

Holiday Highlights  
Turkey  
4 -17 May 2013

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Travel day

With the flights on time and the service very good on the flight we are all impressed with Turkish Airlines – even the food is very palatable and certainly better than many airlines. That does mean we are not hungry on reaching Istanbul but we enjoy a light meal in the airport before our onward flight to Adana. Here we are met by our vehicle hire representative who soon helps guide us to our first hotel where a friendly welcome awaits us and very nice rooms.

Day 1: It is already warm early in the morning when a few of us who have woken early wander over the road to have a look at the park by the river. The weather has been unseasonably hot recently with temperatures you would not normally expect until July! We are delighted to find the park alive with birds!! The weather does not appear ideal for migration but the trees and bushes are full of Blackcaps, Barred Warblers and Red-backed Shrikes. We are delighted to find a Nightjar roosting on a horizontal branch and make a note of exactly where it is so we can show the others after breakfast. We find several Lesser Whitethroats, a Thrush Nightingale and a Garden Warbler. There are plenty of Swifts, Swallows and House Martins overhead and amongst them we find a few Red-rumped Swallows and Pallid Swifts. Amongst the Red-backed is a male Woodchat Shrike but both species are out-shone by a beautiful Masked Shrike that perches out in full view. There are Laughing Doves too and we head back for breakfast feeling very pleased with our haul.

Breakfast is an experience! At first there seems to be little to eat - a basket of bread and nothing to put on it and we wonder what will come next. Well the answer is cheese, slices of meat, tomatoes, cucumber, olives, different cheese, some curls of mozzarella and then yet another kind of cheese, spreads, jams, dried fruit, yogurt strawberries and more!! It completely fills the tables until they are putting bowls on top of bowls! We eat heartily but are completely over-faced and there is more left on the table than we have eaten.

After breakfast we return to the park for those who had not been to catch up and soon enough we are finding most of the birds again. The nightjar is still in place and there seems to be even more Barred Warblers. We get only brief views of Masked Shrike but very good views of the Woodchat Shrike and add Reed Warbler, several White-spectacled Bulbuls and get superb views of the

Thrush Nightingale. There is a Peregrine on one of the Minarets of the beautiful Merkez Camii Mosque that overlooks the river and which makes for a stunning backdrop – surely this must be one of the most beautiful buildings in Turkey! A Cuckoo flies over and a couple of Black-crowned Night Herons. It is almost impossible to drag ourselves away as every time we try to make a move another bird flies in and we have to check it out but gradually we move towards the edge of the park and with the weather really heating up we pick up the lunches and head south.

We pass White-spectacled Bulbuls on the wires and plenty of Red-backed Shrikes and there are small mixed flocks of Collared and Laughing Doves. We make a sudden stop as Julian spots a White-throated Kingfisher on the wires. Frustratingly it does not stay for long and soon flies but most people manage a good if brief view. We arrive at a wide bend in the river with a broad bed of reeds along the edge and get wonderful close up views of a Marsh Harrier. It drops into the reeds close by and while we wait for it to reappear we get flight views of Little Bittern and discover that there are several Reed Warblers and Graceful Prinias here. With patience we eventually manage some very good views of the Graceful Prinias in particular as they perch out in the open their tails cocked or out at strange angles. The Marsh Harrier reappears, we get another flight view of Little Bittern and there are Crested Larks everywhere. Starred Agamas peer at us from the top of the piles of rubble here - big chunky lizards that are quite impressive! We also see a few butterflies including Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady and Large White.

Eventually we arrive at a large expanse of salt-marsh and shallow water where we make a stop to enjoy a view of Greater Flamingos along the shore. They look fabulous as they feed or hold necks up high. There are plenty of Kentish Plovers and Black-winged Stilts plus several Little Egrets. A superb male Black-headed Wagtail appears, lots of Little Terns are fishing in the main lake and we get good views of Spur-winged Plovers. A small flock of Little Stint are close to the road and more Kentish Plovers. It is already lunch time by the time we get to the far side of the lakes where we have lunch beside a small stand of trees. We are expecting a few migrants here and find Spotted Flycatcher and more Red-backed Shrikes while a close tree is full of Spanish Sparrow nests. After we have eaten we have a try for Eastern Olivaceous Warbler which has been singing in the bushes behind us. It proves rather elusive but most people manage to get a reasonable view before it disappears into thicker cover. A Golden Oriole flies past which somehow turns into a Barred Warbler the moment it lands in the tree top - I hate it when they do that!

In the shelter of the bushes and trees it feels very hot indeed so we take a walk along the south shore of the lake where a pleasant breeze makes all the difference. We have hardly gone any distance when Roy spots a flying Rufous Bushchat which drops in at the edge of some rushes. We sneak forwards trying

to get a view and most people manage to see a glimpse before it moves on. We continue our walk and are soon enjoying more Spur-winged Plovers and lots of Kentish Plovers plus 'dancing' Flamingos. The waders are rather disappointing with hardly any in view at all but we are delighted when a couple of Collared Pratincoles fly over. We find more shrikes and get a brief view of Great Reed Warbler, a fly-over Purple Heron and a pair of Garganey on the far shore. We are surprised to find a couple of Curlews and enjoy nice views of three Slender-billed Gulls. A Rufous Bushchat starts singing in the scrubby vegetation on the dunes and we enjoy fabulous views through the scopes. We see more Collared Pratincoles and there are even more Little Terns plus a few Common Terns. A couple of Bee-eaters fly over very high and we find another Woodchat Shrike. As we walk back we get superb views of Graceful Prinia perched right out on a few reed stems and then find Whinchat and a delightful tiny baby Kentish Plover like a ball of fluff on legs.

Back at the vans we start our drive back and decide to go in search of White-throated Kingfishers along a road that Julian has seen them on before. We find a beautiful Masked Shrike on the roadside wires, more Red-backed Shrikes and another Rufous Bushchat. In some of the ditches are Levant Water Frogs. We find a superb White Stork nest with an adult and at least one, possibly two young, then soon enough the second adult flies in looking huge! There are quite a few Spanish Sparrows nesting in the base of the storks nest and we get good views of a well marked male. It is frustrating that we can't in the end get down the road we want to as a slightly official looking person tells us we can't go down that road! So instead we drive back to where we got brief views of the kingfisher this morning and have a scan around there but to no avail - we decide we'll try again in the morning.

We arrive back at the hotel with enough time for a break before meeting for our evening meal on the roof top terrace! Again the food is very good and we enjoy the warm evening air with views out over the park towards the subtly lit mosque - a lovely finish to the day

**Day 2:** We meet up across the road in the park before breakfast to see whether anything new has come in. There are plenty of Red-backed Shrikes still, a few Blackcaps and we get very good views of Barred Warbler again though there seems to be fewer this morning. We enjoy excellent views of a singing Thrush Nightingale perched in full view and singing for several minutes before dropping down to the low bushes and hopping on the grass. The Masked Shrike shows briefly and Arlene is delighted to find a Nightingale. It is always strange to see Reed Warblers in the tops of the trees and we find a Willow Warbler and then have the challenge of identifying a couple of hippolais warblers. They are always hard to identify but one is swinging its tail in a sort of loop which is classic behaviour of Upcher's Warbler! The plumage fits too and this is a great find here and we enjoy a few brief but good views before finding a second bird that

is dipping its tail in classic Eastern Olivaceous Warbler fashion - one of each! There are a few birds passing by along the river too including Whiskered Terns and Yellow-legged Gulls, and Roy and Sara find a White-winged Black Tern. A couple of Black-crowned Night Herons fly over and skulking amongst the willows there is a Little Bittern. Every now and then a burst of strange noises reminds us that there are also Levant Water Frogs!

We arrive back at the hotel ready for our breakfast and while not burying the table in food this morning there is still far more than we can eat! After breakfast we are keen to try and get a decent view of White-throated Kingfisher before we leave so we head south a short distance to a spot where we have seen them in the past. We walk along the river and have not gone far before we can hear one calling further down the track. Walking on quickly it gets louder and we arrive just in time to see it fly away!! A second bird follows the first and we stand and scan the wires and trees hoping there might still be one here. There are White-spectacled Bulbuls here in good numbers and a male Golden Oriole flies through, then suddenly we hear a White-throated Kingfisher calling again. We scan round and suddenly it flies in and lands on the distant wires. Through the scope it looks fantastic with its huge red bill, white throat and brilliant blue wings. We enjoy great scope views before it flies and then we are delighted to watch it flying in wide circles high overhead - the white flashes in the wings really distinctive - a fabulous looking bird. Over the next hour we get more good views of both perched and flying birds plus a few other birds too - a singing Olivaceous Warbler, a Penduline Tit gathering nesting material and great views of Rufous Bushchat feeding in a berry tree.

