

Bulgaria – Black Sea Coast 11th – 25th September 2010

By Bob Shiret

Introduction

This was our first trip to Bulgaria and in our two weeks we intended to do some sightseeing, walking and wildlife watching. Pre-reading for the trip included the previous reports on the www.travellingbirder.com website, Gosney's Bulgaria "Wheretofind" and Gorman's [Birding in Eastern Europe](#). Both these books were useful but generally geared to hiring a car. I have included a section at the end of this report titled "Getting About" as things have changed regarding hire cars/taxis since Bulgaria joined the EU. Our base was St Konstantin, a fairly quiet coastal town 7 miles from the city of Varna. We booked our holiday through Balkan Holidays and stayed at the hotel Koral where the food was good and staff pleasant and helpful. Costs for the holiday were around £600 each half board including flights/transfers, a bottle of wine in the hotel was £5. weather was hotter than anticipated at around 75-80^of most days with unbroken sunshine. One of the reasons for visiting at this time of year was to hopefully observe major raptor/heron/stork migration down the Black Sea Coast. Unfortunately in spite of our best efforts – pre-breakfast and evening walks, all day trips along the coast, no major raptor migration was observed. We did however see some fabulous birds with several lifers (L) and would go again and recommend it to others. Butterflies were exceptional and I hope you enjoy the pictures as much as I enjoyed taking them (see section below).



Red Squirrels were common

The Places

St Konstantin and the Ecological Park

The Ecological park is a short walk (via the bus underpass) from St. Konstantin so I have treated them as one location. When entering the park go straight on for about a quarter of a mile then take a semi-metalled track 90^o to the left past some trees and you quickly reach the edge of the park and enter a large area of meadow/scrub/trees/farmland which proved good for a wide selection of birds including: - **Roller(L)**, **Wheatear**, **Honey Buzzard (L)**, **Bee Eater**, **Red Backed Shrike**, **Woodlark**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Sparrowhawk**, **Jay** and one **Greater Spotted Eagle** migrating at high level. **Green** and **GSP Woodpeckers** were quite common in the park itself.



Woodlark



Wheatear



Red Backed Shrike

In the town of St Konstantin **GSP** and **Green Woodpeckers** were common and one **Syrian Woodpecker** was seen along with **Red Breasted Flycatcher**. Heard on three evenings was a **Scops Owl** (L) and one **Golden Oriole**, both heard outside our hotel. On the only wet/windy day we had in 2 weeks I visited the coast and there were plenty of **Little Gulls** (L) and **Cormorants**, **Common Terns** were seen along with two **Gill Billed Turns** (L).



Red Breasted Flycatcher



Syrian Woodpecker

[Cape Kaliakra](#)



I have to admit to being truly shocked to find one of the most important migration places in Europe covered in hundreds of wind turbines, they are also out at sea. The plains leading up to the cape are covered in them and there were no **Harriers/Stone Curlew** etc that we were hoping to see, only small migrants. To make it even more depressing we spotted a guy detailing where more were to be put up! We did however manage to see some good birds here, if not the astonishing numbers seen by other in previous years at this time. Several **Pygmy Cormorants** (L) were below the cliffs at the end of the headland, a **Sparrowhawk** was hunting the **Red Backed Shrikes** which were sitting atop almost every clump of bushes. Migrating **Wheatears** and **Bee Eaters** were common and a **Red Breasted Flycatcher** was on the military buildings. A **Honey Buzzard** landed a few yards away and a pair of **Black Eared Wheatears** were by the car park. Whilst watching a group of **Rock/Feral pigeons** flying along the cliffs I was amazed to see they were closely following a fast flying falcon which was probably an **Eleanoras**, sighting was too brief for absolute confirmation.



Pygmy Cormorant harassed by gull





Honey Buzzard (juvenile)



Male Black Eared Wheatear



Female Black Eared Wheatear

Note: others have reported Pied Wheatears here so I could be wrong !

[Albena/Baltata Forest](#)

The purpose built hotel village of Albena is about fifteen miles north of St. Konstantin, it is much quieter than the brash Golden Sands resort that is between the two. The Baltata Forest is a protected area which is about one mile square and contains swamp and unspoilt

woodland. Birds of note seen here were **Green, GSP** and **Middle Spotted (L) Woodpeckers** and **Warblers** of which most appeared to be **Willow** and **Chiffchaff**. Two **Squacco Heron** were seen on the coastal marsh near the river mouth along with a **Pochard**. When visiting make sure you check the wooded walkways into the marsh near the river mouth (easily missed). On the edge of the forest away from the coast two **Ballions Crake (L)** were heard having a fight in the marshes, this id was confirmed by sound recording (unmistakeable!). Possible **Grey Faced Woodpecker** were seen distantly on two occasions on the edge of the forest, too brief for absolute id. North of Albena the beach front walk continues for about half a mile and then the path is obliterated by rock fall from building works at the top of the cliff. Although it looks quite promising no birds of any kind were seen here except **Cormorants** out to sea.



Middle Spotted Woodpecker



Squacco Heron



Pochard

Other Sites

When visiting the Palace Gardens in Balchik a **Tawny Pipit** (L) was spotted along with a **Green** and **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, **Nuthatch** were also heard here. Golden Sands resort produced **Black Redstart** and **White Wagtail**, the extensive protected woods behind the resort only produced **GSP** and **Green Woodpecker** plus a **Spotted Flycatcher**. A map of the woods with walks detailed is available from the information centre on the main road opposite the resort.



Crested Lark

(The only one seen on the trip, at a coach stop on the way to the airport)

Butterflies/Insects

The best area for butterflies was the area behind/outside the Ecological Park mentioned earlier. I have included pictures of those that hopefully will be of interest to the visitor, more common UK varieties I have left out to try and keep the file size of this report down!



