

# NEOPHRON Tours 2007



## Winter Birding in Bulgaria

*This tour will take you to the Bulgarian Black Sea coast to explore some of the most important European wetlands for wintering geese. Every year hundreds of thousands of wild geese, among which almost the whole population of the globally threatened Red-breasted Goose, choose the northern Bulgarian lakes of Shabla and Durankulak as their wintering grounds. The less severe climate on the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast allows for enjoying wintering Dalmatian and White Pelicans, various species of ducks, shorebirds, gulls, raptors and many more.*



**Best period: 20 January - 25 February**

This tour can start any time you prefer within the above period

### Tour details

#### Costs per person:

2-3 persons: £ 555 / €790

4-7 persons: £ 440 / €630

bigger groups: to be agreed

Single room supp: £ 70 / €100

#### Accommodation:

In twin bedded en-suite rooms, in clean and comfortable family-run hotels

**Food:** Breakfast and dinners at the hotels, lunches are packed. Local food is tasty, wine is especially good.

**Grading:** Easy day walks; for watching the geese "take off" it is necessary to get up earlier (~ 06 a.m.) and to be prepared for the cold

#### Price includes:

Ground transport by 4WD car or bus (*depends on the group size*), all accommodation and meals, guiding fee

**Price excludes:** Flight and travel insurance, alcoholic drinks

#### Day 1

Arrival at Varna Airport.

/If you arrive at Sofia Airport you should take the internal flight to Varna or drive to Varna - estimated time: 6 hours/

Accommodation in Varna, a major city and port on the Black Sea coast (one night).

#### Day 2

In the morning we will visit the marsh area Yatata near Varna lake. It is a small wetland, hosting Pygmy Cormorant, Great White Egret and a selection of waterfowl. There are high chances to find Cetti's and Moustached Warblers. Depending on the severity of winter we may expect Whooper and Bewick's Swans, White-fronted and Greylag Geese there too. In the afternoon we will have a brief stop at the Kamchia riverine forests to the south of Varna. The area around the Kamchia river mouth is remarkable for its variety unique flooded forests, wide beaches with sand dunes and freshwater marshes. There we will check for White-tailed Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle, Black Woodpecker, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper. We can also expect various waterfowl in the sea in front and Merlin in the agricultural lands around.

In the late afternoon we will drive to Bourgas on the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast and stay there for two nights

#### Days 3 & 4

These two days we will explore the wetlands around the city of Bourgas that form one of Europe's richest bird areas. Together they harbor 340 of about 400 bird species, recorded in the country. One of the biggest attractions of the Bourgas wetlands in winter however, are the flocks of Pygmy Cormorants, Dalmatian Pelicans and White Pelicans resident there, and the hundreds of White-headed Ducks wintering regularly on Vaya Lake. Some of the other species expected

there are White-tailed Eagle, Bearded Tit, Slender-billed Gull, Mediterranean Gull and other more common wintering water birds. The open waters may hold the very rare Ferruginous Duck.

On day 3 we will visit Bourgas Lake and Mandra Lake (including the Poda lagoon and the Poda Visitor Centre managed by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, the BirdLife partner in Bulgaria).

On day 4 we will check again Bourgas Lake, then will spend the afternoon at Atanassovsko and Pomorie Lakes (all of them are Ramsar sites, distinguished for their bird diversity). If you wish we can spare that morning for visiting some old broad-leaved forests in the Strandja Mountain, where we will find White-backed Woodpecker.

Later in the day we will drive back north to the town of Kavarna and check in our hotel the seafront zone of the town (four nights)

#### Days 5, 6 & 7

We will spend these three days in Bulgaria's "Geeseland" - the northernmost part of the Black Sea coast near the Romanian border, including the lakes of Shabla and Durankulak. The lakes, where the geese roost occupy former river estuaries, winding through hilly plains down to the coastal sand dunes and beaches.

Watching the early morning "take off" of hundreds of thousands of wild geese flying inland to feed in the winter crop fields is truly spectacular! The numerous flocks of White-fronted Geese feature astonishing numbers of Red-breasted Goose (usually between about 10000 and 50000).

During the day, after watching the geese taking off, we will have coffee, tea and sandwiches in a local bistro, then will explore the fields where the geese graze.

While enjoying the Red-breasted Geese, we will also search for Lesser White-fronted Goose. Usually, while checking the huge flocks

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of White-fronted Geese, the Lesser White-fronted Goose can be spotted. Offshore we can expect to see Black-throated and Red-throated Divers, Great Black-necked, Red-necked, Slavonian and Little Grebes, Red-breasted Merganser and Greater Scaup. The White-tailed Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Rough-legged Buzzard, Peregrin and Merlin, as well as the Great Bittern are common winter residents here. There are very good chances for viewing Pallas's Gull at the lakes.

One of these days, we will also explore cape Kaliakra - sheer cliffs towering up to 100 m above the blue-green seawater - where we can expect to see the Mediterranean subspecies of the European Shags, Eagle Owl, possibly Wallcreeper, and various sea

waterfowl. The adjacent steppe area hosts wintering Calandra Larks and Eurasian Skylarks, Merlins, Long-legged Buzzards, etc.

Rough-legged Buzzard and Syrian Woodpecker can be observed during the trip.

**Day 8** Departure from Varna Airport

**During the tour you will learn from our guides a lot about the Red-breasted Goose conservation actions of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, many of which are financed with funds raised through NEOPHRON tours.**

***The above suggested trip itinerary can be modified or we can design a tailor-made tour for you, concentrating specifically on your requests and the time you are ready to spend!***