

**GEORGIA – Endemics of the Caucasian Hills and lowland steppe
Birds, mammals & breathtaking landscapes**



GEORGIA TRIP REPORT - 21-28 April 2018



The following is a detailed **Trip Report of our April 2018 Georgia tour**. For daily species list please contact us at ecotours@t-online.hu and cancuninfo@gmail.com

All pictures in this material were made during this tour by participants and leaders.

Fact File

- 8-day-long birding holiday with some mammals and breathtaking landscapes
- start and finish in Tbilisi, Georgia
- using 4 accommodations
- this tour was a modified version of our websignup itinerary spending extra time at Davit Gareji instead of extensive travel to Javakheti Plains

Highlights

- visiting different protected areas conserving Caucasian wildlife
- wide variety of undisturbed habitats and wildlife, ranging from steppes, lakes & marshes through beautiful valleys up to canyons at impressive mountain ranges
- many truly Caucasian bird species in good numbers, great photo opportunities
- slopes covered by carpets of Gentians, Primulas, Irises and Orchids
- scenic rural countryside, great nature & culture experience
- ancient villages with monasteries, proud and friendly local people and excellent food

Accommodation

3 nights at Kazbegi NP, Tergi Valley; 3 nights at Chachuna Nature Reserve
1 night at Davit Gareji; Before and after the tour most of us had 1-1 nights at Tbilisi

Activity level & weather

Timing was perfect and we were very lucky with the weather, we had crystal clear weather most of the time. In the hills mornings were chilly, but without wind it was tolerable. On the plains sometimes it was hot, but dry, so again it was not bad at all. We used a 4x4 minivan, so walks were short, still of course even a short stroll above 2000m can be demanding.



Eurasian Black Vultures were in good numbers in the air above the hills

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Detailed day by day description of the tour and observations:

Our journey started on 20th of April, part of the group, Mike and Bob started from the UK, Greg from the Netherlands, while Dorothy arrived from the U.S. through Budapest where she met with Andrea and Gabor from Ecotours & Worldwide Travel who organised the tour and travelled together via Istanbul to Tbilisi. Upon arrival we waited the preordered transfer from the hotel which never arrived so we had to organise another one. As we were driving through quite shabby areas passing defunct depots and strange buildings we felt a bit strange and when our driver said after passing a fence that we have arrived we were not really sure. But he was right, it was the Marco Hotel which actually had acceptable, large rooms with all facilities. We were all too tired to bother with real dinner, so we discussed breakfast time and went to bed.

Day1 21April 2018

After a large breakfast 4 of us were picked up by Nika who was our driver and local guide and then we drove to downtown to collect Mike and Bob. It was not easy to find their small downtown hotel, but Bob came out to one of the larger streets at the right moment. We left Tbilisi finally around 10am driving North towards the hilly region of Kazbegi. At our first roadside birding stop at the beginning we found common species such as Greenfinch, Robin, Blackbird, but then we noticed a Peregrine Falcon and a Steppe Buzzard, a locally common form of the Common Buzzard. First we heard and then we found beautiful Red-breasted Flycatcher, first a female, later several nicely coloured males. A few Long-tailed Tits were around alongside with Blackcaps, Great Tits and House Sparrows. We saw a Great Heron flying in a distance and a Sparrowhawk just above us. Heard Chiffchaff and Blue Tit and had Eurasian Jay as well.



Our next short stop was at a small coffee and restaurant where at the roadside slope in a small forest patch we searched White-backed Woodpecker, but found just Greater-spotted. Also here we had Blackbird, Eurasian Nuthatch, Coal Tit and Chaffinch. A bit further we stopped again at a restaurant, but this time not for birding, but to have our first really amazing lunch with excellent Georgian food with big variety of dishes and portions which we could not finish

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although we tried hard. We drove up to higher elevations with beautiful hills around. We stopped at a mountain lookout surrounded by snowy peaks and gorgeous valleys. The first birds such as White Wagtail, House Martin, Common Swift, Stock Dove and Raven did not cause big excitement but soon we started to find high elevation species as well such as Red-billed Cough, Ring Ouzel with a bit more white on wing panel than in Northern Europe, Alpine Accentor, Water Pipit. We had a Hobby and a Common Buzzard, but the big excitement was caused by our first Lammergeier which flew in front of us majestically at the edge of the cliffs disappearing much faster than we wished. But a bit later as we drove away we had another 2 of this amazing birds.



