



Trip Report

Birding Georgia trip

A seven-day birding in Georgia
From 20th to 26th of May 2024



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Great Rosefinch (*Carpodacus rubicilla*)

SUMMARY

Sunday, May 19th: Before Day 1 of our birding trip, some of the guests were already in Tbilisi, so Nika and Josip decided to take them with us for the predeparture birding! We picked up the guests close to city center and headed straight to Kumisi Lake and Zemo Teleti Hill. We wanted to check out a few locations before the trip starts, to see where we could find few targets and confirm one nest of **Krüper's Nuthatch**, just to make it easier on the last day of the tour when we were actually planning to go there anyways! Of course, we found the Nuthatch, but not only that - we found a few more species that would just add to the tally the last day!



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Krüper's Nuthatch (*Sitta krueperi*)

After the airport pickup of some of the guests, and after the introduction dinner, we made plans for DAY 1 of our trip, and went straight to the hotel, excited and eager to start our trip the next morning.

Monday, May 20th: The day started early, after our guests had a chance to have some rest from their flight, and as we were packing our things, we already started birding. First bird we spotted was a female **Barred Warbler** that was nice enough to hop into the tree above the car and started to call. A few moments later, we saw a low-flying **Black Kite** heading north, and weirdly enough, we didn't have any after that during our tour. The weather was great (for the most part) for birding; however, it was not too good for migrating and flying raptors. As we were leaving our hotel, **Syrian Woodpecker** wished us good luck, and guess what? Good luck we had!

On Day 1, we headed to Kazbegi, Stepantsminda, where we had our accommodation for the next several days. We had a few stops between Tbilisi and Kazbegi with the first one being the Zhinvali Reservoir, next to Ananuri Fortress Complex, where we stopped to find several forest species, targets for our tour. As we left our car, we spotted a Caucasian subspecies of the male **Common Redstart (Ehrenberg's)** in the tree next to the road, and it was moving around to the nearby powerlines and fences, giving us clear views of

the white wing patch, distinctive of the subspecies. Walking into the forest, first **Eurasian Blackcap** was seen and heard singing, as well as a **Hawfinch**, both seen in the Walnut tree canopy. **Great, Blue and Coal Tit**, all of them were quite visible and heard well, as well as **Eurasian Wren**, one of the smallest birds in Europe, but with a very powerful voice! Another target species for the day, **Green Warbler**, was heard throughout the forest, basically during the entirety of our walk. In two brief occasions, we even had a chance to observe it, but not for long, as they tend to be very active and mobile in the canopy. As we were leaving the area, we heard two flycatchers we were looking for, **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, a more common sight in Georgia, and **Semi-collared Flycatcher**, a more difficult, high canopy species. Since we had a plan to get to Kazbegi and do some birding there as well, we left the Ananuri forest, and decided we will visit the area again on our way back from Kazbegi.



Ring Ouzel (Caucasian) (*Turdus torquatus amicornum*) Photo: Josip Turkalj

As we were driving up the elevation, we stopped twice, once before and once after Gudauri Panoramic View and monument. First time, we stopped because of the raptors, as we saw a low flying **Peregrine Falcon**, as well as **Long-legged Buzzard**. No bird is safe from us, even when (safely) driving! Later, we saw a beautiful adult male **Caucasian Ring Ouzel**, another subspecies specific to Caucasian region, and during that stop, we saw a few migrating birds, as well as some singing in the pass: a migrating **Willow Warbler** and **Northern Wheatear**, a quick glance of a **Wallcreeper** we will look for another day, as well as some **Water Pipits**, **Grey Wagtail** and **Whinchats**. Wallcreeper at this location gave us only a short viewing opportunity, but we heard it sing quite well, however, we were not able to find it ourselves after that.

After getting to Stepantsminda, we left our things at the hotel where we would be staying for the next two nights, and after a quick lunch to energize, we went to the Sea-buckthorn plains of Stepantsminda in search of more Caucasian target species. We were lucky enough to have some rain, that was turning into snow in the higher elevations, driving the high-altitude species down the slopes so that we could see/hear them easier. While walking and searching for birds, we heard the high-pitched songs of **Caucasian Snowcock**, and

we were hoping to see them, but not this time, as they were still high enough not to be seen, only heard. In the plains, with a small drizzle we were experiencing, only a few species were actually singing, such as **Common Cuckoo** and **Song Thrush**, as well as **Mountain Chiffchaff** (Caucasian subspecies), which we got a close-up view of! **Common Rosefinch** and **Eurasian Bullfinch** were also cooperative, calling from the Sea-buckthorn, making us think it was some other species that we wanted to see even more, but in the end, it was just the bad lighting that got us confused.



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Eurasian Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

With the end of the day coming close, and with thoughts of a Georgian dinner on our minds, we decided we will give it another shot and check one more field with Sea-buckthorn in the Terek River Valley. Rain was picking up, still not big enough to cause issues, but enough to be (slightly) annoying, however, that did not stop us. Getting to Terek River, we spotted our first **White-throated Dipper** for the trip, bobbing on the rocks and hunting for invertebrates in front of us. Male **Ring Ouzels** were everywhere, with a few **Eurasian Blackbirds** in the mix as well, and we sure stopped a few times to admire them and take a few photos. As we were about to end the day, we said “let’s just go another 30 meters, there is a good place to turn the car around” and wouldn’t you know it – **Great Rosefinch**! There were 3 females feeding in the short grass and we stayed there for quite some time, enjoying the sight and honestly, trying to find a male, just to improve our day a bit more. After we figured out that this is it for the day, and as the sun was slowly setting, we headed towards our hotel, excited for the food and even more excited about Day 2! First day, **46 species!**

Tuesday, May 21st: An early start, even before breakfast, was not an issue, neither for us nor our guests. We knew what we were looking for, but we had no idea how great of a day we would have. As we were getting in the car, we had a mixed flock of swallows and martins above us – **Western House-Martin**, that was also nesting on the side of our hotel, **Eurasian Crag-Martin**, and **Barn Swallow**. A few ever-present **White Wagtails** were seen on the rooftops, calling and of course, wagging their tails.



