

A Bulgarian Recipe!

Take 16 bird watchers with varying degrees of expertise, add 162 spectacular species of birds, add copious glasses of red wine plus lots of laughs and good humour and mix well!

This was the recipe for our long awaited seven day trip to the Black Sea Coast from 22nd -29th September 2017!

After a late arrival at our hotel near Pomorie , followed next day by a pre breakfast walk we set off to the North for a three night stay near Kavarna at the beautifully situated Russalka resort, stopping en route for some pre - arranged wine tasting.

The habitat in the North is a mixture of magnificent red sea cliffs, limestone terrain and causses. The highlight for me was a day spent at Cape Kaliakra, right on the Via Pontica migration route and where we were spellbound by a never ending flyway of raptors including Pallid, Montague's and Marsh Harrier; Lesser Kestrel, Honey Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Sparrowhawk ,Hobby, Red Footed Falcon and so it continued!

The causses also proved an interesting habitat with Red Backed Shrike among the many species spotted. Ferruginous Duck, Red Knot and Ring Ouzel were added to our growing list throughout the rest of the day.

We then headed back south for the second part of the tour where the habitat is very different and with cliffs giving way to lakes and salt pans where we were intrigued to see scantily clad people covering themselves with black therapeutic mud, hanging their arms out to dry like Cormorants, before immersing themselves in the lagoon along with the seabirds! We visited the Green Balkans Pomorie Reserve and Visitor Centre before heading to Lake Atanassovsko where the migration was well underway and where we counted approximately 500 Red Footed Falcons feeding in a field nearby. That day 10,700 were officially recorded in the area - one of the best years ever!

A visit to the Poda Reserve managed by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds followed the next day. Here there is the only colony of Great Cormorants in the world which nest on disused electric pylons - quite a surprising sight!

The final evening saw Kath win the 'Guess the Final Total of Species' sweep with her total of 157 and a small presentation to our excellent driver Boyko and also our guide Mitko who was forced to admit he hadn't had a group quite like ours before!

Our tour ended with a final species list of 162; new friendships formed and a boost to the Bulgarian Wine Industry - and maybe a few mild hangovers!

Liz Harrison

3rd October 2017