Time is flying now so we set off back to the hotel to finish packing and load up for the journey to our next destination. Theresa is feeling unwell having been poorly all night and Gerald informs us that she is not well enough to come with us. We agree to 'play it by ear' about how they might catch us up when we know how she is feeling but he insists we must carry on without them. It is about two and half hours to Gaziantep and we are soon on our way and heading east. We make a stop for lunch at a service station picnic site and a little look around after lunch produces Black-headed Bunting, Great Tit and a few butterflies including Long-tailed Blue, Clouded Yellow and Small White. There is also a Balkan Wall Lizard.

We arrive at the hotel - and what a superb hotel it is! The foyer is very impressive indeed with the centre of the hotel empty right up to the top floor and beautifully decorated. The rooms are lovely but we don't hang around for long and, after a few minutes to settle in, we head out again at around 4:30pm. It is just a short drive to where we take a side road down towards a small village and we drive slowly looking for birds. The scenery is completely different with rocky slopes, orchards and scrubby bushes. We soon spot a raptor above the skyline and we jump out to enjoy superb views of a Long-legged Buzzard. Once

out of the vans we start finding more birds with at least two Black-headed Buntings singing in the trees then a Sombre Tit in one of the bushes. It behaves very well showing for a long time and then we move on to a White-throated Robin found by David - a beautiful bird and one of the rather pale-bellied colour variant. We watch this for a while and then Julian brilliantly picks up a Lesser Spotted Eagle high overhead! It behaves very well circling slowly which allows us to enjoy scope-views, which is not always easy! At one point another Long-legged Buzzard is circling with it and the size difference is very obvious.

We drive a little further up the road and get out again when we see a few birds flitting around. One is a Woodchat Shrike plus there are more Sombre Tits and White-throated Robins - this time orange bellied birds. We get very good views of another Long-legged Buzzard and in the valley below us discover a calling Eastern Rock Nuthatch looking so much bolder than our Nuthatch with a very broad eye-stripe - especially behind the eye which is diagnostic. It flits around the rocks below us behaving just like a Rock Nuthatch should! Anne Spots a Syrian Woodpecker which frustratingly flies off before we get views then a warbler flies in and perches in the bushes - but what is it! The rather large size and pale grey of the back plus pale wing panel suggest Upcher's and eventually it comes closer and even sings which completely clinches the identification. We add Linnet, Red-rumped Swallow, Sardinian Warbler, more White-throated Robins and even a Balkan Short-tailed Mouse! Roy C finds an Eastern Festoon amongst a variety of other butterflies.

It has been a very successful afternoon and we set off back to hotel delighted by our findings. The evening meal is a superb buffet and we head to bed for a good night's sleep so we can be up good and early tomorrow.

**Day 3:** An early breakfast at 6:30am means we can be out before it gets too hot and again the breakfast is fantastic!! There is a massive choice of food - cheeses, breads of different kinds, olives, eggs and even a large bowl of chocolate spread! It is a very pleasant temperature as we set off for our walk in the hills and we park and start walking up the slope towards a valley between two craggy rocky slopes. It is beautiful habitat and the orchards to our left are also of interest with Syrian Woodpecker here and a couple of Black-headed Buntings. On the rocky slopes we find several Black-eared Wheatears and are astonished by how much they vary - from very black and white looking birds to much buffier coloured and some with black throats, others with just black 'ears'. There are small parties of Linnets and we find a couple of Cretzschmar's Buntings lower on the slope where Sara finds a beautiful male Blue Rock Thrush. A Short-toed Eagle appears above the skyline and we get superb views of a Peregrine and a very smart Long-legged Buzzard. There are quite a few butterflies as we walk including Painted Lady, Turkish Meadow Brown, various skippers including Oriental Marbled Skipper, a Knapweed Fritillary, Lesser Fiery Copper and beautiful Eastern Festoon. Starred

Agamas are on the rocks here and there and the flowers are beautiful though mainly go un-named.

We follow the path round and start to gain a little height adding more birds as we go. There are lots of Rock Sparrows nesting in small holes in the rock face and perching on boulders and small bushes. We find our first Cinereous Bunting singing well from the tops of the rocks and further on find more. A hissing 'buzzy' sound guides us to a very good species - Pale Rock Sparrow and there seem to be several nesting in the area and holding territory. A flock of Bee-eaters fly over and there are lots of Common Swifts around too. We find more Black-eared Wheatears further on and enjoy superb views - then there is a bit of confusion as a wheatear flies across with a lot of dark on the top of the tail. At first we think it must be Isabelline Wheatear but when it re-appears we are delighted to discover it is in fact a female Kurdish Wheatear! The orange under the tail is distinctive and we get good views through the scope. We spend a long time in this area getting more views of this bird plus more Black-eared Wheatears, Cinereous Buntings, Blue Rock Thrush and lots of butterflies. A little further on we enjoy fantastic views of Finsch's Wheatear with two males and a female eventually being located. There are more butterflies and so far we have identified Holly Blue, Southern Swallowtail, Lesser Fiery Copper, Small Blue, possible Tessellated Skipper, Eastern Dappled White and Large Grizzled Skipper, and the flowers and scenery are superb.

Eventually we drag ourselves away and start back down the track. We reach the bottom and walk into the village where we decide to buy an ice cream as it is now very hot, and by chance we coincide with the schools lunch break! There are lots of children and it is great fun trying to hold a conversation with their limited English and our non-existent Turkish! They are so happy and smiling and asking our names and where we are from and so on and telling us they learn English at school and realising we are happy to try and chat we soon gather quite a crowd! It is great fun and we enjoy swapping names and then their English teacher arrives and at least can translate a few bits for them and us! We are invited to the school for tea but decide this might end up very time consuming and decide to decline though it is tempting. It is all very enjoyable and the children such fun and we all wave as we finally head back to the hotel where we eat our packed lunch and take a break.

We meet up again late afternoon for another walk soon arriving at another small village where we are again greeted by a group of small children shouting 'Hello,' over and over again! The trail starts down through an orchard with rocky slopes above us and the weather is lovely and much cooler than yesterday. We have had a small amount of rain earlier which has made the track rather muddy but we continue anyway soon finding some birds. There seems to be an astonishing number of Lesser Whitethroats. We spot one after another as we walk and they are by far the commonest bird here. We get very good views of White-throated

Robin and a close Sombre Tit. A Syrian Woodpecker appears but refuses to stay in the open flying over us a couple of times but never landing in view. There are at least three Black-eared Wheatears and we find Upcher's Warbler, a couple of Cretzschmar's Buntings and a lovely singing Cinereous Bunting. A Cetti's Warbler calls from the depths of the bushes and further on we get more views of White-throated Robin and several singing Black-headed Buntings. Overhead we enjoy wonderful views of a Short-toed Eagle at one point joined by a Long-legged Buzzard. There are Kestrels too and enormous numbers of Swifts. We arrive at a bit of a cliff and find an Eastern Rock Nuthatch nest. It is obviously in use as the bird nips over the top of the rocks the moment we arrive keeping a very low profile.

Walking back we find many of the same species again and enjoy very good views of a singing Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and another Upcher's, one after the other - useful for comparing the two. A Cuckoo flies in and is mobbed instantly by several birds including Cretzschmar's and Black-headed Buntings and Lesser Whitethroats. We get another great view of a White-throated Robin on the wires and a Cetti's Warbler sings from the bushes - some are lucky enough to see it! A couple of Red-rumped Swallows are near the vans as we arrive back.

**Day 4:** After a leisurely breakfast we say thank you to our excellent host at the hotel, then we head still further east. It is about an hour to our next destination and we arrive late morning taking the road along the Euphrates River where we spot some immature gulls along the shore. Stopping to check them out they appear to be Yellow-legged Gulls but they are all first winters - about the hardest age to identify - there could just be an Armenian sneaking in amongst them! We continue along the road making another stop to enjoy the sight of Little Swifts racing around the cliffs and twittering loudly. They are clearly attending some nests here and we get fabulous views of both this species and Alpine Swifts too. Our first Northern Bald Ibis fly past, some overhead and some bigger flocks out over the river. A Syrian Woodpecker flies past and at last we get a scope view and pick out the identifying features.

