

# Trip report, southeast Bulgaria

17-24 May 2008

Lars Edenius & Grzegorz Mikusinski

[lars.edenius@grubbe.com](mailto:lars.edenius@grubbe.com)



*Masked Shrike Goljamo Krusevo 23 May 2008. Photo and copyright Lars Edenius*

This report is a summary of a combined 1-week work and bird watching trip to Bulgaria. To allow sufficient time for work we minimized driving and allocated little time to localities traditionally visited by birders, viz. the wetland localities surrounding Burgas, in favor of a prolonged stay (4 nights) in Madjarovo in Eastern Rhodopes. We did not use a local bird guide or driver.

### General aspects

*Accommodation.* We had made reservation for all nights before hand, which, in retrospect, proved unnecessary as late May is outside the peak tourist season. The only “problematic” stay was the in the BSPB Nature Information Center “Eastern Rhodopes” in Madjarovo [marin.kurtev@bspb.org](mailto:marin.kurtev@bspb.org), which did not respond to subsequent e-mail inquiries and had to be contacted by telephone (+359 3720 345, +359 878 599 367) (good English spoken though). We were told that the first night was fully booked, but this proved wrong upon our arrival. The center was a perfect place to stay (3 bedrooms that can host 3-4 persons each), located in tranquil and very beautiful mountain surroundings, and cheap. There is also a restaurant in the house. Highly recommended. Beware though, the beds are hard!

*Car rental.* We rented car through Hertz at Burgas Airport. Carefully check the fuel meter at pick up and make sure to replace gas to exactly the same level when returning the car. This seems to be strictly reinforced.

*Maps.* It is difficult to get good maps of Bulgaria outside the country. Our 1:400 000 scale map from Freytag & Berndt was unreliable in details (e.g. missing roads). At the BSPB Center in Madjarovo we purchased a local tourist 1:100 000 scale map over Eastern Rhodopes which was very useful for that area.

### Itinerary with some highlights

17 May. Arrival Burgas Airport at lunch time. Picking up rental car, driving towards Krajmorie, short stop at Burgas Lake. Afternoon walk along Black Sea coast at Krajmorie, evening excursion along northern, western and southern side of Lake Mandras. Overnight stay at Krajmorie. Nice rural areas west and south of Lake Mandras with small roads sparsely trafficked. High densities of Black-headed Sparrows, Red-backed Shrikes and Bee-eaters. A large flock (c. 150) of White Storks roosting in oak trees.

18 May. Leaving Krajmorie, quick stops at Ropotamo River Reserve nearby Primorsko. Carevo, Kondolovo, Bosna, Varovnik, Boljarovo, Elhovo, Topolovgrad. Evening excursion primarily south of Topolovgrad in Sakar region. Overnight stay Hotel Sakar, Topolovgrad. Three singing Semi-collared Flycatchers at Ropotamo River stopping site (a bit frustrating not to be able to walk outside the parking lot here). Very nice contiguous oak forest extending from the Carevo towards Elhovo. Sparsely populated and few signs of recent forestry. Highlights here were a Middle Spotted Woodpecker and a good view of European Wild Cat slowly walking in front of the car. Masked Shrike encountered at an unplanned stop (details of this locality, see species list below). Booted Eagle soaring over the road at Elhovo, two Lesser Spotted Eagles hunting over scenic pasture land east of Topolovgrad. Several Isabelline Wheatears in the same area.



*European Roller, Dolna Kula 22 May 2008. Photo and copyright Lars Edenius*

19 May. Topolovgrad, Ljubimec, Malko Gradiste, Madjarovo. Overnight stay in Madjarovo. Evening excursion in the surroundings of Madjarovo (Topolovo village). A large colony of Bee-eaters south of Topolovgrad. Masked shrike (2 males), Olive-tree Warbler, 10 Black Storks and 2-3 Booted Eagles at Jerusalemovo gorge (details about the locality, see species list below). Beautiful views over the Arda River after Borislavci in the Eastern Rhodopes. Eight Griffon Vultures and one Long-legged Buzzard soaring over the cliffs at Kovan Kaja. Two Egyptian Vultures sitting on the ground close to road in Dolni Glavanak village.