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Caucasian Grouse (*Lyrurus mlotosiewiczii*)

Our first stop was another Sea-buckthorn plain of Stepantsminda, where we quickly got distracted by male Common Rosefinches, forgetting how valuable and important morning hours are to our days. After a quick reminder (and a session of staring at Rosefinches), we got to the open field from where we started checking out the mountain slopes for our days' target species – **Caucasian Grouse**. This beautiful bird was already out and lekking, and we counted 8 Caucasian Grouses on the slope, as well as seeing our first **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**, to which we didn't pay too much attention at this location, knowing we will have a better view at our next one. After only about 40 minutes at the location, we decided that, since it was a bit crowded with photographers and birders, all trying to find and see the Grouse, to go for another location and check the Mt. Kuro slopes. This turned to be one of the best decisions we made during the trip.

Getting there, we were immediately greeted by the Caucasian Snowcock song, sounding as if it was somewhere real close. Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, the one we saw from about a kilometer and a half (about a mile) away, now was just a few steps away. **Fire-fronted Serin** was heard singing, and a few moments later, we saw them on the fences, singing and even performing their mating dance! Birds of the World says it best: *"Several males may competitively display simultaneously to female, and in presence of female displaying male sings with crown and forehead feathers prominently raised, wings drooped and partly spread and tail slightly raised, and may swivel body to left and right; also courtship-feeds female prior to copulation."* Now, reading this gives you an idea of how this looks like, almost manakin-like behavior, but seeing it in person made us all excited and definitely overjoyed!



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Fire-fronted Serin (*Serinus pusillus*)

We climbed up to a great viewpoint, and started searching the slopes. First find was an extremely close male Caucasian Grouse, on a slope just a few hundred meters away (we should have hiked up this day, but we were so excited that we completely forgot, here is why). As we were scanning the slopes, we had a few glimpses of **Caucasian Snowcocks** flying, as well as female Caucasian Grouses, until – we saw our first Snowcock on top of a rock, singing! The excitement was very visible, and we were all looking through the scope and enjoying the great views of the hard-to-find bird. It was actually quite close, probably about a kilometer away (still far, but this was manageable).

As we moved the scope to find another bird, with maybe a different angle or maybe even more birds in the same place, we found one Snowcock walking around, with feathers all puffed up. As the scope changed hands, we heard “the bird is not there anymore, there is a cat, must’ve scared it away”. Our initial confusion turned into a roaring excitement – it was a **EURASIAN LYNX**! Extremely elusive cat, it was walking out of a cave-like rock formation, and was even seen chasing after a Caucasian Snowcock before the bird flew away, safe and sound! It was an amazing sight to see, and the Lynx was walking and resting in the area for over 30 minutes! To make this whole thing even better, as we were observing the Lynx, we had a **White-winged Redstart** fly to it and perch on a rock next to the resting Lynx! It was our only observation of this beautiful, high-altitude bird during this trip, but to see it in the combination with the Lynx - we really did not mind it at all.



Photo: Josip Turkalj
Caucasian Snowcock (*Tetraogallus caucasicus*)



Photo: Josip Turkalj
Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx*)

Still riding the high from everything that has happened, before breakfast we decided to go and check the same location we were at the day before, for the Great Rosefinch, as we were feeling quite lucky. After a few nice views of **Red-backed Shrike**, **Barred Warbler** and **European Bee-eater** that finally decided to give us a chance to observe them from quite close distance instead of high overflight, in the shade we saw a few thrush-sized birds, and one was quite reddish... **Great Rosefinches!** This time, four females and **one adult male!** Amazing find, birds were feeding on the grass, until a stray dog walked next to them, and, after our

initial fear that it would chase them away, the dog just got them to perch on the Sea-buckthorns, where we took some amazing pictures and had a great time observing this amazing bird!

All of this before breakfast!



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Great Rosefinch (*Carpodacus rubicilla*)

After breakfast, we decided that first thing we see is the thing we are going to go after, and luckily, it was **Eurasian Griffon (Griffon Vulture)** flying over Gergeti Trinity Church. So, we headed towards Dariali Gorge - Gveleti Waterfalls and Lake, where we checked out the Griffon nesting colony. In total, 10 birds were spotted, both in flight and sitting on the nests. In addition to them, we spotted male **Eurasian Linnet** and a **Rock Bunting**, as well as many **Eurasian Crag-Martins** in the gorge. A few new Caucasian subspecies were seen of the birds we haven't spotted yet, such as **Dunnock** and **Eurasian Jay**. With many Griffons flying over us, we were paying attention to make sure all of them are actually Griffons. And sure enough, two weren't – **Bearded Vulture** (also known as Lammergeier) were flying above us, one an immature bird, and an adult bird. They didn't stick around for a long time, and were gone pretty quickly.

We decided to try our luck and we headed towards Kobi village, to check the cliffs there, as it's a good location to find a Wallcreeper. As we arrived, we heard the song, but unfortunately, we haven't heard it afterwards. However, we found a nice male **Black Redstart** (ssp. *phoenicuroides*), as well as **Common Swift**, **Red-billed Chough** and **Grey Wagtail**.

