports are available for most holidays.



Honeyguide enamel badges
free from the Honeyguide office.

Flights: flights noted in the holiday details were the likeliest when the brochure went to print. However many summer schedules were not then out. Which airlines fly to where, and on what days, are increasingly prone to change; this may affect the flights and occasionally the dates for some holidays. Flights from other UK airports are sometimes possible: please contact the Honeyguide office. Boarding passes or booking references will be sent 1-2 weeks before departure.

We use scheduled services and cannot be held responsible for any departure delays. We are not in a position to state the aircraft type to be used.

Changes to the programme: should circumstances beyond our control make significant changes to the programme necessary we will consult you to see if these are acceptable to you.

Holiday leaders: we do our best to keep the leader named for the holiday, but we reserve the right to replace him or her in the event of illness or some other reason. When two leaders are listed, one may not accompany the holiday if there are not enough participants.

Group size: very occasionally if there is one place available on a holiday and a couple wishes to book we may go over the group size stated. The minimum is usually four.

Overnight accommodation and parking near the airport: we often cannot avoid flights that mean an overnight stay for many participants. We may be able to advise on a hotel and/or parking. If staying overnight, please consider if you wish to have an extra day on your travel insurance.

Extending your holiday: for some holidays it is possible to arrive early or stay on. Please contact the Honeyguide office for details.

Passport: a valid full passport is essential.

Brochure: a spare brochure (more if you wish) will be sent with every booking.

Our price commitment: the prices of our holidays are fixed – there are no surcharges.

What the price includes: flights, airport taxes, carbon offsets, all travel and excursions, services of your holiday leader(s) and your conservation contribution are included in the holiday price. Also included are accommodation and meals – breakfast, packed lunch (except Morocco) and evening meal, normally inclusive of wine.

What the price excludes: insurance and personal spending.

Smoking: most Honeyguiders are non-smokers. Anyone who smokes is expected to ensure this does not affect others in the group, including in the field. There is no smoking in transport, in our accommodation and at meals.

Tips and gratuities: all services in the itinerary are covered. You may wish to leave a 'thank-you' for room or restaurant staff at the end of your stay. We may organise a collection if service has been particularly good.

ATOL terms and conditions: these T&Cs, with respect to Honeyguide's Air Travel Operator's Licence, are those that apply to all ATOL holders, as follows:

"Your Financial Protection: when you buy an ATOL protected flight or flight inclusive holiday from us you will receive an ATOL Certificate. This lists what is financially protected, where you can get information on what this means for you and who to contact if things go wrong."

"We, or the suppliers identified on your ATOL Certificate, will provide you with the services listed on the ATOL Certificate (or a suitable alternative). In some cases, where neither we nor the supplier are able to do so for reasons of insolvency, an alternative ATOL holder may provide you with the services you have bought or a suitable alternative (at no extra cost to you). You agree to accept that in those circumstances the alternative ATOL holder will perform those obligations and you agree to pay any money outstanding to be paid by you under your contract to that alternative ATOL holder. However, you also agree that in some cases it will not be possible to appoint an alternative ATOL holder, in which case you will be entitled to make a claim under the ATOL scheme (or your credit card issuer where applicable)."

"If we, or the suppliers identified on your ATOL certificate, are unable to provide the services listed (or a suitable alternative, through an alternative ATOL holder or otherwise) for reasons of insolvency, the Trustees of the Air Travel Trust may make a payment to (or confer a benefit on) you under the ATOL scheme. You agree that in return for such a payment or benefit you assign absolutely to those Trustees any claims which you have or may have arising out of or relating to the non-provision of the services, including any claim against us, the travel agent (or your credit card issuer where applicable). You also agree that any such claims may be re-assigned to another body, if that other body has paid sums you have claimed under the ATOL scheme."

Travel Insurance

Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays acts as an Introducer Appointed Representative for the purposes of your travel insurance, appointed by Global Travel Insurance Services Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority and whose status can be checked on the FSA Register by visiting www.fsa.gov.uk/register or by contacting the FSA on 0845 606 1234.

Contact details:
Global Travel Insurance Services Ltd,
The Turret, 25 Farncombe Road
Worthing, West Sussex
BN11 2AY
Telephone: 01903 235042
Fax: 01903 229389
Email: enquiries@globaltravelinsurance.co.uk
Web: www.globaltravelinsurance.co.uk

You can go to our website where you can obtain a quotation and arrange the insurance online, or download an application form. Or we can send you an application form on booking enabling you to arrange this insurance.

Beyond providing this information, we are not allowed to assist you in any way in the arrangement of your travel insurance or give any advice.

Honeyguide wildlife holidays



Cover picture: Moussier's redstart (Igor Maiorano)

Back cover: from NaTourEst's bear hide in Estonia, though the mammals – brown bear, wild boar, raccoon dog and fox (all by Ivan Nethercoat) – won't really be quite that close!

Other photos by:

Howard Bayliss
Geoff Crane
Sue Davy
Chris Durdin
Steve Fletcher
Dimitar Georgiev
Chris Gibson
Richard Hobbs/Sally Ward
Carol Leigh (Firecrest Photography)
Pau Lucio
Martin Kelsey
Igor Maiorano
Ivan Nethercoat
Gábor Orban
Daniel Petrescu
Svetoslav Spasov
Artur Wiatr



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