Searching and finding Caucasian Snowcock and Caucasian Black Grouse

Our next stop was at a basalt wall where the first birds were White and Yellow Wagtails, plus Black Redstarts, but soon we have found an attractive Wallcreeper as well flying like a giant butterfly from cliff to cliff. A Steppe Buzzard flew suddenly so close towards us that we could almost touch its feathers which were in mint conditions. A Sparrowhawk crossed above the rock wall and we found another exciting local specialty in the form of a singing male Red-fronted Serin. It was not easy to leave this great place, but we had to arrive to our new accommodation at Stepantsminda where we were already waited by an excellent dinner. We ended the first great day with 43 species, almost the quarter of the final result.



Day2 22April 2018

Our second full day started with a pre-breakfast walk at the foot of the impressive Caucasian hills. We had all layers on which were needed the cool morning with temperature below minus 4 Celsius. The first birds were Black Redstart and Ring Ouzel. At the latter species we noticed the much bigger white wing panel on the local population than what we used to see in other parts of Europe.



Two excellent endemics: Greater Spotted Rosefinch and Güldenstadt's Redstart by Greg Tailor

Suddenly we noticed 2 male Caucasian Black Grouses chasing each other on the slopes and later on we found a third one as well. We heard the Curlew-like strange call of Caucasian Snowcock regularly, so we tried hard to find them as well.

Finally Gabor pointed out one and everybody has managed to see it through the scope before it flew down and disappeared. Suddenly we realised that just behind of us on the tree we have a beautiful male Greater Spotted Rosefinch which we managed to admire for a while before it moved on. Soon we had another local specialty, the *brevirostris* subspecies of Twite which has shorter bills than the nominate form. Other species to mention were Raven, Great Tit, Dunnock, White Wagtail, Goldfinch and we heard from time to time Chukar as well. Wow, what a morning, all this just before breakfast! After breakfast we drove up to a church on a strongly eroded road which was a real challenge even with an excellent 4x4 minibus. Strangely enough there was quite strong traffic as well since this site is a popular general tourist destination as well.



Water Pipit was common in the hills, while Güldenstadt's Redstart was very localized

The scenery was excellent and from time to time we could see the peaks of Kazbegi as well. We had a very tame Water Pipit at our feet, Ring Ouzel, Mistle Thrush, Raven, Black Redstart. We flushed during driving a Chukar. Also saw a very distant Golden Eagle disappearing in the clouds, Steppe Buzzards. We had both Red-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos so we could compare them. After driving down our next stop was at a Griffon's Vulture nesting site. Here beside White Wagtail Grey Wagtail was new and we had again Raven, Great Tit and Black Redstart. In the meantime finally Griffon's Vulture turned up as well. Late afternoon we spent again at the foothills at a bushy slope at the edge of the town where the first birds were Water Pipit and Northern Wheatear, but soon we found Güldenstadt's Redstart which we admired quite close for long time. For a comparison Black Redstart was around as well. Nika, who is a biologist specialized on local mammals, found 6 Eastern Caucasian Turkeys high up in the rocky slopes. We had again a Lammergeier plus of course Raven and Ring Ouzel.



Caucasian Tur, a rare endemic mammal; Lammergeier above snowy slopes (photo Greg Tailor)

We could not ask for more within a day, we had plenty of great endemics birds and mammals, so after a substantial dinner and completing our bird list we prepared for another great day.



We had breathtaking views of several majestic Lammergeiers on different days

Day3 23April 2018

Before breakfast we drove up to an alpine slope to search an even better view of a Caucasian Snowcock. We were lucky to find one on a boulder rock on the slope in front of us. Later it flew, but fortunately we could follow it and saw it feeding on the scree so we could observe this special bird for long time. We noted Steppe Buzzard and Rock Dove as well. We returned to our accommodation to have breakfast and then we drove South. We stopped alongside the road and admired Lammergeier and Griffon's Vultures again. Black Kite and Honey Buzzard as new and we also noticed a Common Sandpiper. Troops of Wagtails and some Northern Wheatears were around as well. We returned again to the Wallcreeper wall where this time we could enjoy 2 birds calling each other and also coming down even for photography.



We heard the Curlew-like call of Caucasian Snowcocks regularly and have found a few as well.

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Surroundings of cemeteries, monuments and hotel gardens were all good birding places

Winter Wren was new and we had again Red-fronted Serin. Red-billed Coughs were loud and we also had Eurasian Jay, Common Raven and Hooded Crow. Later we visited a side valley where at another rock surface we saw another Wallcreeper, but no Rock Thrush. We skipped to visit a 6000 years old petrified tree and since it was very windy and apart from Barn Swallows and Ring Ouzels we could not see too much we decided to return to Stepantsminda.