With so much going on this day, after lunch we decided to try again for the Sea-buckthorn plains. Checking the whole area for a close up of a White-winged Redstart, we ticked a few extra species we haven't had the chance of seeing, like **Yellow-billed Chough**, and then, while counting the Chough and figuring out which ones were Red- and which ones were Yellow-billed, we found **East Caucasian Turs** high in the mountains. We observed them for quite some time, as they were resting, grazing and (play)fighting one another. A total of (at least) 35 individuals was recorded on the slopes. After this, we were waiting for the rain, to bring the birds down to the plains. During that time, we drove all the way up to the Georgian-Russian border, to

see if **Golden Eagle** would show up before we had to leave the area, but no such luck this time. Pansheti Flats were up next, a great location for the fallout during a rain event, and we got there at perfect time. The flats were filled with birds, the most numerous being **Water Pipit**, **Northern Wheatear** and **Whinchat**, but there were a few more birds around! A small flock of **Alpine Swifts** flew next to us as we were observing the birds on the ground, and a single female **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush** took this opportunity to do some foraging. Finally, among the **Eurasian Linnets**, we saw it – a (**Caucasian**) **Twite**! Hopping on and around the rocks and low grasses, it was quite interesting to see it and observe the behavior compared to Linnets. With Twite, we ended the day and headed to our hotel for nice dinner, with so many stories to tell and to get ready for Day 3! At the end of Day 2, we were at **50 species**, **67 species** for the trip so far!



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Twite (Caucasian) (*Linaria flavirostris*)

Wednesday, May 22nd: We started the day early in the morning again, before breakfast, and headed straight to Pansheti Flats, where we went yesterday. Due to so much excitement and cool species the day before, all of our cameras died and we had to call it in early, and today, we were on a hunt for, among other things, Twite we missed out on the day before. Getting to the flats, we saw our first **European Roller**, for which we were all excited about, forgetting that in the next several days it will be just as common as holes on Georgian roads. From the Sea-buckthorn brush, we heard a **Corn Crane**, one of those species that are easy to hear, but difficult to spot. First **Lesser Gray Shrike** for the trip was also there, perching on the fences and from time to time, flying down to catch some food. Its smaller cousin, **Red-backed Shrike** was hiding in Sea-buckthorn bushes, with one pair even creating their own pantry out of an earthworm, in front of us. After a while, we found a small, mixed Linnet/Twite flock and we got some photos of both bird species.

After breakfast, and packing all of our stuff in the car, we checked out some of the locations in Stepantsminda vicinity for White-winged Redstart and any odd species we might have missed, and we continued again to Kobi village, to try again with **Wallcreeper**, and today was our lucky day, we spotted it several times and saw it fly away! Unfortunately, we weren't so lucky with photos this time. As we left the

car, before we found the Wallcreeper, there was another **Bearded Vulture**, an adult bird, that graced us with its presence and with that one, we started our descend to Dedoplistskaro.



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*)

Of course, we did not do a full 5-hour trip without any stops. We stopped again at Gudauri Panoramic View (and once just before it) as there was a flock of 60 Choughs, ~55 **Red-billed** and 6 **Yellow-billed Choughs**. After descending some more, we stopped at Zhinvali Reservoir (Ananuri forest) to try and find our Flycatchers. After a while, we managed to hear the **Semi-collared Flycatcher**, and while following the bird and where it went, we found a few very active **Red-breasted Flycatchers**, and we had some great views of them! There also was one **Hippolais sp. Warbler** (presumably Icterine, but we will never know) that was just not cooperative enough for us to figure out what it was.

Now, driving several hours without birding can get a bit... itchy, but we found a way to combat that – window birding! If we saw a cool bird, we stopped for a few minutes before continuing on. After getting to our accommodation for the next couple of days, we went to Eagle Gorge to quench our thirst for birds for just half an hour or so, before dinner was served. We were lucky that right next to our accommodation we had another great species, **Laughing Dove**, that we had the pleasure of hearing and seeing. Eagle Gorge was a really quick stop, but with about an hour spent there, we found quite a few species, like Eurasian Griffons and **Black Stork**, but more on that on Friday as we spent more time in the area. Day 3 ended with **75 species** for the day, **91 species** for the trip!

Thursday, May 23rd: This day was reserved exclusively for Chachuna Managed Reserve. A large area, about 52 km², deserved all the time we had, and it definitely delivered. From the entrance road, we had one, after another great species. During the ride the day before, we had many **Corn** and **Black-headed Bunting**, or so we thought. During our drive, it seemed as if every single bush or tree had its owner, mostly Black-headed Buntings! **European Bee-eaters**, that we only saw briefly in the past few days, now we saw digging holes next to the road and resting in the small bushes, and larks... Larks were almost a dirt bird. **Crested Lark** was

absolutely everywhere, as was **Calandra Lark**, whose numbers we surely underestimated. We will try and skip all the stories surrounding these species, and where we saw them, since they were ever-present during this day.



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha calandra*)

At the very beginning of the entrance road, we spotted a beautiful **Siberian Stonechat**, an adult male, perched on a wooden poll, waiting for another opportunity to catch some food. Another one of those species we only saw once, and we are still not sure why there weren't more of them during our trip. Continuing our road towards the drier areas and plains, on the side of the road, we spotted the nesting holes of **Rock Sparrow**, and several individuals were seen and head singing. At the same place, **Isabelline Wheatear** with its fledgling was spotted, along quite a persistent **Eurasian Hoopoe** that was either spying on us or guiding us down the road, we were not sure. Every so often we saw **Lesser Gray Shrikes** and **Woodchat Shrikes** perched on a bush, waiting for the next meal, and, before we gradually left the more agricultural area, we spotted a few **Greater Whitethroats**, flying in the fields.