20 May. Madjarovo. Afternoon excursion west of Madjarovo along the southern side of the Ardas River. Several Sombre Tits in the slopes north of the river in the morning, many Hoopoes calling in the valley. A flock of 25 Rosy-coloured Starlings. Eastern Bonelli's Warbler singing.

21 May. Madjarovo. Morning excursion in the surroundings of Madjarovo. Several Subalpine Warblers and Orphean Warbler (details, see below). Eight Rosy-coloured Starlings flying over the valley in high speed. Rock Sparrow (details below), Peregrine and European Wild cat at Kovan Kaja. A flock of Black Storks chased by dogs along the Arda River in the late evening.

22 May. Madjarovo. Morning excursion to Studen Kladenec och Dolna Kula. Black Kite at two places along the road. Black Stork breeding in a cliff, Levant Sparrowhawk and intimate sights of perching Roller in the very scenic Dolna Kula area. Golden Eagle and Egyptian Vulture in Studen Kladenec. Eastern Bonelli's Warbler singing at the BSPB Center, Scops Owl calling during the night.

23 May. Transport Madjarovo, Svilengrad, Topolovgrad, Elhovo, Sredec, Lake Burgas, Pomorio, Nesebar. Overnight stay in Nesebar. A pair of Western Rock Nuthatch in the pillars of Kovan Koja (details in the species list). Two Imperial Eagles in the Sakar mountains (N of Svilengrad).

24 May. Drive Nesebar to Burgas Airport, leaving Burgas in early afternoon.



*Rock Sparrow, Madjarovo 21 May 2008. Photo and copyright Lars Edenius*

Bird species list (150 species)

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

**Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

**White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocratalus* C. 150 resting on pylons in eastern part of Lake Burgas 17 May

**Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

**Great White Egret** *Egretta alba*

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* seen mostly in Eastern Rhodopes with up to 10 daily

**White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia*

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser*

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera*

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

**Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*

**Pochard** *Aythya ferina*

**Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*

**Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus* 4-5 adult in Madjarovo area, 1 adult in Studen Kladenec

**Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus* Up to 15 birds seen in Madjarovo and Studen Kladenec

**Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* 2 observed in Madjarovo

**Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

**Levant Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter brevipes* 2 in Dolna Kula 22 May

**Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* 2-3 in Madjarovo

**Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* 1 along the road over Vizica and 2-3 east of Topolovgrad 18 May

**Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* 1 adult and 1 sub-adult hunting 5 km north of Pastegor, Sakar mountains 23 May

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* 1 sub-adult Studen Kladenec 22 May

**Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* 5-7 seen in total

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

**Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*

**Peregrine** *Falco peregrinus* 2 in Madjarovo

**Chukar** *Alectoris chukar* heard and seen in Madjarovo and Dolna Kula

**Quail** *Coturnix coturnix*

**Corncrake** *Crex crex*

**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

**Coot** *Fulica atra*

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*

**Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*

**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta*  
**Yellow Legged Gull** *Larus argentatus michahellis*  
**Gull Billed Tern** *Sterna nilotica* 1 over Pomorie salt pans 23 May  
**Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis*  
**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*  
**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* c. 25 Lake Burgas 23 May  
**White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* c. 10 Lake Burgas 23 May  
**Rock Dove** *Columba livia*  
**Woodpigeon** *Columba palumbus*  
**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* 6 at northern shore of Lake Mandra 17 May  
**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*  
**Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*  
**Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*  
**Scops Owl** *Otus scops* calling bird at BSPB Center, Madjarovo 22 May  
**Little Owl** *Athene noctua* 1 Orjahovo, Sakar region 19 May  
**Common Swift** *Apus apus*  
**Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* up to 25 seen at Madjarovo  
**European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* abundant, seen (or heard) all days  
**European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* 20 in total; seen most days  
**Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* most observations in the Eastern Rhodopes area, very few seen in the Sakar mountains and further east  
**Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis* seen (or heard) most days in the Eastern Rhodopes  
**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus major*  
**Syrian Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus syriacus* seen most days in the Eastern Rhodopes  
**Middle Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus medius* only seen in the Bosna area (close to the coast)  
**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus minor* confirmed breeding in Madjarovo  
**Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*  
**Woodlark** *Lullula arborea*  
**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*  
**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*  
**Crag Martin** *Hirundo rupestris*  
**Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* abundant in Eastern Rhodopes, elsewhere more uncommon  
**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*  
**House Martin** *Delichon urbica*  
**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*  
**Black-headed Wagtail** *Motacilla flava feldegg*  
**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*  
**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*  
**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*  
**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*  
**Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*  
**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* only 2 males seen  
**Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*  
**Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata*  
**Isabeline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* 5-6 in the surroundings of Topolovgrad  
**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*  
**Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica*

**Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* seen and heard in the steep slopes of Kovan Kaja north of Madjarovo

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula*

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*

**River warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis*

**Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides*

**Marsh warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris*

**Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

**Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

**Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida*

**Olive-tree Warbler** *Hippolais olivetorum* we had two singing males just north of the road crossing at the southern end of the Jerusalemovo Gorge. This gorge, which is a protected area, is located immediately west of the Jerusalemovo village, c. 8km NW of Svilengrad (at the Bulgarian-Turkish-Greece border). We also had very good views of two males of Masked Shrikes here. Three Olive-tree Warblers were heard and seen at close distance in open shrub land 5 km east of Madjarovo, directly south of the Malko Brjagovo-Borislavci-Madjarovo road junction.

**Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria*

**Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* 6-7 singing birds north of the Arda River 1.5 km west of the Madjarovo along the road towards Gorni Glavanak village

**Orphean Warbler** *Sylvia hortensis* 1 pair, apparently making a breeding attempt at the Arda River bank at the opposite side from the BSPB Centre in Madjarovo. Three singing birds east of the Madjarovo at the Olive-tree Warbler site, see above.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis*

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

**Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus bonelli orientalis* 2 singing birds Madjarovo

**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*

**Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapillus*

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*

**Pied flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca*

**Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata* observed at Ropotamo River only

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus macedonicus*

**Marsh Tit** *Parus palustris*

**Sombre Tit** *Parus lugubris* At least 15 birds seen in and in the surroundings of Madjarovo, also observed at Dolna Kula

**Coal Tit** *Parus ater*

**Blue Tit** *Parus caeruleus*

**Great Tit** *Parus major*

**Nuthatch** *Sitta europea*

**Western Rock Nuthatch** *Sitta neumayer* 2 birds heard and seen in the steep slopes of Kovan Kaja - the impressive south-facing cliffs at the northern side of Arda River just north of Madjarovo (stop at the viewing point site below the highest cliffs and check the closest pillars)

**Common Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*

**Short-toed Treecreeper** *Certhia brachydactyla*

**Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* very common!

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* strikingly abundant!

**Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor*

**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator*

**Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus* driving westwards from Sredec to Elhovo 18 May we stopped the car at a parking lot on the northern side of the road, 4 km east of the Goljamo Krusevo village, at a seemingly good spot for Masked Shrike (open canopied oak forest). We almost immediately encountered two males very close to the road. (We saw them again on the return trip 23 May). Two males were also seen at the Jerusalemovo Gorge (see Olive-tree Warbler text above).

**Jay** *Garrulus glandarius*

**Magpie** *Pica pica*

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*

**Hooded Crow** *Covus corone*

**Raven** *Covus corax*

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

**Rose-coloured Starling** *Sturnus roseus* 3 flocks totaling >100 birds flying fast in northwest direction, also resting at the big poplars along Arda River in Madjarovo 19 May

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

**Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis*

**Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*

**Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*

**Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*

**Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina*

**Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*

**Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus*

**Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia* 2 singing males at the Rock Nuthatch site in Madjarovo

**Ortolan Bunting** *Embriza hortulana*

**Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala*

**Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra* strikingly abundant!

#### Some other observed vertebrates

**European Wild Cat** *Felis silvestris* – two observations: one on the road (deciduous forest) between Bosna and Varovnik (18 May) and one in the Eastern Rhodopes (slopes with shrubs and scattered trees) outside Madjarovo (21 May)

**Hermann's Tortoise** *Testudo hermanni* – one observation in dry river beds of Arda in Madjarovo

**European Glass Lizard** *Ophisaurus apodus* – three individuals killed by cars and one living specimen outside Madjarovo

**Nose-horned Viper** *Vipera ammodytes* – encountered sun-bathing on the smaller road in the countryside

**Common Tree Frog** *Hyla arborea* – heard outside BSPB Center in Madjarovo