

Romania - The Wildlife of Transylvania

Naturetrek Tour Report

24 - 31 May 2008



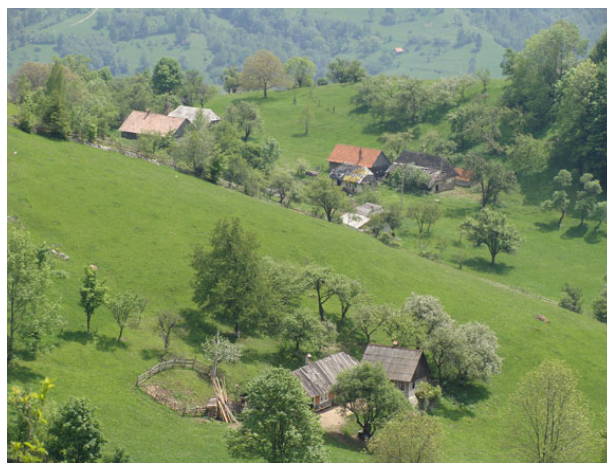
Dumbrovitsa Fishponds near Brasov



Rose-coloured Starlings



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Alpine meadows near the village of Bran

Report and images compiled by Andy Smith



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Day 1

Saturday 24th May

Sunny with scattered cloud, mild, humid and showery

Our flight to Bucharest arrived on time in the mid-afternoon and after clearing the airport we met Simona our local agent and began the bus ride to Zarnesti. Our journey took us north-westwards across flat agricultural plains, away from Bucharest, past the industrial town of Ploiesti and then up into the mountains. Birds en-route were few but included some White Storks on roadside nests, Lapwings and Yellowhammers in the crops and a Red-backed Shrike or two. We finally arrived at our comfortable and welcoming guesthouse in Zarnesti in the early evening in good time to meet our local guide Szilard and settle in before dinner.

Day 2

Sunday 25th May

Sunny with scattered cloud in the morning, wet in the afternoon. Mild.

A pre-breakfast stroll for some out into the fields behind the guesthouse introduced us to a number of local dogs keen to voice their displeasure at our passing plus various birds including a rooftop Black Redstart and a couple of singing Marsh Warblers. A little later, with breakfast completed, we boarded two ancient horse-drawn carts of traditional design and along with their equally ancient drivers began a sedate passage through Zarnesti town and its suburbs, past lush vegetable gardens and neat little hay meadows, to the steep forested slopes beyond and the beginning of the famous Zarnesti Gorge. Once at the gorge we disembarked from the carts and began walking up. The scenery was spectacular and the wildlife diverse.

Birds during the day included a Honey Buzzard, several Alpine Swifts, two or three Dippers, several Grey Wagtails, over 30 Crossbills and, for one lucky member of the group, a brief Wallcreeper.

Butterflies in the morning sunshine included Common Swallowtail, Wood White and Grizzled Skipper, whilst a Hummingbird Hawkmoth put in a much-appreciated cameo and the botanists in the party were satisfied with Snowbells and Alpine Butterwort. Clouds built up as the day progressed and in the middle of the afternoon it began to rain. A wet walk back through the gorge ensued and then we met up with our equine transport again and began an exciting and amusing journey back down into Zarnesti.

Day 3

Monday 26th May

Sunny with scattered cloud. Warm.

After breakfast we were introduced to the excellent Julian, our bus driver for the rest of the week and then drove out into the wonderful Transylvanian countryside. Horses and carts were more common on the quiet roads than motorised vehicles and the unhedged strips of crops in the fields were full of colourful flowers – quite a contrast to Britain! One brief impromptu stop in some roadside meadows produced a fine male Red-backed Shrike, a couple of Turtle Doves and a surprise flock of Rose-coloured Starlings, part of a large invasion of this species into the region this year.

Our first scheduled stop was at an Oak forest near the village of Vad. The woodland echoed with the calls and songs of Cuckoos, Hoopoes, Golden Orioles, Tree Pipits and Wood Warblers. Flowers included drifts of ragged Robin and carpets of Narcissi; Sand Lizards scuttled through the leaf litter and among the butterflies we noted Duke of Burgundy, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and dozens of smart Woodland Ringlets. Further birds appeared as we progressed and we enjoyed some reasonable views of a Honey Buzzard, a Middle Spotted Woodpecker and a few Hawfinches. Back out on the edge of the wood we found Whinchats, a Hobby or two, a fine Great Grey Shrike and then actually saw one of the orioles, a dazzling male as he looped along the edge of the woodland. Several Silver-studded Blues and a lovely little Violet Copper added the finishing touches to a delightful couple of hours.