As we were heading more south, the habitat change was gradual but visible. We left the **Great Whitethroat**, and we entered the **Tawny Pipit** area. First harriers were seen, first a female **Western Marsh Harrier**, after which both male and female **Montagu's Harrier**. Both of them we spotted quite far away at first, but gradually, they moved closer and closer to us, and at one point flew overhead. Great sights all around! Quite a few **Little Owls** were spotted, flying close to their burrows and some seen in front of them. At one point, we had a flock of mostly **House Sparrows**, which had an imposter among them – one male **Spanish Sparrow**!

As we were driving, one of the guides started yelling "**Chukar, Chukar!**" after which we all rushed out of the car, to try and find it. Eventually, we found it, as we flushed it by walking on the ridge, after carefully getting closer to said ridge, and concluded that everything we are seeing is either a large rock or small grasses. Well, one of those rocks was a Chukar, only a few steps away, and none of us realized until it was too late.



Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin (*Cercotrichas galactotes*)
 Photo: Josip Turkalj

About 3 hours since the start, we were started to enter a semi-desert area. Another flock of Spanish Sparrows was seen, as well as our first **Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin**! As the name suggests, we saw them in sparse brush, usually at the base of the brush, collecting nesting material and food. A **Eurasian Jackdaw** flock, of 32 individuals, was feeding on the ground, with a few individuals here and there seen after this flock. **Eurasian Griffon**, **Black Stork**, **Eurasian Kestrel** and **Red-footed Falcon**, were all seen flying over and from the distance, apart from **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, which was seen a few times. All of them were adult birds, apart from one that was a subadult. With less and less grass and bush around, we found a perfect place to look for **Greater Short-toed Lark** and **Turkestan Short-toed Lark**. Hiding among the **Eurasian Skylarks** and **Crested Larks**, it was not an easy task to find the Greater Short-toed, and they did not make it easy by constantly flying from one place to the next, eventually landing in front of us, allowing us to have nice views and an easy way to figure out the ID. Turkestan Short-toed Lark, however, had some sympathy for the exhausted birders, as it decided to walk on the dirt road, a few meters in front of the car, without even flying away.

As we were getting closer to Dali Mountain water reserve, we got a few threats at the same place – **Black Francolin**, **Menetries's Warbler**, **Black-Eared Wheatear**, **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** and **Rosy Starling**, all in one place! Black Francolins were extremely cooperative, and did not really care about our car, plus we tried our best to be as quiet as possible. They were singing from all directions, close and far away, from high grasses and even wooden polls. Menetries's and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers were not visible, but were singing their hearts out, and Rosy Starling only stopped on a Tamarix briefly. Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin was again something that we ended up enjoying more than expected, with a pair having a nest few meters to the side of the car where we parked! After few minutes of enjoying the relationship dynamics, we moved away to not stress them out too much.



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*)

Finally, when we got to the Dali Mountain water reserve, next to the abandoned buildings there, we found not one target species of the day, but two! First one was the expected **Lesser Kestrel**, as this location is the one and only breeding site of this species in Georgia, but also, among the flying Western House-Martins that nested under the bridge there, we found a **Saker Falcon**! This rare species is breeding in Georgia, but in small numbers, and with large territories such as theirs, observations are only a few each year.

Going to Kajiri Sandstone Cliffs, we were hoping to find a few rock species. The sun was starting to get high in the sky and temperatures were getting up there as well, but we did not stop. **Western Rock Nuthatch** greeted us from the top of the rock formation, but did not want to stick for too long, always flying away as soon as we found them with our binoculars. In the Tamarix brush, we found a family of the **Eastern Orphean Warblers**, 3 chicks and 1 adult feeding them. With that, we visited all the locations we had in mind for the day, but the day was not over yet! We slowly started driving back to our accommodation. As we were going back, we stopped at the location where we found the **Menetries's Warbler** the first time, and right next to a **Corn Bunting**, there it was, perched on a bush! It flew around, back and forth, a few times before getting deeper in the brush, but for a decent time we had some amazing views of it. While we were checking out the warbler, a beautiful male **Levant Sparrowhawk** flew overhead, and we didn't have much time enjoying the view. But we knew we had more days ahead of us. And just as we continued further, towards our hotel, we saw an odd sight – an **Isabelline Wheatear** flying down from a roof, and looking agitated on the ground. We quickly realized what we were seeing – a **Blunt-nosed Viper** moving through the short grass, on a hunt! Just before ending the day, and just as we were getting into Dedoplistskaro, we saw a huge bird on the side of the road. Immediately, we knew it was an eagle, and after we checked it out, we realized that it was an adult **Lesser Spotted Eagle**. What a way to end the day, with 131 species for the trip, and amazing **69 species** for the day!



Photo: Josip Turkalj
 Menetries's Warbler (*Curruca mystacea*)



Blunt-nosed Viper and **Isabelline Wheatear** (*Macrovipera lebetinus* & *Oenanthe isabelline*) Photo: Josip Turkalj

Friday, May 24th: We started the day, unlike some others, with a nice breakfast, to have enough energy for the day ahead of us! First thing in the morning, we re-visited the Eagle Gorge, hoping we will have more luck with the raptors and we sure did! **Booted Eagle** in courtship flight, **Black Stork** and **Eurasian Griffon** on the nest with the chicks, **Lesser Spotted Eagle** flying overhead, as well as **Eurasian Goshawk** and **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**. It was a good morning for raptor watching, but as the weather showed rain and showers, we were getting worried about missing out on a few raptor species and how we might need to rearrange the itinerary for the next couple of days. Apart from the raptors, we had a few new species for the trip – **Long-tailed Tit**, **Rock Bunting** in an amazing light and just a few steps away, **Blue Rock Thrush** and we heard a **Eurasian Scops Owl** that was singing during the day, which was interesting for everyone!

