



# Bulgaria

## East meets West: Birds and Wildlife

Inala Nature Tours

### OVERVIEW

At the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Bulgaria is a country of beautiful landscapes, fantastic birds and ancient history. Our tour visits the best places in the country from the biodiversity hotspots of the Balkans and Rhodope Mountains, across the Upper Thracian Plain to the cliffs, beaches and wetlands of the scenic Black Sea coast. Bulgaria is excellent for raptors, including Levant Sparrowhawk and Imperial Eagle, as well as Egyptian Vulture and the huge and majestic Eurasian Griffon and European Black (Cinereous) Vultures. Many eastern bird species extend into Bulgaria, among them Isabelline and Pied Wheatear, Paddyfield Warbler and the sought-after Rose-coloured Starling, which visits over summer. The country is also known for its plant diversity, especially around the Rhodope Mountains, and its many species of reptiles and butterflies. On top of this, it has a long and rich cultural history, which we will explore at Perperikon, the ruins of an ancient rock city occupied in waves from the Bronze Age until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when it was finally abandoned to nature.

### TOUR LEADER

Dr Tonia Cochran with local guide.



## ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1. Sofia to Tryavna. Accom: Tryavna.

Days 2 – 4. Tryavna, Central Balkan NP to Durankulak. Accom: Durankulak.

Days 5 – 7. Durankulak to Sarafovo.

Days 8 – 10. Eastern Rhodope Mountains.

Days 11 – 12. Eastern to Western Rhodope Mountains.

Day 13. Western Rhodope Mountains to Sofia.

Day 14. Depart Sofia.



Woodchat Shrike. Ecotours.

## DETAILED ITINERARY:

**Day 1. Sofia to Tryavna.** This morning, we will meet our local guide in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. We will then head to Tryavna enjoying some birding enroute if time permits. We will spend one night in the historic town of Tryavna. **Accommodation:** Hotel in Tryavna (ensuite room). **Meals included:** D.

**Days 2 – 4. Tryavna, Central Balkan NP and Durankulak.** Tryavna lies in the Central Balkan National Park. It is surrounded by beautiful forests and a morning walk might add some higher elevation species to our list such as Black Redstart, Coal Tit and Common Crossbill, before we leave for the Black Sea Coast. It takes 5-6 hours to reach our next destination, Durankulak. Our lodge is situated on the shore of the famous Lake Durankulak, thus offering great opportunities to bird from the balcony before dinner. Spanish Sparrow, Black-headed Bunting, the black-headed race of Yellow Wagtail are garden birds here. Bee-eater, Hobby, Calandra Lark, Little Owl can also be seen from our hotel. Lake Durankulak is one of the westernmost breeding sites of Paddyfield Warbler and while looking for these nice songsters we might find many other species such as Ferruginous Duck, Pygmy Cormorant, Glossy Ibis, Whiskered and Black Tern. Marsh Harriers are plentiful and there might be divers or skuas out in the Black Sea. Further south is Lake Shabla where we will scan the shallow waters for waterfowl and raptors. In the past we have found here Red-crested Pochard, Ruddy Shelduck, Collared Pratincole and Terek Sandpiper. It is a short drive from Durankulak to the steppe country above the spectacular cliffs of Cape Kaliakra. Here, and at nearby Yailata, are the most western populations of Isabelline and Pied Wheatears

as well as good numbers of Black-headed Buntings and Lesser Grey Shrikes. We'll search for Stone Curlews and hope to see Rose-coloured Starling here too, though their numbers vary greatly from year to year. The powerful song of Calandra Larks will fill our ears and we will hear smaller numbers of Short-toed Lark. On the cliff top stands a ruined castle from where we can scan the sea in search of Yelkouan Shearwaters and Skuas which pass through here, while Mediterranean Shags nest down below and there is always a chance of a passing Harbour Porpoise or Bottlenose Dolphin. Alpine Swifts nest on the cliff face. **Accommodation:** Durankulak (ensuite room). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