Eventually we drag ourselves away and head to the Bald Ibis Centre. Here we get to see the cages where the birds are brought in during the winter so that they don't migrate - the main cause for the severe decline was birds not returning from their wintering grounds! There is also a bank of nest boxes on the cliff face, each with a pair of Bald Ibis and through the scope they look wonderful - not pretty but certainly they have character! Their scraggy crests stick up all over the place and they are preening each other and some feeding chicks, others are displaying or courting and some just preening. They are such strange looking birds but it is a real pleasure to see how successful the whole programme is being - there are now 152 pairs - a big increase from a few years ago.

We cross the road to enjoy a cup of tea with the local guide Mustafa and also arrange a tractor and trailer ride for tomorrow. We get great views of Olivaceous Warbler and at least three Rollers appear flying round in big circuits overhead - occasionally a bird twisting over and 'rolling'. Anne finds a superb Praying Mantis which brings out the cameras!

We head to a nearby restaurant for lunch. It is good food and there is the entertainment of Roy being given lessons in how to eat the food on his plate! Apparently he is doing it all wrong and everyone enjoys a good laugh as the waiter takes over placing ingredients on his wrap and showing him how to wrap it ready to eat... Julian says he has to read a bedtime story as well!

After lunch we check in at the hotel and then after a short break go back out in the late afternoon to visit a gravel pit complex the far side of the river. It is an excellent area for birds and we arrive to find Rollers flying round and perching on the telegraph poles, Pygmy Cormorants are flying over at frequent intervals and our first Iraq Babbler is in the reeds - but frustratingly brief and we need better views. We see Graceful Prinias, lots of Reed Warblers, a singing Great Reed Warbler, Northern Bald Ibis both flying and on the pylons - and the Iraq Babbler appears again in the reeds but again vanishes too quickly! The weather feels much more humid and we struggle a bit with the heat but the birds keep us happy enough! A Long-legged Buzzard flies through and a Marsh Harrier then Anne spots a Dead Sea Sparrow in the tops of some dead twigs and we enjoy excellent views of this rather nicely marked little bird. A Hoopoe flies through and Hilary finds a nice flock of Bee-eaters hawking from some dead branches. Overhead there are lots of Swifts and Julian brilliantly spots three Honey Buzzards flying over us as they head north followed by a fourth bird moments later. In several places round the pits there are small Sand Martin colonies.

We decide to try another spot and drive round the gravel tracks slowly looking out as we drive. We pause briefly to admire a Roller perched in one of the trees and scanning the reedbeds glimpse another Iraq Babbler - and still not everyone has seen one - so we search on. There are more Dead Sea Sparrows, White-spectacled Bulbuls, then a Black Kite flies over. A Turkish birder stops and tells us he has seen a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater further down the track earlier today so we decide to have a look but just as we are about to go the Iraq Babbler panics as it realises we might ignore it and hops out into a dead tree so we can enjoy wonderful full frame views through the scopes - hoorah!

We scan the area where the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater had been earlier but there is no sign though a couple of European Bee-eaters give us a start! We get wonderful views of more Iraq Babblers and a singing Great Reed Warbler. A small flock of Red-crested Pochards fly over and both Purple and Grey Herons too. We walk on and Hilary finds a couple of Rufous Bushchats that are either



courting or fighting, fanning their tails and showing off and then overhead we spot three more Black Kites! There are lots more Reed Warblers and we pick up a Ménétries's Warbler. It is a surprisingly dark capped individual but the song is spot on and there is no doubt to identity. It vanishes quickly so to try and get another view we play a little of the song and it responds immediately flying closer and singing back, allowing us even better views.

With time passing fast we start driving slowly back through the gravel pit tracks - then as we pause to allow a truck to pass Hilary spots a Pied Kingfisher in the dead trees. We jump out to have a look but it flies before we have the chance - then as we wait for it to reappear a second bird flies past very high. It is not a brilliant view but it is a very distinctive bird. Small flocks of herons and egrets pass over including Black-crowned Night Herons, a flock of Purple Herons and flocks of Little and Cattle Egrets! A Hoopoe flies by and a flock of Rosy Starlings flies through at speed in typical fashion for this species. As we drive back out towards the main road we find a very close Little Owl.

We enjoy a tasty evening meal back at the hotel with some laughs about the drinks on offer. There is no alcohol allowed here and the drinks include a welcoming cup of what is like a weak yoghurt drink and then when various soft drinks are on offer including Coke, Fanta and a drink with chilli in it - though it is hard to tell that from the bottle. Of course this is chosen by the one person in the group allergic to peppers but our host spots her about to drink it just in time!! What are the chances of that? Arlene likes it but the rest of us think that it is horrible!

**Day 5:** We have an early start today and take breakfast with us for the tractor and trailer ride up into the hills. We drive to the village where we meet Akmed and there is much laughter as we board the trailer - it is clearly not going to be the most comfortable ride but at least the first part of the track is smooth-ish! Our first pause en route for the hilltops is for a Little Owl and this is a very pale looking bird of the race known as Lilith's Owl. Some consider this a potential split but there are some birds that are in colour between the two so at the moment it is all unsure. There are also several larks here. There are Crested Larks but also at least one Greater Short-toed Lark and then a bigger lark flies up and starts to climb, singing as it does so - a Bi-maculated Lark!! This can be a very tricky species to find and we are very pleased as we have plenty of time to take in the salient features as it hovers overhead. An Isabelline Wheatear appears on the nearby fence and high above the hillside is a hovering Short-toed Eagle.

We continue on our way and suddenly the track takes a much steeper route causing much hilarity as we try to stay upright! There are Bee-eaters as we go and lots of larks but we wait until we get higher up and level off before making a stop and getting out seeing what we can find. There are larks singing all around including several Calandra Larks. The occasional bird drops to the ground and

shows very well indeed, the dark chest markings are enormous! There are also a couple of Greater Short-toed Larks though they prove difficult to get good views of as they seem to vanish in the grass on landing. A flock of Bee-eaters flies through and we enjoy great views of the Short-toed Eagle and Long-legged Buzzards. We decide to have breakfast and enjoy bread, salad and various spreads as we watch the birds and scan for Black-bellied Sandgrouse.

We take a short walk across to the edge of the ridge and scan the whole area. We start seeing a few Honey Buzzards, first just a couple then four more then more including a small flock of twenty or so. There is a Long-legged Buzzard hanging around most of the time and we also see Sparrowhawk, Kestrel and a Black Kite. Another lark flies in and lands very close by and we are surprised to find it is a Lesser Short-toed Lark. There are at least three birds and we get excellent close views – that makes five species of lark here!

Then more raptors start flooding through, with group after group of Honey Buzzards. There is an Egyptian Vulture and with these a bird which Roy is convinced is an Eastern Imperial Eagle as the plumage looks good for this species - very pale on the body, head and forewings and with dark flight feathers. There does not appear to be any white band down the length of the wing - but there is something not quite right, the wings are drooped in flight and the tails too short! Julian suggests it might be a Steppe Eagle and a debate ensues with our thoughts leaning towards Steppe Eagle but without Imperial Eagle ruled out yet - these birds are not always easy! We find Lesser Grey Shrike, another Isabelline Wheatear, yet more Honey Buzzards and Black Kites and a Peregrine. Just as we are about to give up and go in search of See-see Partridge a Black-bellied Sandgrouse appears flying past us at pretty close range! Excellent flight views at least!

We are almost back by the village when we make a stop beside a small pool with dozens of small toads around the edge - they look like small Green Toads with the green blotches on their backs. There are Pale Rock Sparrows here showing very well indeed, a Corn Bunting and more Honey Buzzards and then another eagle appears! It is rather a pale bird too but this time we can easily see the white band through the middle of the wing typical of Steppe Eagle. It has some of the same markings that the earlier bird had including pale patches on the upper wing and looking at the shape and flight of this bird, with the same drooping wings, we feel more confident that the earlier bird was also a Steppe Eagle - just a rather unusually marked one!

We take a track that goes up into a newly planted field of Pistachio trees. Our driver carefully steers between the trees and checks first one gully then another and then suddenly, just as we find a Lesser Spotted Eagle - he finds a pair of See-see Partridges! We jump down from the trailer and set up scopes and are soon enjoying very good views of this rather beautiful bird. It is so neatly marked with

curving flank-stripes, a black line through the eyes and little red bill - it is delightful. At first we think they are going to run straight over the top of the rise but they stop and allow prolonged views. As we return to the farm we see a Finsch's Wheatear. We finish off back at the farm and enjoy Turkish tea while we scan the area hoping for Desert Finch. They don't appear but we get very good views of Turtle Dove, Lesser Grey Shrike, Isabelline Wheatears, Laughing Dove, Black-headed Bunting and more. Then suddenly things 'really kick off' as yet more Honey Buzzards start flying over, not just in ones and twos but sometimes flocks of twenty or thirty or more. At one moment a scan of the skies produced a count of well over a hundred and in amongst them the occasional Black Kite and another Steppe Eagle.