“Hey, will we see **Rosy Starlings** up close?” was one of the questions we got during the ride to Udabno, where we were staying for the next two nights. The answer was clear but the proof came only a couple of minutes later, when we stumbled on Mulberry trees with many, many fruits on them. About a hundred Rosy Starlings were hopping in the trees and on the ground, picking the berries and gulping them down in an eating frenzy. To add to this beautiful sight, we saw a **Common Cuckoo**, for the first time during the trip, as it was flying to the tree canopy and singing, quite visible to us. Salt lakes just before Udabno were not as fruitful as we hoped, most likely because of the rain. However, rain did not stop us from finding something cool, in this case **Common Quail**, that gave us an amazing view while poking its head out of the grass, just moments before deciding that we are just too close and flying away.



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Rosy Starling (*Pastor roseus*)

After having some rest and grabbing lunch, we continued our birding, and we visited David Gareji monastery complex, looking for the raptors. The David Gareji Monastery Complex, located in the Kakheti region of eastern Georgia, is a significant historical and cultural landmark. Founded in the 6th century by St. David Gareji, the complex consists of numerous cells, churches, chapels, refectories, and living quarters carved into the rock face. Other than this stunning piece of history, the birds were nice too! We found (this time very cooperative) **Western Rock Nuthatch**, an adult and a fledgling, singing from the rocks and bringing food to the chick every minute or so. In the brush, a **Green Warbler** was hopping in the rain and going from branch to branch, quite a few times in the open. On the Monastery walls, an adult male **Finsch's Wheatear** was trying to keep itself dry, but the drizzle was not helping. We all ended up a bit wet, but the birds were better than what we expected during the rain!



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Finsch's Wheatear (*Oenanthe finschii*)

Going to Jandari lake, we were passing next to the Georgia-Azerbaijani border, and we had some fun with it! Besides that, in Chachuna and this day, going through these steppes, we encountered several transhumance shepherds. Transhumance is a deeply rooted tradition that plays a crucial role in the agricultural and cultural life of the country. This practice involves the seasonal movement of livestock, primarily sheep and cattle, between highland and lowland pastures. During the summer months, herds are driven to the cooler, lush mountain meadows, known for their rich biodiversity and ample grazing opportunities. As winter approaches, the livestock are brought back down to the milder, lowland areas to avoid the harsh mountain climate. The road was scenic, with many **Needle Grasses**, a true steppe plant.

Jandari marshes and pasture proved to be a good place to visit, because the birds were just spectacular. Raptors were a plenty, light morph **Booted Eagle**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Imperial Eagle** and, finally, an adult **Steppe Eagle** were all seen in the area. Steppe Eagle was mobbed by **Eurasian Magpies** and fled the area quite quickly. Over the marshes, our first terns for the trip were flying and foraging, both **White-winged** and **Whiskered Terns**! In addition to the terns, there was one more bird (and later 3 more showed up) that at the beginning looked quite tern like, but it was so much better (in our subjective opinion) – **Collared Pratincole**! It was flying around us, landing in the marsh a few times, just to take off flying only minutes later! Following the road, we were on, there were more beautiful bird sightings we had – a pair of **Penduline Tits** singing and almost trying to scare us away, loud and persistent **Great Reed Warbler**, and several secretive **Common Nightingales**! A large **Rook** flock foraged the meadow, along with **White Stork**, and a **Common Kingfisher** which flew in front of us, presumably into the nesting burrow, only giving us a quick glance of the beautiful colors. With that, we headed back to our hotel in Udabno, but not before stopping on the side of the road because we saw something moving in the bottom of a brush - **Libyan Jird**. Another great day, clocking in **80 species** for the day, and **148 species** for the trip so far!



Photo: Josip Turkalj

Libyan Jird (*Meriones libycus*)

Saturday, May 25th: The day started with a flock of Rosy Starlings feeding on a Mulberry orchid across the road from our hotel. We were all having breakfast, birds and birders alike! After a nice breakfast, we were going the same road as the day before to get to Jandari lake. With a nice discussion on mud roads in Georgia, should **Calandra Lark** be considered a dirt bird or not, and if we can ever get enough of **European Rollers**, we got to Jandari lake. A huge mixed flock of Swifts and Swallows was flying over us. A few species stood out at the lake, **Squacco Herons** foraging at the shore, **Gull-billed Terns** that were a nice surprise, and several **Armenian Gulls**.

As we were leaving the area, we ended up stopping at Rustavi industrial area, where we spotted a few **Black-winged Stilts** and one **Wood Sandpiper**. We checked every pond in the area to find more waders, but we were out of luck this time. However, Ponichala Reserve was our destination for the day, and we headed that way, eager to find some forest birds! Immediately after entering the Reserve, we had a pair of **Syrian Woodpeckers**, probably in a middle of a scuffle, but they were not the only ones there. In total, we had at least 2 different pairs of Syrian Woodpeckers, on several different locations in the Reserve. Just after spotting Syrian, we had a calling **Eurasian Green Woodpecker**, agitated after flying away from **Levant Sparrowhawk**! One of these two, we were expecting to see better than the other, and it was not what we thought – after leaving the dense forest at the entrance, **Levant Sparrowhawk** was seen quite nicely! We saw the courtship flight, as well as the male being agitated by **Eurasian Jay** for intruding on their territory. They were clearly in the process of nest building, and were very cooperative! We had a **Black Woodpecker** in flight a few times above us, and after teasing us with landing somewhere we can see it properly – it finally chose a dead branch at the top of a canopy! We had a great view of the bird, to the joy of all of our guests! However, we had to cut the time around the area a bit short today, as one of our guests started having some back problems, and since we didn't want to leave anyone behind, we decided that we will continue the rest of the trip mostly as car birding, with some light walks.