On the way Nika found some more Eastern Caucasian Tur. In the town we visited a small park and searched Semi-collared Flycatcher. First some of us had shortly a female, but it took a while to find a male alongside the river, through the vegetation. We also noted Common Sandpiper, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Barn Swallow, Great Tit, Coal Tit and of course Chaffinch. We had a late lunch from 3pm and went out birding again from 4pm to a small patch of woods with a little stream. Here we had Grey Wagtail, Dunnock, Eurasian Treecreeper and a nice group of dozen Siskins.



Red-billed Cough was common and we saw Dunnock regularly as well

When we returned to our hotel we found a Wryneck and we all enjoyed amazing view of it. We also had Blue Tit. Later we stopped at a dump where we had Twites and Linnets, plus Water Pipit. Rock Bunting and Common Redstart's subspecies samamisticus (Ehrenberg's Redstart) was new as well. We also visited a stream side bushy area, but although the habitat looked excellent we hardly heard and seen anything here, so we decided to go back to the subalpine slope where we started yesterday morning. Here we had again a nice selection of birds from Sparrowhawk through Water Pipit and Ring Ouzel till Red-throated Pipit which was new. Plus we had again several local specialties such as Caucasian Black Grouse, Gldenstadt's Redstart and Red-fronted Serin. We finished again a bird-full, exciting day with almost all the sought after birds in our pockets.



We had excellent views of Wallcreeper regularly, but found Horned Lark just once

Day4 24April 2018

During the night a strong change happened in terms of the weather conditions. Morning was very foggy, so it did not make sense to go up for further search of Snowcocks and Grouses. Instead we made a longer walk alongside the subalpine slope but bird activity was much lower than anytime before. We had some Northern Wheatears, Black Redstarts and Red-billed Coughs and the most exciting birds were a small group of Bullfinches. After breakfast we had to say goodbye to the hotel and the area and we started our journey to a completely different habitat at the South East corner of the country. Of course we could not resist to stop at the Wallcreeper site where we found again 2 of them, plus Winter Wren, Black Redstart, White Wagtail, Dunnock and Red-billed Cough.

But the best was a Mountain Chiffchaff and of course the Red-fronted Serins. Later on after crossing a bridge we searched Snowfinches without luck. The next stop was at a snowy parking place from where we climbed up to a little plateau of a grazed meadow which was perfect for Horned Lark, Twite and of course Water Pipit, Dunnock and White Wagtail.



Wallcreeper with nesting material; Common Redstart ssp. samamisisicus = Ehrenberg's Redstart

After this short, but successful stop we continued till a crossroad. This site looked pretty Good for Barred Warbler. We tried hard but it seemed the species has not arrived yet so we decided to return a few days later. Still we had Yellowhammer, Magpie, Corn Bunting, Collared Dove and to see the 20+ Eurasian Bee-eaters were really cheerful. Later we also had during our way Kestrel, Barn Swallow, Great Tit, Chiffchaff and some more. Our last birding stop today was at a lakeside where we added several new species and also noted a few which we had before during the tour: Ruddy Shelduck, Black-necked Stilt, Greenshank, Lapwing, Marsh Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Black-headed Gull, Hooded Crow, Common Starling, White Wagtail, Rook, Hooded Crow. After this last stop we had another hour drive on dirt roads till our well

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positioned, hidden accommodation in the Chachuna National Park. During getting our rooms we heard the call of nearby Scops Owls.



A pair of Lesser Kestrels performed some acrobatics

Day5 25April 2018

We started the day with a pre-breakfast walk towards the dam. First we had a Black-eared Wheatear and later on we could compare it with a Pied Wheatear. Plenty of Barn Swallows were around and we found several Crested Larks as well. We heard Common Cuckoo and Hoopoe was seen as well. At the reservoir close to the shore we saw 7 Black-winged Stilts, Yellow-legged Gull, 2 Ruddy Shelducks, 2 Avocets, Common Sandpiper. We heard the Black Francolin and after some search we managed to put the scope view on it. Wow, another great endemic species! Soon we had stunning view of an Eurasian Roller while we heard Nightingale and Syrian Woodpecker. Wood Pigeon, Marsh Harrier and Sparrowhawk flew across. Gabor found a Menetries' Warbler, but it was very hard to show to each member of the group. But we took our time and finally everybody has managed to see this interesting songbird. After a Green Woodpecker we found a little tree decorated amazingly by 3 stunning Ortolan Buntings, offering incredible photographic possibilities. We also noted Tree Sparrows and Jackdaws before we arrived back for our first breakfast here from 9 till 10. After breakfast we drove first alongside the reservoir where we found Little, Black-necked and Crested Grebes and also some Tufted Ducks. We saw some Lesser Kestrels hunting around and soon we discovered that they were nesting in the huge pumping station building.



