



TURKEY: PRIVATE BIRDING AND CULTURAL TOUR REPORT

26 - 31 MARCH 2023



*The striking **Pallid Harrier** was seen on migration making its way north through Istanbul.*

Overview

Our six-day tour of the beautiful city of Istanbul began on the 26th of March 2023 and concluded on the 31st of March 2023. During the tour we visited many wonderful birding and cultural locations including Belgrad Forest, Hagia Sophia, the Grand Bazaar, Istanbul Archaeological Museum, Galata Bridge, the Egyptian Market, and lakes Kucukcemece and Buyukcekmece.

Our trip around this beautiful city gave us many exciting species, including **Pallid Harrier**, **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, **Citrine Wagtail**, **Garganey**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Alpine Swift**, **Greater Flamingo**, **Yelkouan Shearwater**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Penduline Tit**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, and **Black Redstart**. A total of 73 bird species were recorded during the tour, with the full species list at the end of this report.

I would like to thank Urban, Nancy, Wendy, Karen, and Alex for their company during the tour.



Short-toed Snake Eagle was one of the raptor highlights in the Bosphorus

Detailed Report

Day 1, 26th March 2023. Arrival in Istanbul

The first day of our tour was treated as an arrival day, with Urban, Nancy, Wendy, and Karen, plus guide Alex, all arriving at various points in the day.

Day 2, 27th March 2023. Belgrad Forest and the Bosphorus

With typical spring weather set to disrupt our time in Istanbul, we decided to begin the tour early and explore the birding sites around the city. Our first stop was the beautiful Belgrad Forest. The highlight of our visit here was stunning views of **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, which were joined with good views of **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** and **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**. Other birds of note here were **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, and great looks at **Eurasian Jay**.



Grey-headed Woodpecker gave us stunning views Belgrad Forest.

Next, we headed for the Bosphorus and the amazing migration observation tower at the north end of the join between Europe and Asia. This is a migration hot spot and here we enjoyed the spectacle of spring raptor migration with great views of **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, **Pallid Harrier**, **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, and **Common Buzzard** (mostly of the *vulpinus* “Steppe Buzzard” subspecies). Also seen here were **Booted Eagle**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Black Kite**, **Alpine Swift**, **White Stork**, and an elusive **Sardinian Warbler**.

After lunch we crossed the Bosphorus to a wetland area next to the Black Sea. This looked a potentially interesting area but with the wind picking up, it proved hard going. However, we were able to find **Common Moorhen**, **Cetti’s Warbler**, and three stunning **Black Redstarts**. With the afternoon traffic a known issue in Istanbul we began the journey back towards our hotel where we would have our first evening meal.

Day 3, 28th March 2023. Hagia Sophia and the Grand Bazaar

Today the heaven's opened, in stark contrast to yesterday. We thus took the opportunity to visit Istanbul's cultural centers. To start we explored the ancient and beautiful Hagia Sophia mosque. A truly exquisite building full of history. After a coffee break, we walked the area around the Blue Mosque and visited the Sultan Ahmet Tomb, the final resting place of Sultan Ahmet built between 1617 and 1619.

After lunch it was time for the short walk to the Grand Bazaar. This historical shopping district is now a glitzy mix of shops and a real shock the senses. We enjoyed a walk here to escape the rain and the group purchased some souvenirs to return home with. With the weather not improving we headed back to our hotel before our evening meal.



The ancient Hagia Sophia is a huge landmark and a breathtaking place to visit (photo Dennis Jarvis).

Day 4, 29th March 2023. Istanbul Archaeological Museum & Gülhane Parki

With the weather once again proving challenging, the group visited the incredible Istanbul Archaeological Museum. This vast set of buildings houses wonderful treasures from the history of the region. While the weather did improve briefly, it once again declined and we even had very unseasonal snow! After lunch we braved the chilly conditions and headed to Gülhane Parki which runs all the way to the Bosphorus.