Photo: Josip Turkalj
 Levant Sparrowhawk (Accipiter brevipes)

It was not raining too strong, but enough water came down from the sky to turn Georgian dirt roads into mud roads. Going to Kumisi lake turned into a mess, since we couldn't get too far whichever way we went. Our amazing guests found the rally like car movements fun and entertaining, so it must not have been as bad! However, even then, Kumisi lake did not disappoint! A nice family of **Ruddy Shelduck** was swimming to a small rocky "island" close to us, with **Great Crested**, **Eared** and **Little Grebe** swimming around. Finally, a muddy shore was great for some wader action. **Common Ring Plover** and **Green Sandpiper** were enjoying another drizzle, and were not scared by our presence. **Ruff** was trying to hide behind a concrete pole, but nothing escapes our scope! **Little Terns** tried to share the rocky "island" with Ruddy Shelducks, but quickly decided that's not for them. **Rock Sparrows** were hiding under the bridge, in their nest cavities, and one **Long-eared Owl** family was trying to keep away from the rain, unsuccessfully. This ended our day, as the rain started to pick up even more, and we wanted our guests to have a bit more rest that day. With **85 species** for the day, and with **174 species** for the trip, we were happy with what we had!



Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

Photo: Josip Turkalj

Saturday, May 25th: Our last day, a bitter-sweet moment. We had a few targets today, but decided that since we were doing quite hardcore birding in the past few days, we would take it easy today, only checking a few locations, and leave our guests to have a nice afternoon off, to pack and get ready for their flights home (and to start going through all the pictures taken on this trip!). That being said, our first destination of the day was to go from Tbilisi to Zemo Teleti Hill. While we had **Krüper's Nuthatch** on our pre-tour birding day, not everyone was there with us so this time we went there all together and we saw it quite nicely, around the nest cavity feeding the chicks. Parents were visiting the cavity every minute or so, so we didn't have to wait too long until the birds came around! On the ride to the hills, we found a **Wood Lark**, and we both saw the birds and head the "lu-lu-lu-lu" song! Leaving the area, we had a **Chukar** that climbed a rock next to the road and was just resting there, paying us no mind at all!

The original plan for the day was to go to Kumisi lake, but due to the rain in the past few days, we decided against that, as the roads were still not dry and, while our car was a 4x4, we could still get stuck in the muck. We decided that the easiest thing to do would be to try and find the missing vultures and eagles, and one extra warbler species. At the fields northwest of Kumisi lake, we went to find Marsh Warblers, where we had them a week earlier. In the thistles, with many **Corn** and **Black-headed Buntings** and a few **Greenfinches** and **Goldfinches**, we found our **Marsh Warblers**. At the beginning, they were only seen flying low in the Wild Mustard, not getting out in the open, but after a few minutes they hopped on the top of the thistle!

Lastly, we went to a small town near Tbilisi, known for being a vulture gathering place, in a hope to find our "missing" vultures. As soon as we arrived, we found 16 **Egyptian Vultures**, two of which were juvenile, 4 **Eurasian Griffons**, an adult **White-tailed Eagle** and, as our final bird for the trip, we had a beautiful **Cinereous Vulture** soaring above the road and all other vultures. We couldn't ask for a better way to end the birding trip. After our end-of-the-trip lunch and leaving our guests at the hotel, we had a total of **180 bird species recorded during the trip**, (+2 more if we count **Eurasian Hobby** and **Spotted Flycatcher** from the pre-trip birding day), **48 species** for the last day of birding!



Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)

Photo: Josip Turkalj



The misspelled sign, clearly should have been BIRDER*!



Our drive in the steppe at the Georgia-Azerbaijan border!

Annotated List of Birds

Developed on the basis of the IOC World Bird List (v14.1).

Observation status code:

Number = quantity seen and counted
 (m) = male
 (f) = female
 (h) = heard

Number+ = more than mentioned quantity seen (roughly counted)

Total = **181 species**; 178 seen and 3 heard

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
Anatidae		Swans, Geese & Ducks							
1	Tadorna ferruginea	Ruddy Shelduck						16	
2	Anas platyrhynchos	Mallard						3	
3	Aythya ferina	Common Pochard						1	
Phasianidae		Pheasants & Allies							
4	Lyrurus mlokosiewiczi	Caucasian Grouse		9	2				
5	Phasianus colchicus	Ring-necked Pheasant						1	
6	Francolinus francolinus	Black Francolin				9			
7	Tetraogallus caucasicus	Caucasian Snowcock	1h	5	4				
8	Coturnix coturnix	Common Quail				1h	1	4h+	4h
9	Alectoris chukar	Rock Partridge				7	2		1
Podicipedidae		Grebes							
10	Tachybaptus ruficollis	Little Grebe						2	
11	Podiceps cristatus	Great Crested Grebe						21	
12	Podiceps nigricollis	Eared Grebe						2	