Delighted with our sightings we decide to head back for lunch and slowly make our way back the way we came checking the birds on the fence wires for Desert Finches - but still with no luck. There are numerous Red-backed Shrikes plus Lesser Grey Shrike, Spotted Flycatcher and Rufous Bushchat. We pause to check a raptor which turns out to be a dark morph Booted Eagle then arrive back at the town for a very enjoyable lunch at the hotel.

After a break we go out again in the later afternoon when things have cooled down a little. Our first stop is just down the road at a well known site for Pallid Scops Owl. Two years ago we missed this species despite putting in an enormous effort but this year we are more hopeful! Julian woke early this morning and popped out to see if he could find where the bird was roosting. Not only was he successful but it is still here!! We simply walk into the area and set up the scopes and there we are enjoying full frame scope views of one the rarest birds in the Western Palearctic! It is indeed a pale bird too and with lovely fine markings. It is fast asleep most of the time but for a little while it wakes up and preens, has a look around and it is a good chance for a photo. We are delighted with this sighting but eventually decide that we should try for one of the other two remaining specialities of this area - Chestnut Shouldered Petronia - or Yellow-throated Sparrow as it being called these days. We drive out of town to an orchard area where Julian has seen this species before and almost immediately he finds one singing from the top of one of the trees - superb! It shows very well allowing everyone good long scope views before finally taking flight.

This just leaves Desert Finch and we are not very hopeful having missed them this morning around the tractor ride farm. We drive on up the road and eventually come out from the orchards onto some more rolling steppe like country and pause when Roy spots two birds on the wires. They are Crested Lark and Black-headed Bunting but as we about to drive on a small bird flits a short distance in a rather scruffy field to our right - a quick check with the bins and yes!!! We are out of the vans in moments and setting up scopes to enjoy these really gorgeous

little birds - Desert Finches – and there are actually five of them! They are just beautiful birds with such simple colours and lovely markings - everyone is thrilled.

Mission accomplished we head back towards Birecik with big grins on our faces then pause as we enter the town to look at some Pygmy Cormorants on the river. From the same spot we see a few Alpine Swifts and a pair of Northern Bald Ibis that are perched on a nest.

We head next to spend the last half hour or so at the gravel pits and enjoy some good birds here in the fading light. We pass a Little Owl on the way in. There are at least two Great Reed Warblers singing from the tops of the reeds, two Common Terns fishing in the background and several flocks of Night Herons fly over as well as Little and Cattle Egrets. Three small flocks of Rosy Starlings fly through, a Caspian Tern flies past and we see a couple of Marsh Harriers and get excellent views of a Ménétries's Warbler so close you can see the red eye and thin white eye ring. Two very distant Pied Kingfishers fly through and as we leave we spot a Purple Heron. Back at the hotel we finish the day with a very nice meal and several short power cuts as the thunder and lightning play around outside!

**Day 6:** Today is a travelling day with a long drive from here to Goreme but before we leave we have a quick look at the gulls on the river as a couple of us found at least one Armenian Gull here this morning. There are actually quite a few gulls on the shingle islands and the majority are first year birds which makes identification a genuine challenge. We discuss whether they might be Yellow-legged or Armenian Gulls and there are even a couple of birds Roy is convinced could be Caspian Gulls! One however is very distinctive being a second summer bird and therefore showing much more distinctive plumage features such as the darker mantle, yellow bill with big black tip and a black eye - this is definitely an Armenian Gull and structurally it is almost like a Common Gull! Comparing this bird with the younger ones Roy is pretty sure the majority of these birds are Armenian as well but there are a couple of bulkier birds that may well be Yellow-legged and at least one or two that have the structure of Caspian Gull - perhaps there are all these species here! An immature Lesser Black-backed Gull is surely of the fuscus race, with a very white body and head for a first summer bird. There are a few Northern Bald Ibis feeding here too and a single Snipe flies up and away. A Pygmy Cormorants is drying its wings and in the distance on an island are nesting Black-crowned Night Herons and Cattle Egrets. *(On returning home we send photos of some of these gulls to Chris Gibbins, a friend with a lot of experience of eastern gull species and his reply confirms that the majority are Armenian and there is at least one Caspian while none, in the photographs at least, are definitely Yellow-legged which is all very interesting)*

We eventually drag ourselves away to make a start on our journey and we start by heading back to Adana where Gerald and Theresa are waiting for us - Theresa now fully recovered from her illness. We arrive for lunch time and enjoy lunch

on the terrace looking out over the park with the stunning mosque in the background - it seems strange to be back, almost like we have never been away! Heading north we discover that the motorway has been extended enormously since we were last here. We cover the miles easily but don't see much as we drive - the odd shrike on the wires and at a comfort stop at a petrol station we find an Asia Minor Souslik!

We finally arrive on the outskirts of Goreme and make a stop to enjoy the astonishing view across the valley here. The viewpoint looks out at scenery with eroded valley sides and 'fairy chimneys' as they are locally called - pinnacles of rock eroded to points, sometimes with a small cap on the top. The soft volcanic rock here is ideal for carving out caves and dwellings and many of the 'fairy chimneys' have windows and doors cut in to them. The hillsides in places are peppered with holes where people have carved their dwellings into the rock face and in some areas squatter pinnacles all crowded together are full of windows looking like some kind of surreal little elfin village. In the distance are valleys with the sloping sides eroded into fins and buttresses - it is simply astonishing! It is going to be an exciting day tomorrow in this incredible place. A few birds also catch the eye including lots of very close Alpine Swifts, a great view of a displaying Isabelline Wheatear, a Jay of the Turkish race with a black cap, our first Tree Sparrows and a Hoopoe. We add Black Redstart as we drive to our hotel where we receive a lovely welcome from Filiz and we have time to settle in before enjoying a very tasty and generous evening meal before a run through the checklist and bed.

**Day 7:** A few people are out before breakfast and find some nice birds. Gerald adds to his list with Black-eared Wheatear, Black Redstart and Jay and Hilary gets Common Redstart of the race *samamiscus* with white in the wing, and a Finsch's Wheatear. A leisurely breakfast sees us ready to leave at around 9:00am for the underground city at Kaymakli. This is an astonishing place - where people over thousands of years have dug out their homes into the hillside, the entrance surprisingly small, leading down to eight levels of rooms all connected with narrow corridors. We visit kitchens, stables, wineries, a church and more with our guide, pointing out all sorts of little features we might have so easily missed... small holes where the horses would have been tied, others from which would have hung a hammock. We see how they could bar the entrance with a huge round stone and defend themselves if attacked. A ventilation shaft that goes from ground level right down to a source of water also acts as a well and there are holes in the floor for placing amphorae filled with wine or water. The city could house as many as eight to ten thousand people and there is even a 10km tunnel connecting this city to another one! The scale of what we are seeing is hard to take in and obviously we get to see only a tiny proportion of what is here. The Hittites started these diggings but they were hugely extended when the Christians used them as hiding places while under persecution from the Romans and the Persians. It is all quite astonishing and we come out at the end feeling we have seen

something incredible. Afterwards we have time for a look round a few stalls filled with all kinds of things we might buy, before heading back to Goreme for lunch making a short stop en route for twenty minutes birding. There are tall Poplars, scrubby bushes and fields and as we start walking we hear a Golden Oriole calling. We get good views of Syrian Woodpecker, glimpse a Nightingale and spot Jay and a Lesser Whitethroat. There are a few butterflies including Small Heath and Spotted Fritillary. We enjoy lunch back at the hotel then have some free time to enjoy Goreme itself with its wonderful shops!

After this we head out for a walk in the Love Valley, famous for its rather phallic 'fairy-chimneys' We are soon finding birds, Lesser Whitethroat, Black-eared Wheatear, Jay, Alpine Swift, Black-headed Bunting, Rock Sparrow and a superb displaying Long-legged Buzzard. A Syrian Woodpecker shows very well in a small vineyard along with Lesser Grey Shrikes and a superb male Golden Oriole - he flies across and lands right out in the open in the bare branches of one of the trees - wow!! A second bird appears - this one a rather duller bird though still a male and over the next twenty minutes or more they fly and back and forth and we enjoy excellent views of them both in flight and perched.

