

Romania - Christmas in the Danube Delta

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Bucharest and overnight.
- Day 2/3** Tulcea.
- Day 4/5** Constanta.
- Day 6** Return Bucharest and fly London.

Departs

December.

Focus

Red-breasted Geese and other wintering birds.

Grading

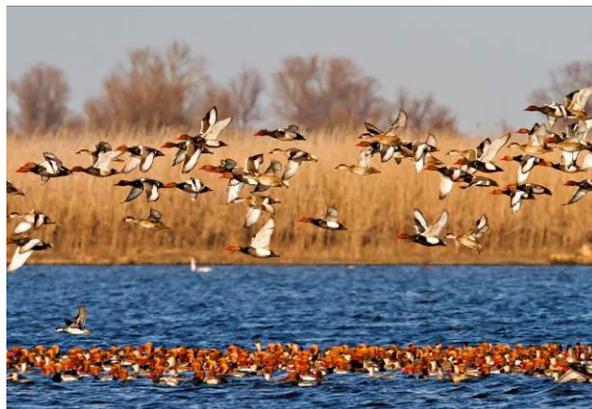
Grade A/B. Easy to moderate walks only.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ROM06) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

Highlights:

- Explore the reed-fringed lagoons and marshes of the Danube Delta
- Scan through mixed flocks of wintering geese for the beautiful Red-breasted Goose
- Large flocks of wintering wildfowl
- Explore the Dobrogea Steppe in search of Rough-legged Buzzard & Long-legged Buzzard
- Visit the Black Sea coast
- Look for Sombre Tit, Calandra Lark & Black Woodpecker
- Led by expert naturalist guides



Images from top: Red-crested Pochard, Rough-legged Buzzard & mixed flock of White-fronted and Red-breasted Geese. Courtesy of D Petrescu.



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Introduction

We are all familiar with the abundance of birds that return each summer to breed within the wetlands of Romania's beautiful Danube Delta but, as the days shorten and the weather cools, many of these species head south to warmer climes to be replaced by an equally spectacular number and variety of wintering birds. Largely uninhabited, with the exception of a few fishing and farming villages, the Delta has an ethereal beauty in the winter. Corridors of willow and poplar trees stand frail and naked, exposed to hard frosts and snow; reedbeds rustle in a chilly wind and sandy islands support forests and the occasional small village, some of which are still constructed of traditional reed and wood. This is a peaceful place, disturbed only by the incessant babble of ducks and the distant honking of thousands of geese from out across the plains. Tens of thousands of Russian White-fronted Geese and 'Eastern' Greylag Geese return here each winter to take advantage of the rich feeding in the wheat fields and marshes around the edge of the Delta. Within these large gatherings of geese, however, can be found flocks of Romania's star wintering bird, the beautiful, delicate and increasingly rare Red-breasted Goose.

December is one of the best months to go in search of the Red-breasted Geese flocks. At this time of year all of the birds have arrived into the Delta from their breeding grounds on the Russian steppe, but the weather has not hardened sufficiently to tempt them to move further south into the less accessible wetlands of Bulgaria. These beautiful birds add a splash of festive colour to Romania's frosty winter landscape and will be the undoubted highlight of this exciting Christmas tour. The geese, however, are only one facet of this yuletide break for the supporting cast of raptors, waders, woodpeckers and other wintering species will also keep us entertained during daylight hours, whilst in the evenings there are the Christmas festivities themselves to enjoy ... Romanian style, of course!

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Bucharest

We depart from London's Heathrow Airport around 1100 hours on our 3 hour British Airways flight to Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Here we will meet our local guide and transfer to a comfortable hotel on the edge of the city for 1 night.

Days 2 – 3

Tulcea

This morning we will drive east for around 4 hours to the town of Tulcea, our base for the next two nights of the tour. Tulcea sits at the western edge of the Danube Delta, at the point where the mighty river suddenly splits and fans out to create the maze of waterways, lagoons, reedbeds and islands of this internationally important biosphere reserve and UNESCO World Heritage Site. Since the geese tend to wander and do not always favour the same areas from year to year, we will keep the programme for the following days flexible to take account of

this and other variables, such as weather, recent sightings and the advice of our local guides. Over the past few winters, however, many of the Red-breasted Geese have favoured the fields and wetlands around Enisala and Murighiol to the south-east of Tulcea and so we are very likely to spend time exploring this rich area.

In addition to an abundance of the wintering ducks common in the UK, we will be looking out for other less familiar waterbirds such as Red-crested Pochard, Pygmy Cormorant and both White and Dalmatian Pelicans. Wintering raptors are particularly well represented in this region — especially favouring the nearby Babadag Plateau and Dobrogea Steppe — and we should be on the lookout for Rough-legged and Long-legged Buzzards, White-tailed Eagle, Hen and Marsh Harriers, Peregrine, Saker and Merlin during our time here.

Days 4 – 5

Constanta

Next, we move south to end our tour with two nights in a simple, but comfortable, hotel near Constanta. From here we explore Lake Techirghiol — often favoured by large flocks of Black-necked Grebes and the occasional White-headed Duck — and other wetlands along the Black Sea coast. En route we will look for more mixed geese flocks around Istria, Vadu and Lake Sinoe and search for a few of the smaller passerines and woodpeckers that remain here for the winter, including Black, Middle Spotted and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Sombre Tit, Hawfinch and Calandra Lark. For those of the group interested in a challenge there will be plenty of gulls to scan through, and hopefully a few interesting species to find including Caspian Gull, Little Gull and perhaps even a Pallas' Gull.

Day 6

London

Today we must return back to Bucharest, but will try to break the journey wherever possible. Our return flight to London departs mid-afternoon arriving around 1830 hours.

Grading

Grade A/B. This is a gentle-paced birdwatching tour that does not involve a great deal of walking. As we will be mainly searching for and watching wetland species, we will be moving slowly and using telescopes to study the bird flocks in detail. This is likely to be cold work, however, although we will never be far from the relative warmth of our vehicle. It is likely to be snowy and icy underfoot so please pack appropriate footwear.

Weather

You should expect cold weather in late December. There may be snow lying on the ground and daytime temperatures average around 4°C, but can be much colder on occasion, especially if it is windy. Night-time temperatures often drop below freezing. You can generally expect clearer, drier weather than in the UK, but the occasional rain or snow shower is to be expected and should be packed for.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation are included in the cost of the tour. Breakfast and dinner will be taken each day in our hotel, whereas the plan for lunch will depend very much on the weather. If the weather is kind we may opt to take out a packed lunch with hot drinks, otherwise we will visit a nearby café or restaurant. Please note that whilst the hotels we use are comfortable with private facilities in each room, Romanian hotels tend to be rather basic in décor and hot water cannot always be guaranteed!

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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