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
Columbidae		Pigeons & Doves							
13	Columba livia	Rock Dove	4	45	5	10	24	9	10
14	Columba oenas	Stock Dove				2			
15	Columba palumbus	Common Wood Pigeon			3	2	8	5	4
16	Streptopelia decaocto	Eurasian Collared Dove			5		3	4	4
17	Streptopelia turtur	European Turtle-Dove			2	1		1	
18	Spilopelia senegalensis	Laughing Dove			1	1			
Apodidae		Swifts							
19	Apus apus	Common Swift		2		5+	20+	270+	7
Cuculidae		Cuckoos							
20	Cuculus canorus	Common Cuckoo	1h	3	3+	1	1+	2	
Rallidae		Rails, Crakes & Coots							
21	Crex crex	Corn Crane			1h				
22	Gallinula chloropus	Common Moorhen						3	
23	Fulica atra	Eurasian Coot						11	
Haematopodidae		Oystercatchers							
24	Haematopus ostralegus	Eurasian Oystercatcher						4	
Recurvirostridae		Stilts & Avocets							
25	Himantopus himantopus	Black-winged Stilt						8	
Charadriidae		Plovers							
26	Charadrius hiaticula	Common Ringed Plover						2	
Scolopacidae		Sandpipers & Snipes							
27	Actitis hypoleucos	Common Sandpiper		4	2				

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
Scolopacidae		Sandpipers & Snipes							
28	Tringa ochropus	Green Sandpiper						9	
29	Tringa glareola	Wood Sandpiper						1	
30	Calidris pugnax	Ruff						1	
Glareolidae		Pratincoles							
31	Glareola pratincola	Collared Pratincole					4		
Laridae		Gulls, Terns & Skimmers							
32	Chroicocephalus ridibundus	Black-headed Gull					4	1	
33	Larus armenicus	Armenian Gull				2	1	10	
34	Sternula albifrons	Little Tern						2	
35	Gelochelidon nilotica	Gull-billed Tern						2	
36	Sterna hirundo	Common Tern				1		1	
37	Chlidonias hybrida	Whiskered Tern					3	43	
38	Chlidonias leucopterus	White-winged Tern					5	17	
Ciconiidae		Storks							
39	Ciconia nigra	Black Stork			2	2	2		
40	Ciconia ciconia	White Stork					3	1	
Phalacrocoracidae		Cormorants & Shags							
41	Phalacrocorax carbo	Great Cormorant				1		21	
Ardeidae		Herons & Bitterns							
42	Ixobrychus minutus	Little Bittern					1h		
43	Nycticorax nycticorax	Black-crowned Night Heron				3	2	1	
44	Bubulcus ibis	Western Cattle Egret					11	28	

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
45	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	Squacco Heron						3	
46	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Grey Heron						6	
47	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Great Egret						2	
48	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Little Egret			5	3	1	26	
Threskiornithidae		Ibises & Spoonbills							
49	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	Eurasian Spoonbill						6	
Accipitridae		Kites, Hawks & Eagles							
50	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Bearded Vulture		3	1				
51	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Egyptian Vulture							16
52	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	European Honey Buzzard	15		1		1	4	
53	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Cinereous Vulture							1
54	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Griffon Vulture		21	11	7	11	3	4
55	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	Short-toed Snake Eagle			3	1	3		1
56	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>	Lesser Spotted Eagle				1	2		
57	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	Booted Eagle			1		2	1	
58	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Steppe Eagle					1		
59	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	Imperial Eagle				5	1		
60	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Western Marsh Harrier			1	3	1	3	
61	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	Montagu's Harrier				3	1		
62	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>	Levant Sparrowhawk				1		2	
63	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Eurasian Sparrowhawk		1			1		
64	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Eurasian Goshawk					1		
65	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Black Kite	1						

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
66	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	White-tailed Eagle							1
67	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Common Buzzard	1		4		5		1
68	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Long-legged Buzzard	2	1		3	3	1	1
Strigidae			Owls						
69	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Little Owl				7		1	
70	<i>Otus scops</i>	Eurasian Scops Owl				2	1		
71	<i>Asio otus</i>	Long-eared Owl						4	
Upupidae			Hoopoes						
72	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Eurasian Hoopoe			2	5	5	6	
Meropidae			Bee-eaters						
73	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	European Bee-eater	10h	196	5	26	4+	6+	2+
Alcedinidae			Kingfishers						
73	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Common Kingfisher					1	1	
Coraciidae			Rollers						
74	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	European Roller			5	16	5+	6	1+
Picidae			Woodpeckers						
75	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	Eurasian Wryneck	1						
76	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	1					2	
77	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Great Spotted Woodpecker			1				
78	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	Syrian Woodpecker	1					2	
79	<i>Dryobates minor</i>	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker						1	
80	<i>Picus viridis</i>	Eurasian Green Woodpecker						1	
81	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	Black Woodpecker						1	

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
Falconidae		Falcons							
82	Falco naumanni	Lesser Kestrel				10+			
83	Falco tinnunculus	Eurasian Kestrel		5		7	1	1	2
84	Falco peregrinus	Peregrine Falcon	1						
85	Falco subbuteo	Eurasian Hobby	seen on May 19th						
86	Falco vespertinus	Red-footed Falcon				1			
87	Falco cherrug	Saker Falcon				1			
Laniidae		Shrikes							
88	Lanius collurio	Red-backed Shrike	9	21	8	2	2	1+	1
89	Lanius minor	Lesser Gray Shrike		2	3	10	7	1+	2
90	Lanius senator	Woodchat Shrike				14	1	3	1
Oriolidae		Old World Orioles							
91	Oriolus oriolus	Eurasian Golden Oriole					6	4	
Corvidae		Crows & Jays							
92	Garrulus glandarius (ssp. atricapillus)	Eurasian Jay (Black-capped)		1	3			5	
93	Pica pica	Eurasian Magpie	1		2	11	18	23	4
94	Coloeus monedula	Western Jackdaw				48	20		15
95	Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax	Red-billed Chough	10	45	7				
96	Pyrrhocorax graculus	Alpine Chough		7	55				
97	Corvus frugilegus	Rook					55	25	2
98	Corvus cornix	Hooded Crow	3	11	4	8	12	14	14
99	Corvus corax	Northern Raven	3	6	2		2		3
Paridae		Tits							