We checked out the reservoir daily;

Male Lesser Kestrel (photo by Andrew Tailor)

There were a few Yellow-legged Gulls as well. Griffon Vultures flew across and we also had a stunning Golden Oriole. Nika flashed a Eurasian Nighthawk but unfortunately the group could not see that bird.



Although Ortolan Bunting is not endemic or big rarity, still it was a star bird

A bit further at a much drier area we had several Isabelline Wheatears plus Spanish and Rock Sparrows side by side. It was nice to see an Eurasian Hoopoe and a well-marked Steppe Buzzard. Soon we had our first Little Ringed Plover and a colourful Eurasian Roller.



A displaying Isabelline Wheatear offered great observing and photo opportunities

Ruddy Schellducks were new and there were Hooded Crows around as well. Other songbirds included Linnet, Skylark, Whitethroat, Goldfinch and Lesser Whitethroat. We also saw a beautiful Long-legged Buzzard up close and added Upcher's Warbler to our list as well. We returned to our base around 14pm to have a lunch. During the afternoon we ventured out again and had more Eurasian Rollers and also two Cuckoos.



One of the amazing Lilies

Rock Sparrow or Petronia

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Soon it turned out this afternoon became fantastic for raptors since we had 6 Black Vultures, one Egyptian Vulture, an immature Golden Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Common Buzzard, Montague's Harrier and Lesser Kestrel so we were not bored at all. We also added 2 new species here, Corn Bunting and Greater Short-toed Lark. Our final and most distant site today was a large gorge with dry rocky walls which provided excellent habitat for Chukar and of course for our main target bird here, the Rock Nuthatch. It took a while, but finally we have found its interesting nest as well which made the observation of this bird easier. We found several Chukars as well.



This site also provided our first Blue Rock Thrush plus we had Common and Alpine Swifts as well. We also had a big falcon coming in the gorge which caused quite a debate partly because just a few of us could see it, partly because it is quickly landed unfortunately to a spot where it was not possible to observe it further.



Eurasian Roller rolled in the air regularly Caucasian Agama was a stunning endemic reptile

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Based on size, shape and colour it seemed it was a Lanner Falcon, but our local birder said that higher the chance for Saker Falcon which breeds in the area. The distance was relatively big and neither of us had enough regular experience with Lanner, although for Gabor and Andrea Saker Falcons are almost garden birds, so they observe this species quite regularly.



Wheatears were represented by Pied and Black-eared

On the way back to our accommodation we saw most of the species again in a reverse order. We added 37 new species to our list, but this was a great day for other wildlife as well, so we observed Caucasian Agama, Red Fox, Brown Hare and Tortoises were everywhere. We have seen a strange, long-tailed mouse as well.



Beside the birds we enjoyed beautiful carpets of flowers at endless meadows

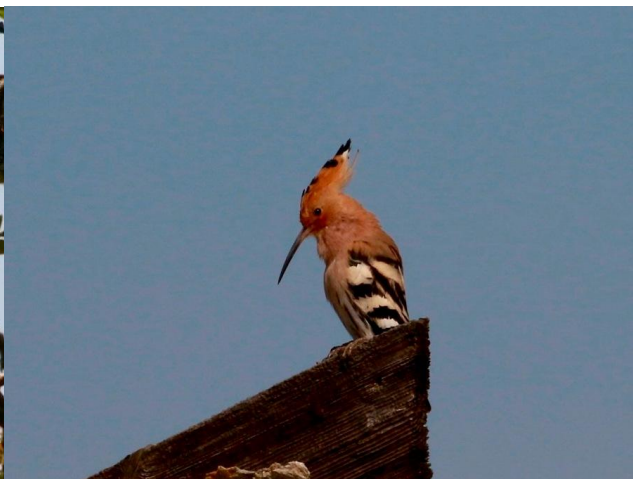


Day6**26April 2018**

Today we started again with a pre-breakfast walk which resulted first with an excellent, up close view of a Black Francolin which flew just in front of us. Later we spent some time with distinguishing Chiffchaff and Green Warbler; we found them both of the same tree. Admired again a Menetries's Warbler and watched Penduline Tit visiting its delicate nest from time to time, offering great photography possibilities. Blackcap, Whitethroat, Red-backed Shrike were common and we also had Cuckoo, Marsh Harrier, Wood Pigeon and two Yellow-legged Gulls. Surprisingly already before breakfast there was a strong raptor activity, started with a Lesser Spotted Eagle, one Black Vulture followed by 5 Griffons. Finally we had a nice adult Imperial Eagle as well.