We walk on, a Roller flying overhead and even rolling a little in display then we get brief views of Nightingale and Common Whitethroat. We walk up to a viewpoint to look at the astonishing 'fairy chimneys' - they really are quite bizarre!! A pair of Kestrels has taken over a rather large nest, perhaps an old Buzzard nest, and the male is doing very well returning again and again with food including a lizard. A couple of Jays are hopping about on the bare rocky slopes and we get very good views of a Turtle Dove - but where are the Western Rock Nuthatches??

We walk on a little further but don't really find anything different until we are on the way back. We are well on the way when suddenly a movement catches Roy's eye and running down the tree trunk of an old Willow is a small rufous looking animal!! It is swiftly followed by another and we watch in astonishment as they chase each other round the tree and up and down - so fast it is hard to even keep up with them. Eventually one pauses for a moment and we realise it has a black 'mask' through the eyes - it is one of the dormice species that occur here!! There are two species with similar masks like this and we are pretty confident that this one is Forest Dormouse. They vanish for a little while then reappear running to the next tree and then through the bushes, disappear then reappear a few minutes later. It continues like this for a while with brief views followed by gaps when they are nowhere to be seen but eventually one pauses for a moment to have a clean of its fur - and what a delightful little animals it is!! We are just spellbound and cannot believe our luck - only spoiled by the realisation that a couple of people had walked on ahead and not realised we had stopped - re-appearing just at the moment the animal vanishes which is incredibly unlucky.

**Day 8:** We meet at 7:00am for a walk before breakfast and stroll from the hotel into the bottom end of Pigeon Valley. It is lovely and very scenic and there are plenty of birds calling and singing including several Lesser Whitethroats, Black Redstart and Black-eared Wheatear. We walk slowly checking everything and get astonishing views of Cetti's Warbler and Nightingale in the same bush - two very hard to see species both sat out in the open together!! The local Blue Tits seem to look particularly smart, we get good views of a Syrian Woodpecker and a Golden Oriole flies through. At the far end of the walk we get lovely views of a singing Common Redstart plus Eastern Olivaceous and Garden Warbler. We are very surprised that there are no Western Rock Nuthatches again!

We enjoy a wonderful breakfast then head out to the Goreme Open Air Museum - which seems a strange name for somewhere where the attraction is churches carved out of the rock face and the paintings and carving inside. It is certainly well worth a visit and the way some of them have been carved astonishes, with pillars, domed ceilings and arches. Some are painted with very basic designs while others have been visited by professional travelling artists who have produced beautiful images from the bible or of saints including several fabulous ones of Saint George on his horse with the scaly dragon below. Other rooms such as dining rooms with long tables carved from the rock, kitchens, store rooms and more make it a fascinating place to visit. But the site is also not without wildlife too and we enjoy some excellent views of Black Redstarts of the eastern race ochruros which has a rufous lower belly. Some of the males are very smart indeed and there are also plenty of Rock Sparrows and a Western Rock Nuthatch nest! In fact there are several but one is in use and with a little patience we enjoy superb close views as it comes into the nest and sometimes sings from the rocks nearby. Some people get a fabulous view of a Golden Oriole and a Honey Buzzard circles overhead briefly.

We head back to the hotel to pick up bags and say farewell and head out to Cavusin where one of the oldest villages can be seen with some spectacular ruins. It is very photogenic and we have a little time here, during which David and Hilary also find a Rock Bunting, before driving into the Rose Valley where we enjoy a leisurely lunch with the most astonishing of views - eroded landscapes with fins of rocks and pinnacles, many a lovely shade of pink! There are more birds here too with a pair of Western Rock Nuthatch nesting nearby and showing well. We see yet more Golden Orioles, Syrian Woodpecker, Lesser Grey Shrikes, Turtle Dove, a Hobby appears overhead and we get superb views of an Egyptian Vulture. There are loads of butterflies here too with Green Underside Blue, Common Blue, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Small Blue and Spotted Fritillary.

After lunch we drive to our next destination passing through some superb habitat en route - wide open steppe and shallow valleys with crags running along the top and bolder scree below. We make a couple of stops and find Short-toed Lark, Honey Buzzards passing through, Egyptian Vulture, Isabelline Wheatear and lots

of Calandra Larks. Sand Lizards scuttle away as we walk and the flowers have more the look of little cushioned alpins. Our second stop overlooks a lake where we find a Squacco Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Little Bittern, Common Sandpiper and a very nice surprise - John spots a Ruddy Shelduck! There is a Crag Martin skimming around the cliff above us and Roy and Sara find a Finsch's Wheatear.

We go through some heavy rain on the final leg of our journey and arrive to a warm welcome from Basar who welcomes us with a lovely cup of coffee. Some of us are staying here and some in the nearby ski centre but we all eat together in the evening and then chat about the plans for the morning!! This is - we hope - going to be our Caspian Snowcock adventure which means an early start and a tractor and trailer ride to the highest rocky slopes - in the dark, so we are there for first light! But before we get as far as going through the checklist a Scops Owl starts calling outside and so we abandon the list and head out with torches and binoculars. We soon find it in the Poplars outside and it shows very well indeed. It is bizarre that this is a new bird for Roy and Sara coming after Pallid Scops Owl!

**Day 9:** We are woken by a knock at the door at 4:00am! There are stars in the sky and our snowcock adventure is on!!! At around 4:30am Anne spots a Nightjar while the people staying at the ski lodge wait for the tractor to arrive. We climb aboard the trailer and are delighted to find a big improvement since two years ago - there are now seats and foam padding too!! This makes the ride considerably more comfortable and we watch the sky gradually brighten as we bounce our way up the track higher and higher. It takes over an hour to get to the top but it is pretty comfortable and long sections of the track are not even bumpy, so we arrive considerably less bruised than on the previous tractor and trailer ride! The last part of the journey is simply stunning. The mountain peaks with large patches of snow are clear or poking out through the cloud and the whole scene is spectacular. We can hear a few birds singing as we arrive and pick out Black Redstart, Wheatear and Shorelark then hear a trembling curlew-like whistle - a Caspian Snowcock!! Excited we jump down and set up scopes and start scanning the ridges and slopes and almost immediately Roy finds a Caspian Snowcock high on a distant ridge. It is very distant and clearly this species but almost straight away the cloud starts rising out of the valley below and obscures the view. It thickens in moments and soon we are shrouded in mist.

It is a good opportunity to enjoy coffee and Wagon-wheels! Roy did not have four - ok!! As we drink coffee Sara finds a Snowfinch in the mist and we watch this and another bird for a little while, then a Shorelark appears and we get very good views of both species. The Caspian Snowcocks continue to call and it is frustrating being unable to look for them but eventually the mist gradually starts to clear. Some cliff face and boulder scree comes into view and we find Northern Wheatear, more Snowfinches, Black Redstart and Water Pipit. Shortly,



a Rock Thrush flies in and starts displaying, flitting from the top of the cliff. There are plenty of Red-billed Chough and amongst them a few Alpine Choughs. There are a few Wild Goats on the ridge opposite including a very impressive male with very large horns. These are genuine wild animals not feral beasts and may well be the original ancestor of farmyard goats. There are also a few Sousliks around too. Hilary and Anne get a very good but brief view of a Crimson-winged Finch and Roy C also finds one which sadly flies away before he can get us onto it. We get absolutely superb views of a Radde's Accentor singing from the top of a small bush - a lovely little bird.

We now really focus on trying to find a Caspian Snowcock and scan every inch of the cliffs and scree over and over again. It is becoming somewhat worrying when an hour of no cloud has passed and we still have not found one. A bird calls from high above us and it is Basar's uncle, our tractor driver, who finds it high on one of the peaks and rather distant. Through the scopes it is pretty good and you can just make out the pale face markings and lines on the flanks despite being rather silhouetted against the bright sky of the rising sun. It is particularly nice to see it throw its head back and call. A second bird appears briefly and then flies and the white in the wing is very clear. Although it is rather a distant view we are still thrilled to have seen this enigmatic and almost mythical bird!

After these birds have gone over the horizon we focus on trying to find other birds. We spend some time trying to locate a calling Wallcreeper and a few folk get brief flight views. Every Black Redstart, Northern Wheatear, Rock Thrush and Snowfinch is scrutinised to make sure it is not a Crimson-winged Finch. Roy finds a Cuckoo that has been calling for a little while and later we find a Wren and a Western Rock Nuthatch! We glimpse another Wallcreeper and two more Caspian Snowcocks fly over but eventually we have to admit defeat in seeing more of the finches and head down for breakfast.