**Days 5 – 7. Durankulak to Sarafovo.** Driving south we will make a stop at the oak woodland near Goritza looking for Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Semi-collared Flycatcher and Short-toed Treecreeper. By late afternoon we will reach our accommodation near Burgas where we will stay for the next two nights. From here we can visit the extensive wetlands around Burgas exploring the lakes, saltpans, reedbeds, flooded meadows and marshlands of one of Europe's richest birding areas, where over 300 species have been recorded. We should see White and Dalmatian Pelicans and Pygmy Cormorants here. The shallow lagoons of Atanasovsko and Pomorie attract many shorebirds including Kentish Plover, Pied Avocet and Black-winged Stilt plus we'll check through the passage waders in search of Broad-billed and Marsh Sandpiper. Mediterranean, Slender-billed and Little Gull can all be seen here along with Gull-billed and other terns. Of all the various races of Yellow Wagtail the black-headed race found here is probably the most stunning! Nearby the reed fringed Mandra Lake is also full of birds with Squacco, Purple and Night Herons in the reeds, White-winged Black Terns dipping down to the water in search of emerging insects all to the continuous soundtrack of Savi's and Cetti's Warbler. Golden Orioles flash between the poplar trees from which Penduline Tits collect the fluffy seeds to build their intricate hanging nests. Glossy Ibis, Ruddy Shelduck, Spoonbill and many other species are all possible here. Time allowing we may also visit Lake Poroy surrounded by meadows and a nice forest. It is the best place to find Ruddy Shelduck, but European Roller and Bee-eater, Red-backed and Woodchat Shrike, Golden Oriole will keep us busy too. We may visit the historic town of Nesebar situated on a small island near the coast to wander on the narrow streets. **Accommodation:** Sarafovo near Burgas (en suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.



Calandra Lark. Ecotours.

**Days 8 – 10. Eastern Rhodope Mountains.** We head west through beautiful scenery to the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. En route we drive through the Strandja Mountains, an endless chain of crests and wood-covered tops. Raptors here include Booted and Short-toed Eagle, Black Kite and Long-legged Buzzard. Roadside fence posts and wires are dotted with Rollers, Bee-eaters and Black-headed Buntings. Later we stop in the Sakar Mountains one of the least known mountain areas. The higher parts are covered with broad-leaved forests, while most of the area is steppe grassland with scattered trees, bushes and agricultural land where Imperial Eagle has its stronghold. This is a great area for raptors with Short-toed, Lesser-spotted and Booted Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard and Levant Sparrowhawk all possible and we'll look for Olive-tree Warbler, Semi-collared Flycatcher and Masked Shrike. We spend 2 full days in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. Rolling hillsides alternate with rugged landscape of jagged peaks, towering cliffs and sparsely vegetated, boulder-strewn slopes. Almost any of the Bulgarian birds of prey can be seen here with good chances of Golden Eagle. We'll visit feeding tables where Griffon, Egyptian and European Black (Cinereous) Vulture feed on carcasses along with White-tailed Eagle and sometimes Imperial Eagles joining the throng. Black Storks nest nearby, and the scrubby bushes and rocky landscape are home to Chukar, Black-eared Wheatear, Eastern Olivaceous, Orphean, Sardinian and Subalpine Warbler, Sombre Tit, Western Rock Nuthatch, Ortolan and Black-headed Bunting. Pallid Swift and Red-rumped Swallow nest in the gorges as does Blue Rock Thrush. Reptiles and insects are also abundant in the dry hills. We will hope to see European Glass Lizard, Balkan Green Lizard, Hermann's and Spur-thighed Tortoise and a good selection of butterflies and dragonflies. The region also offers a good insight into the history of ancient Bulgaria and we shall visit nearby sites with remains of Thracian culture. One such place is the city of Perperikon. Rising 470 m above the picturesque valley of the Perpereshka River, Perperikon stands atop a rocky hill, at the heart of a lush forest. The site has been intensively excavated, revealing walls, stairs, cisterns, churches, palace buildings, a necropolis and the remains of a medieval fort. Perperikon is the biggest megalithic site in the Balkans. There are many Thracian rock niches scattered around the area including an array of about 100 niches spotting the limestone body of a massive rock called Kovankaya, or Beehive Rock, on the road near the village of Dolno Cherkovishte. **Accommodation:** Madzharovo in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. **Meals included:** B, L, D.