Lang`s Short-Tailed Blue



Eastern Wood White



Great Banded Grayling



Purple Shot Copper



Cardinal



Silver-Washed Fritillary



Mallow Skipper



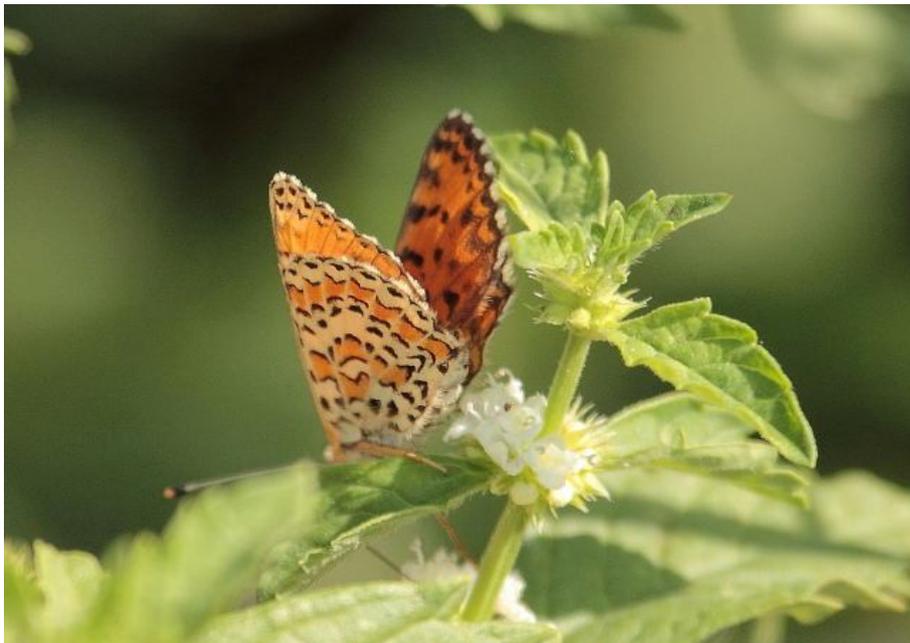
Eastern Bath White



Grizzled Skipper



Dark Grayling



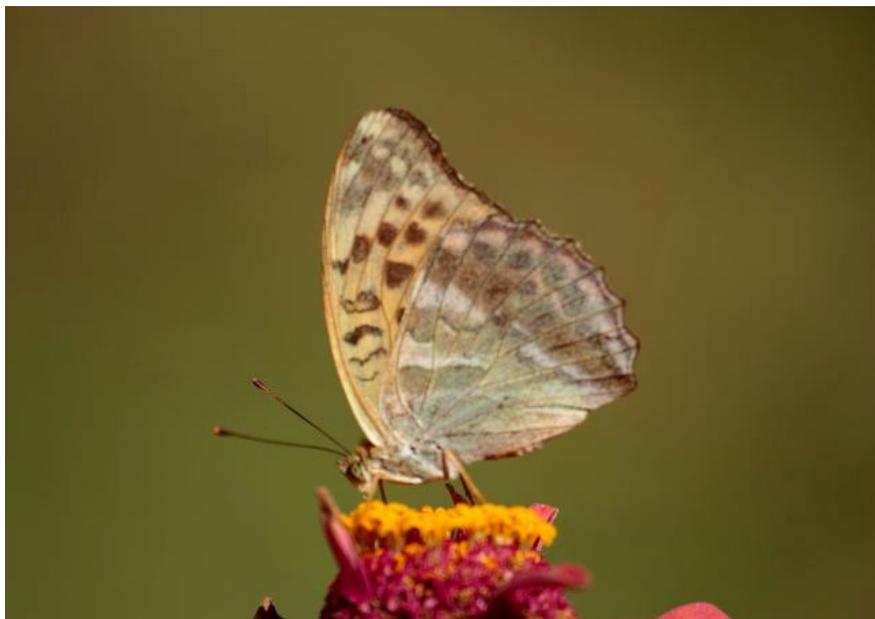
Spotted Fritillary



Lesser Fiery Copper



Small Copper



Silver-Washed Fritillary (f. argyrea)



Eastern Clouded Yellow



Oriental Meadow Brown



Lesser Spotted Fritillary



Swallowtail



Striped Hawk Moth (one of six around one bush !)



Any Ideas ? I have no clues as to what this insect is but he is about three inches long and takes a good picture !

Getting Around

Bulgaria is an ex communist country and its bus operation needs understanding to use it effectively. For example to visit Bakchik by bus (25 miles north) you have to travel south into Varna city to pay at the ticket office and catch it. You then pass St. Konstantin on your journey without stopping! On your return trip however you can ask the driver to let you off at any point. The city bus (409) to Varna or Golden Sands can be caught at any bus stop and the fare paid on board.

Previous trip reports mention the low cost (£21) of hiring a car and driver for a day, unfortunately those days are gone! Enquiring at all the local outlets the cost is now a minimum £40 pounds for the car, £20 for a driver (8hours), plus petrol and a £100 deposit, even though their man is driving! The safer option is to hire a taxi and negotiate a price for where you are going and how long you will be there. Typical cost was £60 for a day's roundtrip from St. Konstantin to Kaliakra. Beware of one particular scam that was attempted on us where once underway the driver tried to assert that the price negotiated was per person! Another couple had this tried on them so I would advise that you always have the correct money to pay the negotiated price. Last point. in St. Konstantin and the area behind the Ecological Park there are some unpleasant dogs, a dazer is recommended (www.sunflowerbooks.co.uk).

Summary

We had a good holiday with plenty of good birds (seven lifers), good weather, some interesting sightseeing and relatively low cost. My wife, a non birder said she would be happy to return, which has got to be a success in my book!