From here we drove back through Zarnesti, up into the Piatra Craiului National Park and into a different world of steep alpine meadows and tall spruce and beech woodland. After a picnic sprawled out on the grass with Field Crickets chirping all around us we headed up the mountainside. Our destination was the famous shrine of Cetiia Chilieii and on the way we stopped to enjoy a range of flowers including Alpine Globeflower, Trumpet and Spring Gentians and masses of Elderflower Orchids. We discovered an Agile Frog in the grass and dozens of neat little Yellow-bellied Toads in the puddles, and marvelled at a superb Honey Buzzard close overhead. Up in the forest we found Bird's Nest Orchids, a singing Collared Flycatcher and a brief Black Woodpecker and then, having admired the shrine in its shady cave at the base of an imposing crag, we headed down again and back to Zarnesti.

Day 4

Tuesday 27th May

Sunny with scattered cloud. Warm.

Leaving the guesthouse after breakfast we walked out of the village and up to the top of the steep, wooded ridge to the south. Our destination was the village of Bran several kilometres to the east. The walk was harder than we anticipated but worth the effort and took us through a wonderful mosaic of meadows, woodland and crags with some fantastic views and some wonderful traditional farmsteads.

Notable birds included a passing Black Kite, a surprise Red-footed Falcon, a Peregrine, a singing Common Redstart and a very smart male Rock Bunting. At the end of the afternoon we descended into Bran and visited the castle, once home to the infamous Vlad the Impaler. Whilst some explored the castle itself others enjoyed the grounds and found nesting Fieldfares and another singing Collared Flycatcher. From Bran it was just a short and amusing bus ride with Julian back to Zarnesti and the guesthouse.

Day 5

Wednesday 28th May

Sunny with scattered cloud. Warm and humid with some rain in the afternoon.

In the morning we drove up into the Paitra Craiului National Park again and in the company of a couple of park wardens we explored part of the remote Birsa Valley. Some of the group climbed up a steep wooded ridge whilst others stayed on the valley floor. The climbers found Sword-leaved Helleborines, Alpine Newts and a Woodcock whilst the lowlanders enjoyed a range of meadow flowers and butterflies plus brief views of a Black Woodpecker.

After an early dinner back in Zarnesti we divided into two groups. One returned to a bear hide high up in the Birsa Valley, experienced a spectacular thunderstorm and had good views of a Bear coming into the feeding station and tantalizing views of a Wolf slinking through the trees. The other group went to the more distant Sinca Valley. As they drove up the valley they came across a superb Lesser Spotted Eagle soaring over the tree-tops and a huge flock of over 300 Rose-coloured Starlings, and at the bear hide itself were treated to fantastic views of perhaps a dozen bears in all including a female with small cubs – wonderful!

Day 6

Thursday 29th May

Sunny and warm with a cool breeze.

A full morning at the Dumbrovitsa Fish Ponds near Brasov provided a contrasting change of scene from the mountains and produced a wide range of wetland birds in a short space of time. Among the highlights were five Purple Herons, a Squacco Heron, a distant Black Stork, four Black Terns, several Whiskered Terns, a few Bearded Tits and masses of Sedge and Great Reed Warblers. Raptors were much in evidence too and included displaying Lesser Spotted Eagles, a female Red-footed Falcon and absolutely wonderful views of several Marsh Harriers involved in various aspects of courting and nest building. After a picnic lunch we headed back to Brasov to look around the picturesque old town and then finished the day at an interesting traditional hunter's restaurant up in the wooded hills nearby.

Day 7

Friday 30th May

Sunny and warm with a light breeze.

After breakfast we drove back to the beautiful Sinca Valley and spent a full morning exploring at a very gentle pace. Among the flower highlights were Bug, Lesser Butterfly, and Broad-leaved Marsh Orchids, whilst butterflies included Large and Purple-shot Coppers and a superb Poplar Admiral. An impressive Mole Cricket scuttling across the track was a great find and a host of exciting birds included Honey Buzzard, Hoopoe, Middle and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Woodlark, Great Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, Tree Pipit, Whinchat, Willow Tit and a surprise Golden Eagle high overhead.

In the afternoon we went back to the Oak Wood near Vad for a brief walk and then split into our two bear watching groups. One returned to the Sinca Valley and had an early dinner at a restaurant there before proceeding up to the hide and the other went back to Zarnesti and then up to the Birsa Valley hide. Once again it was success all round with the Sinca Valley producing a similar ursine extravaganza as previously and Birsa providing a more sedate experience with three bears eventually showing themselves very well after a long wait – a satisfying finale for all.

Day 8

Saturday 31st May

Sunny and warm.

After a leisurely breakfast and a last appreciation of the Marsh Warblers still belting out their fantastic song from the ditch behind the guesthouse we bid farewell to Zarnesti and retraced our steps via Rasnov and Ploiesti to Bucharest. Everything went smoothly enough at the airport and we all arrived safely back at Heathrow a few hours later.

Acknowledgements.

Thanks to Simona for her arrangements; Szilard for his guiding; Julian for his driving and Mimi for her hospitality. Thanks also to all the members of the group for their contributions to an interesting and enjoyable week.