Eurasian Griffon Vultures. Ecotours.

**Days 11 – 12. Western Rhodope Mountains.** Leaving the Eastern Rhodope Mountains, we head for the village of Trigrad in the Western Rhodope Mountains, where we spend the last 2 nights. On the way we stop exploring coniferous forests and alpine meadows for Spotted Nutcracker, Firecrest, Ring Ouzel, Crested and Willow Tit plus many flowers including orchids. Trigrad Gorge is one of the most popular European sites for observing Wallcreeper and we will visit the site in the morning in the hope of finding this unique and sometimes elusive bird. Other species of note here are Peregrine Falcon, Alpine Swift, Crag Martin, Dipper and Grey Wagtail.  
**Accommodation:** Pamporovo or Trigrad in the Western Rhodope Mountains **Meals included:** B, L, D.

**Day 13. Western Rhodope Mountains to Sofia.** We'll leave the Western Rhodope Mountains and enjoy more birding en route to Sofia. In the afternoon we may visit Vitosha Mountain on the southern outskirts of the capital for more high elevation birds or we may have a stroll in the downtown of Sofia with its monuments, museums, and places of worship in a mixture of architectural styles that represent the history of the great city from Roman times onwards.  
**Accommodation:** Sofia. **Meals included:** B, L, D.

**Day 14. Depart Sofia.** This morning, we transfer to Sofia airport for our flights home. This tour has been designed to adjoin our Romania tour and those taking both sections will travel to Bucharest today. **Accommodation:** none. **Meals included:** B.



Spoonwing (*Nemoptera sinuata*). Ecotours.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Group size:** 6 – 12 participants + Inala leader Dr Tonia Cochran + local guide

**Tour Price:** AUD\$12,300 per person twin share). Single supplement: AUD\$640

**Discount:** We are offering a \$500 per person discount for those choosing to join both the Bulgaria and Romania tours.

**Inclusions:** 13 nights' accommodation in ensuite guesthouses and hotels and hotels at Tryavna, Durankulak, Sarafovo, Madzharovo, Pamporovo/Trigrad and Sofia, plus specialist guide and transport, all meals, entrance fees and activities as mentioned in the itinerary.

**Exclusions:** International and domestic airfares, alcoholic beverages, snacks, internet, gratuities, laundry or other items of a personal nature or activities not mentioned in the itinerary.

**Please note:**

**Price:** The above rates are based upon a group size of 6-12 people. If the tour does not achieve minimum numbers, we may offer you the option of continuing with a smaller group size at a small supplement (we would always discuss options with you beforehand).

**Meals and drinks:** Breakfast generally consists of a buffet style breakfast with cereal, fruit and yoghurt and tea/coffee, usually with a selection of meats and cheeses. A full cooked breakfast is not generally offered at most locations. Lunch will generally consist of a packed lunch style meal eaten in the field, but we may sometimes eat at a local cafe. Dinner usually consists of several options for main with the choice of either an appetiser or dessert although sometimes three course meals are available. Drinks (soft and alcoholic) are generally not included but at lunches and breakfasts juice may be made available.

**The itinerary:** Whilst we aim to follow the itinerary as planned, please note that the itinerary provided should only be used as a guideline. Depending on individual trip circumstances, weather, and local information, the exact itinerary may not be strictly adhered to. The guides reserve the right to make changes to the itinerary as they see fit.

**Mobility:** This tour is suitable for a range of activity levels and there are options for joining some walks and for more relaxed touring nearer the vehicle if you prefer.

**Travel Insurance:** Travel insurance is a requirement for participation in all our international tours.

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# AREA COVERED BY THE TOUR