The tractor ride back down feels much faster as we race downhill, flushing a couple of Chukars as we go and passing small flocks of Snowfinches and the occasional Northern Wheatear and Shorelark. We admire the stunning scenery but we are almost back at the vans when a couple of Red-fronted Serins appear and we stop to try and see them. They prove rather elusive but in the end a couple of people see them well and we decide to go for breakfast and come back.

After a very welcome breakfast - it is by now around 11:00am - we head back to the spot where we saw the Red-fronted Serins. On the way we find two Golden Eagles soaring above the slope to our left and loads of Red-billed Choughs. Scanning the area where the serins were earlier we can't see any though we do find several Northern Wheatears and at least two Isabelline Wheatears. We find a couple of lovely Shorelark. The birds in this area are of the penicillata race with long 'horns' and white rather yellow faces. We see

Stonechat and several Lesser Whitethroats. As we slowly walk up the slope we see some very striking Linnets and then Roy C spots a Red-fronted Serin which flies onto the track where it is joined by a second bird. We enjoy wonderful scope views of these gorgeous little birds - surely one of Turkey's best species.

From here we drive down towards the gorge pausing to enjoy the sight of so many Red-billed Choughs in the fields. While watching these Julian spots another Golden Eagle and we get out enjoying the most fantastic views of this superb bird. It lands for a little while on some rocks then flies again coming closer and landing in full view of a rock face not too far away - through the scopes we can see every detail and it looks fabulous.

We move on to the bottom of the gorge and enjoy lunch here while we find more good birds. Julian is well on form and finds a Rock Bunting, a Western Rock Nuthatch and an Ortolan Bunting. Hilary manages to find the nuthatches strange shaped nest. We see Linnets, Alpine Swifts over the gorge and get more view of Golden Eagles. We walk down a short track and enjoy excellent views of another two Red-fronted Serins, and another Ortolan Bunting. There is a constant stream of Red-billed Choughs flying over and we watch cute little Souseliks standing up like Meerkats!

We eventually drive on to the next village to check the trees here for migrants but all is quiet. There are a couple of Grey Wagtail by the stream and a Red-backed Shrike but little else so we decide in the end to head back to the hotel for an afternoon coffee and to scan the mountains for Lammergeiers. The weather over the peaks is not good and instead we make do with Tree Sparrow, Greenfinch and a fly by Golden Oriole before having a break before our evening meal.

**Day 10:** Many folk are out and about before breakfast and birds seen include Red-fronted Serin, Isabelline Wheatear, Rock Bunting and Western Rock Nuthatch by the ski-lodge while Julian and a few folk walk in the village finding Golden Oriole, Grey Wagtail, Cetti's Warbler and two Wryneck! The ski-lodge folk also add Golden Eagle after breakfast! The Wryneck spot is our first port of call after breakfast and we try playing a little of the call to see if there is any reaction. After a few moments one flies across the road and into a large tree working its way up to the top where it starts to call allowing us the most fabulous views, virtually filling the scope view! A great start to the day.

We continue our drive up through the small mountain village and into the Eremlı Valley. Isabelline and Northern Wheatears are abundant and we see Shorelarks fly across the hillsides and Linnets then make a stop to check a spot where there are a few scattered bushes and crags beside a stream. The weather is glorious with blue skies and warm sunshine as we start finding a few birds, the first being

Black-headed Bunting and White-throated Robin sharing a tree top below us. There seem to be lots of other little birds flitting around and we find both Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes, Lesser Whitethroats in good numbers plus several Rock Sparrows. Two Golden Eagles appear high in the sky above the mountains and we watch them circle together assuming they are a pair and it is only as they drop lower and come in front of the hillside that we realise they have a lot of white in the wings and tail and are in fact young birds! We also see Long-legged Buzzard here and three Hobbies circling together. Roy checks a couple of birds flying by and calls them as Woodlarks! This is a bit of a surprise given the rather treeless landscape though apparently they can also be found in this kind of habitat in Spain sometimes. They land and spend a while creeping amongst the lower herbs and grasses and show very well. The flowers here are beautiful and include the delightful Roemeria - like a small purple anemone or poppy, purple flowers of a species of Milkvetch and strange tall spikes of *Asphodeline taurica* - sometimes called King's Spear

We drop down into the valley, park the vans and walk through the rather spectacular eroded landscape with a view up to the snowy peaks ahead. It is a great place and full of birds! We spot two more Golden Eagles that are clearly adults and therefore certainly not the same birds we saw earlier. There are Red-billed Choughs flying over almost constantly and amongst the large boulders here we find a superb male Blue Rock Thrush plus several more Rock Sparrow, a Rock Bunting and a Rock Dove! Oh, and a Rock! There are occasional little flocks of Red-fronted Serins and also a single Common Serin plus we enjoy good views of Western Rock Nuthatch, Crag Martins, Red-backed Shrike, Peregrine and several superb male Black Redstarts. There are more Isabelline Wheatears, lots of Lesser Whitethroats and we enjoy very good views of a Chukar perched right on top of one of the rocks. There are lots of Small Blue butterflies and a couple of Painted Ladies plus Small Tortoiseshell, Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow and Eastern Festoon. We also find Hummingbirds Hawkmoth and a European Tarantula in a large hole lined with web. Overhead we find a small number of Alpine Choughs. The find of the morning however may well be the Lammergeier brilliantly spotted by Julian, an adult circling high overhead before slowly cruising away towards the mountains looking absolutely superb. The scenery is spectacular and so we take a short drive a little further up the valley to take some photos - and are surprised to find a Coal Tit before we turn round and head back to the hotel for lunch.

It has been an excellent morning and after breakfast we decide to have a change of scenery and head down to the lake at Nigde. The journey there is interesting through rolling grasslands and farmland and looks fabulous for larks - so it is odd that we see so few of them! We find three Shorelark and two Calandra Larks and that is about all! We add Black-headed Wagtail, Corn Bunting, Long-legged Buzzards and Peregrine. At the lake we find the water levels incredibly low which is good for waders as it has exposed a little mud along the edge. There are plenty

of Little Stints and a few Black-winged Stilts and amongst them a couple of Little Ringed Plovers. On the far side we find at least five Spur-winged Plovers and nearby an Oystercatcher! There is pair of Ruddy Shelduck with ten ducklings which is a lovely sight and we are pleased to find Pochard - a scarce duck here. A small flock of Greater Flamingos look lovely as they feed belly deep in the water and at one point they take a fly round the lake looking superb with the bright red in their wings and their ridiculously long necks and legs. There are dozens of Swifts flying round and round above the water. We find a single Common Sandpiper and behind us Short-toed Larks, a few Sausliks and a lovely Long-legged Buzzard.

We drive on a little way and scan the next part of the lake where we find more waders including three Dunlin, a Ruff and a Wood Sandpiper while out on the water there are three Great Crested Grebes, a Little Grebe and a lovely male Garganey. A Glossy Ibis is feeding amongst the Coots and a single Cattle Egret flies in. The weather is much windier now and surprisingly cold and no-one complains when we decide that we have run out of time and jump back in the vans for the journey back and our evening meal.

**Day 11:** We meet for breakfast with a few folk having been out early and seen similar species to yesterday. Today is a travelling day with a journey from here to Tusucu near the Goksu Delta and after breakfast we sort ourselves and load up the van then say our fond farewells to Basar and John then head south. The road is not good as they have taken the surface off it for a long way but we make good progress none-the-less.

We are passing through some lovely rugged looking scenery and enjoying the drive and Anne spots a large raptor over the crags to our right. We stop to check it out and realise it is a Golden Eagle and with it a second bird - both of them adults. We enjoy good views of these birds and then spot more raptors that we identify as Steppe Buzzards. Then Julian spots some very distant birds and we study them carefully as they are clearly very large bowed-winged raptors with short tails - Lesser Spotted Eagles! There are four of them then we find another group of perhaps twenty birds circling higher still and through the scopes the identification is clear. This species migrates through SE Turkey in large numbers and we are very pleased to witness the sight of these birds circling up and then gliding away northwards. More appear and then more and by the time we stop seeing them we think we must have seen over a hundred. There are also some Black Storks doing the same and we have one particularly large flock of over twenty birds and a couple of smaller flocks making something approaching forty birds in total. Another Golden Eagle appears briefly mobbed by Kestrels which look tiny in comparison.

We eventually drag ourselves away and continue south pausing again when Julian has a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker fly across the road in front of his van landing

briefly in a dead tree. There is no sign when we return to the spot unfortunately though there is a dead Cat Snake at the side of the road.