Eurasian Cuckoo



..... and Eurasian Hoopoe were in the hotel garden

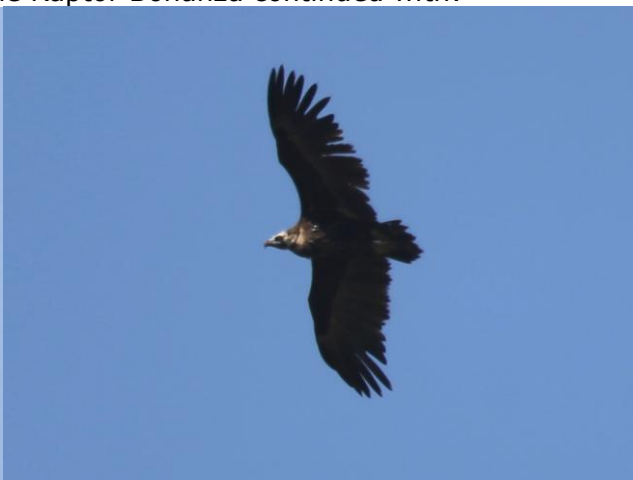
After breakfast we visited the bushy area above our accommodation where we found Common Whitethroat, Crested Lark, Barn Swallow, Great Tit and Lesser Whitethroat. Raptors were still in the air so we could ID a subadult Imperial Eagle and two Black Vultures. Cuckoo nicely perched in front of us and a Montague's Harrier surprised us. Later on we drove down along a small channel. A pair of Black Francolins run in front of us, than later we found a Tree Pipit and heard Syrian Woodpecker. We saw regularly Cuckoo and Chaffinch.

The most exciting was a male Levant Sparrowhawk but unfortunately not everybody managed to see it. We also had Red-backed and Lesser Gray Sheikes, plus Sparrowhawk. After our lunch we drove out to locally famous mud volcanoes. On the way we saw many Eurasian Rollers and Isabelline Wheaters. Raptors were represented by Lesser Kestrels and Long-legged Buzzards. Tawny Pipit was new and we also had Calandra Lark. There were numerous Skylarks and Barn Swallows as well. Upon arrival to the mud volcano area we took quite a lot of photos of this surreal landscape but perhaps the videos could give back the feeling at its best.

A bit further on the mountain ridge we stared 16 Eurasian Black Vultures and 2 Griffons circling around. We also saw a Long-legged Buzzard on its nest. We found again all 3 Wheatear species, plus Chukars and Rock Dove again. The Raptor Bonanza continued with:



Immature Golden Eagle



Black Vulture

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Subadult Imperial Eagle



Griffon Vulture



Black Vultures were in good numbers at certain areas



Long-legged Buzzard at nest



Griffon Vulture



Black Kite



...and some more vultures

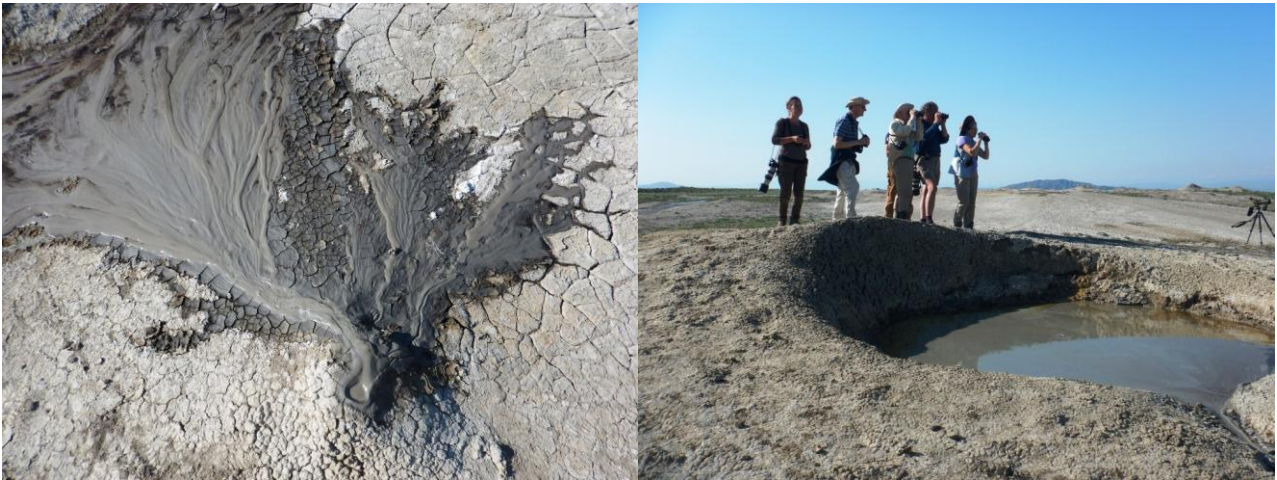
The scenery of the mud volcanoes and their activity was a bit surreal:



Hot water and different gases bubbled up continuously forming and changing the surface



Variously coloured mini-craters were very active

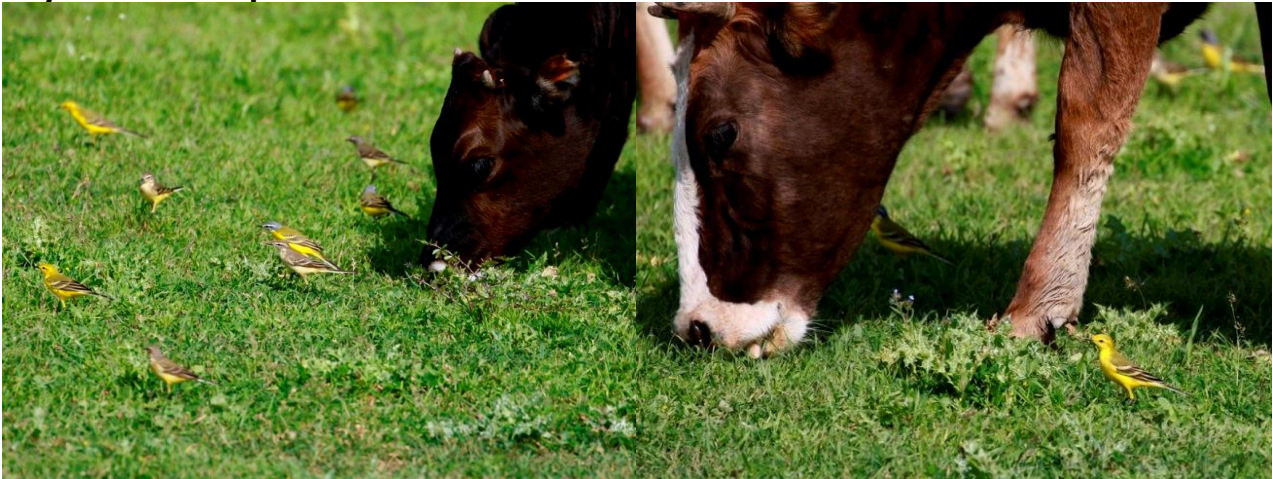


Even at this Moon-like landscape we could find birds



Day7

27April 2018



Several subspecies of Yellow Wagtails and a Citrine Wagtail was found

Today's pre-breakfast walk between 6 and 8am resulted again a long list of birds which started with Corn Bunting, Crested Lark, Eurasian Roller, House Martin and Barn Swallow. Great Cormorant was new and also White-tailed Eagle and Grey Heron flew across. We found again Menestries' Warbler, heard again Black Francolin and Reed Warbler as well. Sparrowhawk crossed quickly and we had Upcher's Warbler and Golden Oriole. We were not paying too much attention to Starlings and Magpies, but it was a different case when Dorothy found an Orphean Warbler!



Beautiful male Woodchat Shrike along the road; Black-headed Bunting in front of our rooms



Whinchat

Spanish Sparrow

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Day by day we had better and better Chukar observations

Black-eared Weather was present in the garden and we also found an Eurasian Hoopoe there. But the star bird here in the garden was a beautiful and very cooperative Black-headed Bunting which we all could admire for long. After our last breakfast here we had to say goodbye to our accommodation here in Chachuna Reserve and we started our drive out through the protected area to West towards David Gareji.