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Species Lists

Birds

(h = heard)

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>						25		
2	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>						1		
3	Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	1							
4	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>						8		
5	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>						30		
6	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>						5		
7	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	3		5	1	1	50	1	6
8	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>						1		
9	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	2							
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	2		2			30		
11	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>						30		
12	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>							1	
13	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>			2			3	1	
14	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			1					
15	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>				1				
16	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>						10		
17	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		3	5	8	9	3	8	4
18	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>				1				
19	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		1	4	1	1	1	1	
20	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		2			1			
21	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentillis</i>		1				1		
22	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			2					
23	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1	3	2		3		1
24	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco verspertinus</i>				1		1		
25	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				1				
26	Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>						1h		
27	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>						2		
28	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>						10		
29	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	6					4		
30	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>						4		
31	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>					1			
32	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>						40		
33	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>						4		
34	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>						10		2
35	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	15					20		10
36	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>						2		
37	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			1	1		1		
38	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	10	15	10	10	5	6	5	15
39	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			8			1	1	
40	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			3	1	2	4	3	
41	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>		15						
42	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	3	2	2	25	10		15	15
43	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			2				2	
44	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>			1		1			
45	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>							2	

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
46	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			2	2		2	7	
47	Middle-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>			1				2	
48	Lesser-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>							2	
49	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>							1h	
50	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		1	10	5	1	6	3	
51	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>			3				1	1
52	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			1			1	2	
53	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>						2		
54	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		1						
55	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	5	20	30	15	5	20	15	15
56	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	20	10	25	25	5	15	15	10
57	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			8	5			3	
58	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		10	6	10	15	5	15	3
59	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1	10		1	2	1	1	
60	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	3				1	5		
61	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		5	1	3			1	
62	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		3						
63	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>				1		1	2	
64	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		4	4	8	10		5	
65	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinoides</i>		1h				1		
66	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>				1	1			
67	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		7	1	8	2	2	1	2
68	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>				2				
69	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	1		2			4	5	
70	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1	2	3	5	4	5	8	
71	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>			5	5	10	2	10	
72	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			1	2	3	1	5	
73	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		2	3		1		6	
74	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		1	1	3	2	1	3	
75	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>		1						
76	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		5	4	12	10	1	10	
77	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>		3	1	4			2	1
78	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		1	2	2		4		
79	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>						20		
80	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>						2		
81	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>		2	1	5	8	4		4
82	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>						7		
83	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		2	2	2				
84	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		4	4	5	2		2	
85	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		2		2	4		2	
86	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>		2	3	2	1			
87	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			1	2				
88	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>			1	1	1			
89	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		2	3	3		2	20	2
90	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>			3	4		2	5	
91	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		10	5	6	10			
92	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>			2	2	1		10	
93	Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>							1	
94	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				2	h			
95	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>						4		
96	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			2	6			4	

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
97	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>		1						
98	Common Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		3	5		1		2	
99	Northern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>			1				1	
100	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	1		8	10	5	3	20	1
101	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	3	5	10	8	10	25	10	15
102	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		1	8	2	6	1	8	
103	Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>		2h	1h				1	
104	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	30	5	15			30		5
105	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	1	10	10	6	5	10	10	5
106	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	40	25	20	15	5	10	5	5
107	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2	2	3	2	7	5	
108	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	15	15	30	20	30	25	20	20
109	Rose-coloured Starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>		2	30		300		12	
110	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>			6				2	
111	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	15	30	40	25	15	20	25	10
112	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			2	6		5	5	
113	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		15	25	25	25		25	
114	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		2		4		1		
115	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>		1	1	2				
116	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		1	2	4	2	1	1	1
117	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			8	10	2	5	5	
118	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		2						
119	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			10	2			2	
120	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		30						
121	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				2				
122	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		1	7	2		2	3	1
123	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>						5		
124	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>			1				2	

Mammals

Wolf
Red Deer

Red Fox
Roe Deer

Brown Bear
Red Squirrel

Reptiles & amphibians

Alpine Newt
Common Tree Frog
Viviparous Lizard
Grass Snake.

Common Toad
Agile Frog
Sand Lizard

Yellow-bellied Toad
Marsh Frog
Slow Worm

Butterflies

Common Swallowtail
Small White
Wood White
Small Copper
Large Copper
Small Blue
Red Admiral
Marsh Fritillary
Woodland Ringlet
Chequered Skipper.

Green-veined White
Clouded Yellow
Brimstone
Violet Copper
Silver-studded Blue
Duke of Burgundy
Small Tortoiseshell
Speckled Wood
Grizzled Skipper

Orange Tip
Pale Clouded Yellow
Green Hairstreak
Purple-shot Copper
Eastern Baton Blue
Poplar Admiral
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
Small Heath
Large Skipper

Other notable invertebrates

Roman Snail
Mole Cricket
Green Tiger Beetle

Black-tailed Skimmer
Hummingbird Hawkmoth
Wood Tiger Beetle

Field Cricket
Hornet
Common Cockchafer