We continue on our way until we find a good place to stop suitable for lunch. There are some large pine trees here and Roy explains that this is habitat for Krüper's Nuthatch so to keep our ears open as we eat. Someone asks what they sound like so he plays a little snippet for people to hear and almost immediately a bird flies in and calls above our heads - brilliant! We are beside a picnic site and a guy from the nearby eating place invites us to sit at the tables so we order coffee and tea and enjoy our lunch.

Once we have eaten we can't resist a wander amongst the trees and soon we start finding more birds including Long-tailed Tits of the eastern race which is noticeably darker with a black bib! There are Ravens above the trees and a Hobby is seen briefly plus another Steppe Buzzard. Sara and Roy discover two Tortoises and we check which species as there are two possibilities - these are Spur-thighed Tortoise identified by the single un-split scale back of the shell. One is beautifully marked. Roy plays a little more Krüper's Nuthatch call as one or two people didn't get a good view of the precious bird against the bright sky and very quickly another bird flies and starts calling above us. This time everyone gets excellent views of this delightful little bird. While we are watching this bird a Short-toed Treecreeper starts calling nearby and soon enough we find it amongst the pines. Time is passing quickly so we decide we had better get some miles behind us but we have barely travelled a few yards when a Booted Eagle appears above the road!

The rest of the journey is rather uneventful as we travel most of the way on the motorway and arrive the hotel at around 5:00pm. The hotel looks out over the sea and after settling in we spend a little while scanning the sea - though not with any great expectation. There are plenty of Yellow-legged Gulls flying past and a close couple of Common Terns plus one or two Shags of the Mediterranean subspecies. A Peregrine flies in from the sea. Right out on the horizon we are amused by the poor views of Cory's Shearwaters! They really are just little winged dots arcing up into the air and vanishing again but there is still something distinctive about that flight! A couple of gulls start hovering over a patch of smooth water and watching them we are pleased to discover they are hovering over two Bottlenose Dolphins! We get a few views of fins but eventually one comes much further out allowing an opportunity to check identification. More surprising, two Ruddy Shelducks fly past.

**Day 12:** We wake to beautiful weather and a very calm sea with just the occasional Yellow-legged Gull drifting by and take a slightly earlier breakfast before heading out into the hills in search of warblers! Julian knows a road along which there is excellent habitat for some of the birds we have not yet seen and we navigate through the town pausing to check out a Little Owl as we leave the buildings

behind. This bird seems much darker than those around Birecik and more like a typical Little Owl. We start to climb into the hills - but our plans seem thwarted when we reach a road block! There has been a landslide and a digger has started what looks like a long term project of removing a mass of rock from the hillside where it has buried the road. There is however a dirt track heading up the hill to our right and we wonder if this is the diversion. It might just loop round the blockage we think, so we start driving slowly up the bumpy track through scattered stunted pine trees and scrub. As we gain height the pines thin out a little and the scrub becomes more prevalent so we make a stop and take a short walk along a little track through this rather beautiful habitat. There are certainly lots of birds here flitting around and it looks good for Rüppell's Warbler so we try playing a little bit of song to see if there is any response. It is a matter of seconds before one appears, popping up onto the top of one of the bushes to check out the intruder. We enjoy excellent views as it perches in full view then more views as it starts feeding, the intruder forgotten - a stunning bird!

We walk on and soon find a brief Masked Shrike, Olivaceous Warbler and a superb singing Rufous Bushchat. Scanning the skies we find two Steppe Buzzards and take time to study the shape of this bird that in plumage is so similar to Long-legged Buzzard - but just like Common Buzzard in shape - and indeed call. A Hobby appears and circles overhead, our best view yet, and it is quickly followed by Peregrine and Raven, then a flock of Bee-eaters fly over. While watching the raptors Roy realises that amongst the Common Swifts and House Martins are a few Little Swifts! There are few butterflies such as Small Blue and Turkish Meadow Brown and other insects such as Ascalaphids, brilliant green beetles and hornets! Julian finds a Spur-thighed Tortoise and around a small water tank there are some interesting looking dragonflies with red veined wings and black and red on the body which we identify later as Red-veined Dropwing.

Adding nothing more we decide to move on and take the track higher up the hillsides. Just when we are thinking this might be pointless as it just keeps going higher and higher we see the minaret of a mosque up ahead and soon arrive in a small village and we are back on the road! We drive slowly on and suddenly through the open window Roy hears the briefest snippet of Eastern Orphean Warbler song! We turn round and pull in near the spot and soon find the culprit which sings well from the trees beside the road - typical Orphean Warbler thrush-like song but the bird itself looks like a big Lesser Whitethroat since strangely it does not have a white eye! As we are about to leave a wonderful insect flies through - a Lace Threadwing! What a beautiful creature - like a cross between a butterfly and lacewing, but with long thin hind wings - it takes a couple of flaps to gain a little height then glides beautifully downwards again.

We move on to a spot where Julian has seen Olive Tree Warbler in the past and get out to scan the scrubby understory of the pines. We soon hear a bird calling up the slope and watch for a little while but the bird is elusive with just a tiny

glimpse as it flits between bushes, so we try playing a little song to see if it might come out. This certainly gets a response in that it starts singing, a wonderful grating song almost like Great Reed Warbler. A second bird starts up nearby, but they still prove very tricky to see and patience is needed as the birds flit around from one bush to the other apparently ignoring the recording after a minute or so. Calls keep us onto where they are but they hide so well in the bushes they are impossible to see until they take flight and nip to the next bush where generally they vanish immediately! Now and then one will land on the outside branches of a bush for a few seconds but you have to get on them quickly! Most people manage a reasonable view in the end and some people excellent views with one perching out for some time and showing all the features. We also enjoy a superb singing male Cretzschmar's Bunting on the wires very close, filling the view in the scope and higher up on the hill a Blue Rock Thrush. In the pines a singing Black-eared Wheatear seems rather out of place!

Well pleased with our sightings we start back down and manage to find a much better route back down the hill thanks to the sat-nav. After lunch we take a break in the heat of the day before heading back out at around 3:30pm. During the break Roy C spots a Monk Seal in the bay just off the jetty - a great find as this is a rare animal.

We meet up again and take the short drive out to the pools of the Goksu Delta. Our first stop is the tower that overlooks the main pool and we find lots of Purple Herons scattered round the edge of the various islands and reed beds. Four White Pelicans are fishing along the rear of the pool and Julian soon finds our first Grey-headed Purple Swamphen, considered by some a separate species from those with dark heads in Spain. Marsh Harriers quarter the reeds and out on the water we find Ferruginous Ducks, Red-crested Pochards including a female with lots of ducklings and Common Pochard. There are Little Egrets scattered here and there and a flock of Spoonbills fly across dropping into a pool behind the reeds. There is a very distant flock of Glossy Ibis, several Common Terns and then a superb breeding plumage White-winged Black Tern flies through just off the nearest edge of the reeds. Julian brilliantly spots a Black Francolin in the distance calling from the top of a rounded clump of vegetation. At the far end of the lake there are some very marshy areas where Little Egrets are feeding and a couple of Great Whites amongst them as well as more Purple Herons and two more Spoonbills. Ruddy Shelducks are here too and in a couple of shallow pools of water are Kentish Plovers and a few Little Stints. Reed Warblers flit through the reeds, Little Terns are fishing in the shallow water and wonderful flock of White-winged Black Terns include a Black Tern in amongst them. We get ridiculously close views of Spur-winged Plovers and find at least two or three Black-headed Wagtails. We find an astonishing dragonfly here with a strange thickened tip to the tail and pale markings which we later identify as a Bladetail - a species that according to the map does not occur here but it is so distinctive it simply has to be this!

We pass a pool where there is another White Pelican fishing to an area that has been good for waders in the past. The water levels are very high this year and there is almost no mud at all so with no waders here we start driving slowly back enjoying a wonderfully close Marsh Harrier with the hills and setting sun in the background - simply beautiful. As we get back towards the start of the drive Roy spots a Black Francolin on some rubble and we pause to watch it calling. It is an excellent view and we watch it for a while when suddenly it starts running with head low to the right where a second male appears running towards it. There is a confrontation as they battle over this patch of ground – a great chance to really appreciate the beautiful plumage of these birds with their black bodies and white speckles, rusty collar and white face patch. They are very intent on fighting it out and we get brilliant views before they eventually disappear into the vegetation - a brilliant finish to the day!