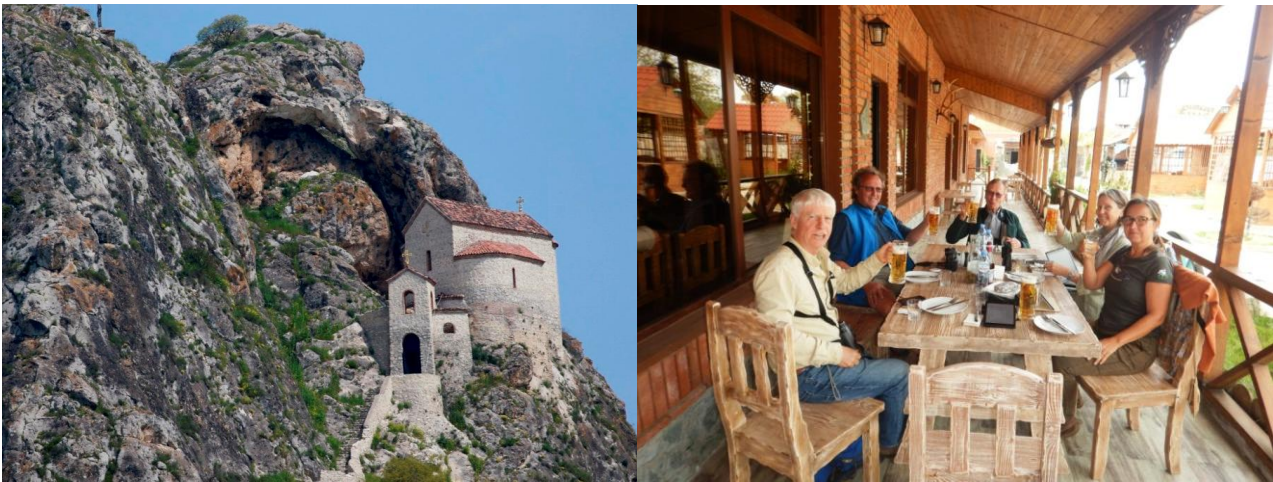
Long-legged Buzzard struggles with tortoise

Leaving through the reserve was not boring either, we had numerous Wheatears, some Crested Larks, Spanish Sparrows and another Black-headed Bunting. But the highlight was to find 2 male Woodchat Shrikes which were close enough even to photograph them. We had a good selection of raptors as well, including Eurasian Black Vultures, Griffon Vultures and Eurasian Sparrowhawk.



A pair of Stonechats were representing the Eastern race of this species.

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We saw some excellent cultural highlights and enjoyed tasty food washed down by lovely beer

Ruddy Shelducks were found again, Jackdaw was common. Close to the sheep there was a large group of Yellow Wagtails with several races from flava through feldegg till thurnbergi. The sheep was interesting as well, it seemed these animals accumulated large fat reservoirs at their butts.

We also found Rock Sparrow and Whinchat and another 2 Chukars. At one point we could compare Steppe Buzzard and Long-legged Buzzard as well.

Later on we drove further West, stopped at a petrol station where first we had Swifts, but suddenly Gabor jumped out from the vehicle and pointed out a Booted Eagle. We made a little detour to a nearby gorge which seemed a perfect place for Vultures and Eagles. Sooner or later two Egyptian Vultures and a Eurasian Black Vulture circled around.



A nice mix of Black-winged Stilt, Ruff, Greenshank and Red-necked Phalaropes

A Blackcap and a Woodchat Shrike was seen again and Gabor got excited by hearing a Scops Owl which he tried hard to call closer. He went toward the sound and the bird flew across and started to call from the other side, but was not possible to locate it. Around 13.30 we stopped shortly at a crossroad with a simple picnic site where we stopped few days ago as well on the way towards Chachuna. This time we were more persistent and finally lucky with Barred Warbler, however it was unusually hard. We also saw Nightingale and heard Common Quail. Gray Partridge, Corn Bunting and House Sparrow was present as well. Later on we stopped at a great Grill Restaurant for a late lunch till 15.30. It was a real feast, was not easy to stand up after eating everything!



Ruddy Shelducks followed by a Demoiselle Crane

Our next stop was at Lake Ganjari where we had 24 Ruddy Shelducks accompanied by Mallard, Little Stint, Black-winged Stilt, several Little Ringed Plovers, a small group of Ruffs and a few Greenshanks. But perhaps the most exciting birds were the always very active Red-necked Phalaropes and 2 lovely Demoiselle Cranes.



Little Ringed Plover we had a few times



The first Demoiselle Cranes

Finally we arrived to Udabno where we had a hard time to find our accommodation since it seemed unlikely that the place where we stopped was the right place. We saw couple of containers out of which 4 were ready, another two were far from that. Cows were wondering around, people were working hard cutting and installing different things and the whole place was really far from being a hotel. But our hosts kept insisting that those contenders are our hotel rooms, so we entered with serious hesitation.