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
100	<i>Periparus ater</i>	Coal Tit	1		2				
101	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Blue Tit	4		4				
102	<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit	4	3	4	1	1	1	2
Remizidae			Penduline Tits						
103	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	Eurasian Penduline Tit					2		
Alaudidae			Larks						
104	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	Wood Lark							4
105	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Eurasian Skylark				1	7		1
106	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Crested Lark				54	6+	4	8
107	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	Greater Short-toed Lark				5			
108	<i>Alaudala heinei</i>	Turkestan Short-toed Lark				2			
109	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	Calandra Lark				57+	14+	16	1
Acrocephalidae			Reed Warblers, Grauer's Warbler & Allies						
110	<i>Iduna pallida</i>	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler				2	3		
111	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	Marsh Warbler							6
112	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	Great Reed Warbler					5		
Hirundinidae			Swallows & Martins						
113	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Bank Swallow						55	
114	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Eurasian Crag Martin		21	10		5		
115	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow			21	23	13	219	26
116	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Western House Martin	6	35	8	80	30	33	
Phylloscopidae			Leaf Warblers & Allies						
117	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler	1			1			

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
118	<i>Phylloscopus sindianus</i>	Mountain Chiffchaff	2	4	4				
119	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Common Chiffchaff		3					
120	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>	Green Warbler	2	2	3		1		2
Aegithalidae			Bushtits						
121	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Long-tailed Tit					4+		
Sylviidae			Sylviid Babblers						
122	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Eurasian Blackcap	3		3				
123	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	Garden Warbler					1		
124	<i>Curruca mystacea</i>	Menetries's Warbler				5			
125	<i>Curruca nisoria</i>	Barred Warbler	3		2				
126	<i>Curruca curruca</i>	Lesser Whitethroat			2				
127	<i>Curruca crassirostris</i>	Eastern Orphean Warbler				4	2		
128	<i>Curruca communis</i>	Common Whitethroat				2			
Tichodromidae			Wallcreepers						
129	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	Wallcreeper	1	1	1				
Cinclidae			Dippers						
130	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	White-throated Dipper	1	1					
Sittidae			Nuthatches						
131	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>	Western Rock Nuthatch				2	2		
132	<i>Sitta krueperi</i>	Krüper's Nuthatch							4+
Troglodytes			Wrens						
133	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Eurasian Wren	1	1	2		1+		
Sturnidae			Starlings						

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
134	<i>Pastor roseus</i>	Rosy Starling				56	240+	310	
135	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Common Starling				7	56	44	5
Turdidae			Thrushes						
136	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	Ring Ouzel	5	5	7				
137	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Mistle Thrush			2				7
138	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush	2	1	1h	1h			
139	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Common Blackbird	13	28	16		4	15	14
Muscicapidae			Chats & Old World Flycatchers						
140	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Common Nightingale			3h	2h	6	2	
141	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	European Robin			3				
142	<i>Muscicapa striata*</i>	Spotter Flycatcher*	seen on May 19th						
143	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin				9			
144	<i>Ficedula parva</i>	Red-breasted Flycatcher	1h		3				
145	<i>Ficedula semitorquata</i>	Semi-collared Flycatcher	1h		1h				
146	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Black Redstart	4	9	3				
147	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	Common Redstart	1		1		1	1	1
148	<i>Phoenicurus erythrogastrus</i>	White-winged Redstart		2					
149	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush		4	2				
150	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Blue Rock Thrush			1		1		
151	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Whinchat	5	3	2	1			
152	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>	Siberian Stonechat				4			
153	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Northern Wheatear	3	2	5				
154	<i>Oenanthe melanoleuca</i>	Eastern Black-eared Wheatear				2		2	1

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
155	<i>Oenanthe finschi</i>	Finsch's Wheatear					2		
156	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	Pied Wheatear				4			
157	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	Isabelline Wheatear				38	4+	5	1
Prunellidae			Accentors						
158	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock		7	1				
Passeridae			Old World Sparrows						
159	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Eurasian Tree Sparrow				4		10	
160	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Spanish Sparrow				12	8		
161	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow		30	19	9	70	10	24
162	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	Rock Sparrow				4	1	6	1
Motacillidae			Wagtails & Pipits						
163	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail	2	4	2				
164	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	White Wagtail	2	12	5	4+		2	2
165	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	Tawny Pipit				5	2		
166	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Tree Pipit			3h				
167	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>	Red-throated Pipit	3	1					
168	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Water Pipit	6	10	3				
Fringillidae			Finches						
169	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Common Chaffinch		1	2		2		3
170	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Hawfinch	1		2			2	1
171	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	Common Rosefinch	2	16	6				
172	<i>Carpodacus rubicilla</i>	Great Rosefinch	3	5	4				
173	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Eurasian Bullfinch	5	2					

#	Family Scientific Name	English Name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
			May	May	May	May	May	May	May
174	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	European Greenfinch			2				11
175	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>	Twite		5	3				
176	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	Common Linnet		15	7				
177	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	European Goldfinch			2	2			4
178	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>	Red-fronted Serin		14	5				
Emberizidae			Buntings						
179	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	Corn Bunting			2	27+	24	12	12
180	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>	Black-headed Bunting			1	29+	5+	1	11+
181	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Rock Bunting		1	2		3		

Thank you for reading our report!

Contact us to join the same or similar tour in 2025.

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