Whether it is because it is so fresh in the mind, who knows, but the Black Francolin moment scores highly in our review of the trip after our evening meal. Each person can chose a couple of species that they particularly enjoyed and some sneak in a third - with Black Francolin scoring very well. The diversity of species that are chosen is surely testament to the great list of exciting species on this trip and amongst the 20 or so species mentioned are Caspian Snowcock, Krüper's Nuthatch, Red-fronted Serin, Golden Oriole, Northern Bald Ibis, White-throated Kingfisher, See-see Partridge, Little Swift and Dead-Sea Sparrow plus of course the delightful little Forest Dormouse! But it is the Pallid Scops Owl that scores the highest number of votes - a great find by Julian and great to see it in such detail in daylight!

Of the many and varied places we have visited it is the mountains around Demirkazik that score the highest with various places around Cappadocia also scoring highly with votes for the scenic valleys, the Underground City and the Open Air Museum. The Magic Moments are always more hard to predict and there is a big mix from migrating Honey Buzzards and Lesser Spotted Eagles, the wonderful time spent looking for Snowcocks, stunning views of Golden Orioles, watching nesting Shorelarks and the Forest Dormouse when he stopped to have a wash and brush up in full view! Walking in the Goreme area also scores highly but the absolute winner by far is the wonderful moment in Isikli when we are surrounded by school children who want to practice their English and are presumably completely puzzled as to why their village has been invaded by these strange people with telescopes, tripods and binoculars round their necks! It was such a wonderful experience talking to them with their limited English but it is amazing how you can get understood and when their English teacher appeared and was able to help chat with us and translate - it was just so much fun and a moment that we will treasure.

**Day 13:** Many of us take the chance for a last birding session before breakfast. We drive down to the delta lakes and head first for the far end of the main lake pausing



en route to check any birds we see. These include Black Francolin, Graceful Prinia, Crested Larks and Rufous Bushchat and a Little Ringed Plover is displaying over the track with the beautiful butterfly flight they do. At the far end we find several Great Crested Grebes, Red Crested Pochards and Ruddy Shelducks. In the shallow waters around the edge are Little and Great Egrets and we enjoy superb views of Purple Herons as close as you could ever hope for. Black-headed Wagtails are here too and again we get great views

We decide to head back to the hide to scan the main lake but it is a little quieter than yesterday - though there are still Pochard and Red-crested Pochard out there plus more Purple Herons and we find a lovely pair of Grey-headed Purple Swamphens with a well grown chick. We add one last species to the trip list when Julian finds a pair of Gadwall!

But time is flying now and we head back for breakfast spotting a Green Turtle swimming in the bay offshore. Then it is time to pack our bags, load up the vans and make our way on back towards Adana, the airport and our flight back to London.

## BIRDS

Ruddy Shelduck	Coot	Lesser Grey Shrike
Mallard	Black-winged Stilt	Woodchat Shrike
Shoveler	Oystercatcher	Masked Shrike
Garganey	Spur-winged Lapwing	Golden Oriole
Red-crested Pochard	Little Ringed Plover	Jay
Pochard	Kentish Plover	Magpie
Ferruginous Duck	Curlew	Red-billed Chough
Caspian Snowcock	Wood Sandpiper	Alpine Chough
Chukar	Common Sandpiper	Jackdaw
See-see Partridge	Little Stint	Hooded Crow
Black Francolin	Curlew Sandpiper	Common Raven
Little Grebe	Dunlin	Sombre Tit
Great Crested Grebe	Ruff	Coal Tit
Greater Flamingo	Common Snipe	Great Tit
Black Stork	Collared Pratincole	Blue Tit
White Stork	Slender-billed Gull	Penduline Tit
Northern Bald Ibis	Yellow-legged Gull	Long-tailed Tit
Glossy Ibis	Armenian Gull	Sand Martin
Spoonbill	Caspian Gull	Crag Martin
Little Bittern	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Barn Swallow
Black-crowned Night Heron	Caspian Tern	House Martin
Squacco Heron	Whiskered Tern	Red-rumped Swallow
Cattle Egret	Black Tern	Calandra Lark
Grey Heron	White-winged Black Tern	Bi-maculated Lark
Purple Heron	Sandwich Tern	Short-toed Lark
Great Egret	Common Tern	Lesser Short-toed Lark
Little Egret	Little Tern	Shorelark
Great White Pelican	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	Crested Lark
Pygmy Cormorant	Rock Dove	Skylark
Great Cormorant	Wood Pigeon	Woodlark
Mediterranean Shag	Turtle Dove	White-spectacled Bulbul
Cory's Shearwater	Collared Dove	Graceful Prinia
Hobby	Laughing Dove	Cetti's Warbler
Common Kestrel	Cuckoo	Great Reed Warbler
Peregrine	Nightjar	Reed Warbler
Honey Buzzard	Scops Owl	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler
Black Kite	Pallid Scops Owl	Upcher's Warbler
Marsh Harrier	Little Owl	Olive-tree Warbler
Goshawk	(Lilith Owl-pale form of Little Owl))	Willow Warbler
Sparrowhawk	Alpine Swift	Garden Warbler
Common (Steppe) Buzzard	Common Swift	Blackcap
Long-legged Buzzard	Pallid Swift	Barred Warbler
Short-toed Eagle	Little Swift	Lesser Whitethroat
Booted Eagle	Roller	Whitethroat
Golden Eagle	White-throated Kingfisher	Eastern Orphean Warbler
Lesser Spotted Eagle	Pied Kingfisher	Ménétries's Warbler
Steppe Eagle	Bee-eater	Rüppell's Warbler
Egyptian Vulture	Hoopoe	Sardinian Warbler
Lammergeier	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Iraq Babbler
Purple(Grey-headed) Swamphen	Syrian Woodpecker	Goldcrest
Moorhen	Wryneck	Wren
	Red-backed Shrike	Krüper's Nuthatch

Western Rock Nuthatch  
Eastern Rock Nuthatch  
Wallcreeper  
Short-toed Treecreeper  
Rosy Starling  
Starling  
Blackbird  
Nightingale  
Thrush Nightingale  
Rufous Bushchat  
White-throated Robin  
Black Redstart  
Common Redstart  
Whinchat  
Stonechat  
Isabelline Wheatear  
Northern Wheatear  
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear  
Finsch's Wheatear  
Kurdish Wheatear  
Rock-thrush  
Blue Rock-thrush  
Spotted Flycatcher  
House Sparrow  
Spanish Sparrow  
Dead Sea Sparrow  
Tree Sparrow  
Rock Sparrow  
Pale Rock Sparrow  
Chestnut Shouldered Sparrow  
White-winged Snowfinch  
Alpine Accentor  
Radde's Accentor  
Black-headed Wagtail  
Grey Wagtail  
White Wagtail  
Tawny Pipit  
Water Pipit  
Chaffinch  
Red-fronted Serin  
Serin

Greenfinch  
Goldfinch  
Linnet  
Crimson-winged Finch  
Desert Finch  
Corn Bunting  
Rock Bunting  
Cinereous Bunting  
Ortolan Bunting  
Cretzschmar's Bunting  
Black-headed Bunting

206 species  
(207 if you count Lilith's Owl  
as a species)

#### **MAMMALS**

Wild Goat  
Asia Minor Souselik  
Balkan Short-tailed Mouse  
Forest Dormouse  
Brown rat  
Red Fox  
Bottlenose Dolphin  
Monk Seal

#### **REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS**

Common Agama  
Balkan Wall Lizard  
Sand Lizard  
Spur-thighed Tortoise  
Balkan Terrapin?  
Levant Water Frog  
Green Toad  
Dice Snake

#### **BUTTERFLIES**

Painted Lady  
Red Admiral  
Small White  
Large White

Clouded Yellow  
Eastern Festoon  
Eastern Orange Tip  
Brown Argus  
Wall brown  
Southern Scarce Swallowtail  
Turkish Meadow Brown  
Eastern Dappled White  
Holly Blue  
Spotted Fritillary  
Knappweed Fritillary  
Small Copper  
Green Underside Blue  
Small Blue  
Common Blue  
Long-tailed Blue  
Tessellated Skipper  
Oriental Marbled Skipper  
Lesser Fiery Copper  
Eastern Rock Grayling  
Small Tortoiseshell  
Queen of Spain Fritillary  
Ilex Hairstreak  
Essex Skipper  
Large Grizzled Skipper  
Small Heath  
Marbled White

#### **OTHER SPECIES**

Lace Threadwing  
Hummingbird Hawkmoth  
European Tarantulas  
Ascalaphid  
Praying Mantis sp  
Violet Dropwing  
Red-winged Dropwing  
Bladetail  
Big crabs!  
And loads of beautiful flowers