Luckily the group just could get enough rooms; they were still building the new ones.

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Much to our surprise the inside was totally fine, brand new and comfy room with small, but tip top bathroom and we had even heating. Walked over to the simple, but cosy restaurant and bar where we were served the best dinner during the tour. Next morning we all agreed that despite the surrounding and the circumstances this was the best place to stay and was absolutely close to David Gareji.



David Gareji monastery is not just a cultural highlight, but an excellent birding area as well

Day8 28April 2018



After a good breakfast we visited Lake Ganjari again where we found again Ruddy Schellduck, Black-winged Stilt, Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers, Ruffs and 3 Greenshanks. Redshank was new and we had a nice flock of White-winged Black Terns as well.



Blue Rock Thrush is always a stunner

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Red-necked Phalaropes were around again and now we had 7 Demoiselle Cranes Skylark, Starling and Corn Bunting were around in good number. From here we continued toward David Gareji. on the way we saw 4 Eurasian Black Vultures, Hoopoe, Skylark, Steppe Buzzard and Calandra Lark. It was interesting to see a Red Fox looking for food in the grassland. We also had a Stonechat and Black-eared Wheatear.



Rock Nuthatch was very confiding



Male Pied Wheatear

When we arrived to David Gareji the first great bird we found was a male Blue Rock Thrush. Soon we also noticed a Rock Nuthatch on the walls of the medieval monastery. A few Eurasian Black Vultures flew over as well. Black-eared Wheatear was common and we found Ortolan and Corn Bunting as well. Barn Swallow, Starling and House Sparrow was really common. Among the walls of the monastery Rock Sparrows nested. At the surrounding slopes we saw Chukar and in the bushes Common Redstart, a female Menetries's Warbler and also Orphean Warbler. Before we left the place a Griffon Vulture flew across as well.



Ortolan Bunting and Red-throated Pipit enjoyed a bath at a pond before the sheep arrived

We went back to our accommodation, had a late check out and we started our journey towards Jandari Lake and finally Tbilisi. On the way we had Hoopoe. Roller, Kestrel, some more Black Vultures and Ruddy Schellducks.

But perhaps the most exciting site was alongside a small stream which supported a pond which was visited by flocks of various Wagtails include White, different forms of Yellow and even one Citrine Wagtail. A stunningly coloured Red-throated Pipit was great and we had several Calandra Larks as well. We found here Ortolan Bunting and Common Sandpiper as well.



Calandra Lark was quite common at one area

Further on a simple bush stop resulted a big surprise, a large Levantine Viper. Fortunately it was more cautious than us so retreated before we could stepped on it. Our final stop was at the Jandari Lake, half of it belongs to Azerbaijan and other half to Georgia. So when we saw a group of Armenian Gulls crossing above the lake through the border from Azerbaijan to Georgia we hesitated a bit on which country's list we should put that record?



Sheep is important to keep the habitat;

Watching Armenian Gulls

Beside the Armenian Gulls we also noted Great Crested Grebe, Grey Heron, Great White Egret. We also found some more new species including Common Coot, Cattle Egret and a small group of Glossy Ibises. From the bus Gabor saw a Red-footed Falcon as well, but it disappeared too quickly. Finally we returned to Tbilisi some of us to the airport hotel, others in the city, but we all left Georgia just next day either early morning or later.

Before we said goodbye at the end of the tour we asked everybody what was the bird of the tour and what they liked in Georgia. The mentioned species ranged from Greater Spotted Rosefinch through Gldenstadt's Redstart till the majestic Lammergeier, but Caucasian Snowcock and the singing Wallcreeper were not forgotten either. Ortolan Bunting, Wryneck, Ruddy Schelduck with Demoiselle Cranes, Black Francolin and Chukar was mentioned as well. Overall we had 171 species, but Nightjar and Red-footed Falcon were seen just by leader(s) and 4 species were just heard such as Common Quail, Spotted Crake, Scops Owl and Reed Warbler. We all agreed that food was excellent wherever we went and people were really friendly and kind. Overall we felt that Georgia has a great potential to attract more and more birders and we already started to plan our return with other groups during the next year.

We hope that by reading this daily diary and looking at the photos we can make you travel back in time and bring back all the lovely memories of this amazing Spring journey! We wish that sooner or later we can enjoy again an amazing Ecotours Holiday together in a great company! Hope to see you soon!!! ☺ With hugs: Gabor and Andrea