We enjoyed some brief sun as we walked through the park, with bird species including **Grey Heron**, **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Laughing Dove**, and **Hooded Crow** all present alongside introduced species like **Common Myna**, **Alexandrine Parakeet**, and **Ring-necked Parakeet**.

On the Bosphorus itself we enjoyed the dramatic view of Istanbul across the Golden Horn as the storm clouds gathered once again. On the water were good numbers of **Mediterranean Gull** and **Black-headed Gull** with the star of the show being good-sized groups of **Yelkouan Shearwater** moving into the Mediterranean Sea. With the rain beginning once again we made a hasty retreat for our hotel and finished the day with dinner at a nearby restaurant.



Rafts of Yelkouan Shearwaters were seen moving into the Mediterranean Sea.

Day 5, 30th March 2023. Galata Bridge, the Egyptian Market, and lake birding

Today we would explore two exciting-looking lakes to the west of Istanbul. However, we first took a walk to the Galata Bridge across the Golden Horn section of the Bosphorus. This is Istanbul's oldest bridge and gave us good views of **European Shag**. Also here were **Great Cormorant**, many of the gulls we had seen yesterday, **Yelkouan Shearwater**, **Pygmy Cormorant**, and our first **Barn Swallow** of the tour.

From here we made the short walk to the Egyptian Market. This smaller version of the Grand Bazaar is much more manageable for a short visit, and it is easier to take in the many goods on offer, including a wide range of spices.

We began our birding for the afternoon on the western shore of Kucukcemece Lake. A sheltered bay on the lake held some interesting birds, with the standout species being two stunning **Citrine Wagtails**. Also seen here was a nice group of 38 **Greater Flamingo**, along with **Spotted Redshank**, **Ruff**, many **Mediterranean Gulls**, and a couple of **Western Marsh Harriers**.

Next stop was lunch and a café close to the stunning Kanuni Sultan bridge at the south end of Buyukcekmece Lake. While enjoying lunch we had great views of **Little Grebe**, **Pygmy**

Cormorant, Mediterranean Gull, and more distant views of Caspian Gull, in a wide range of ages.



Little Ringed Plover provided us with amazing views as we explored the north shore of Buyukcekmece Lake.

Our next stop was the north shore of Buyukcekmece Lake. The north end was very dry so only gave us **Little Ringed Plover**, however a nearby channel was teeming with birds. As we drove slowly along the track next to the channel, we were able to pick up new species like **Garganey, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Great Egret, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Common Reed Warbler**, and some educational views of both *feldegg* and *superciliaris* subspecies of **Western Yellow Wagtail**. Distantly we heard **Corn Bunting** while overhead the sky was full of **Alpine Swift, Red-rumped Swallow, Barn Swallow, Common House Martin, and Common Swift**.

After this amazing birding we headed to our hotel for our final night in Turkey.

Day 6, 31st March 2023. Departure to Batumi

Today we had a very early start as we made our way to Istanbul Airport for our 06:55am flight to Batumi, Georgia.

Bird List - Following IOC (12.1)

Birds 'heard only' are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen.

The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened

Common Name	Scientific Name
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Common Pochard - VU	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
Rails, Crakes & Coots (Rallidae)	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Grebes (Podicipedidae)	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Flamingos (Phoenicopteridae)	
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Laridae)	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>
Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>
Petrels, Shearwaters, Diving Petrels (Procellariidae)	
Yelkouan Shearwater	<i>Puffinus yelkouan</i>
Storks (Ciconiidae)	
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Cormorants, Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)	
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopous major</i>
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Old World Parrots (Psittaculidae)	
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Tits, Chickadees (Paridae)	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Penduline Tits (Remizidae)	
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Cettia Bush Warblers & Allies (Cettiidae)	
Cetti's Warbler (H)	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Leaf Warblers & Allies (Phylloscopidae)	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Reed Warblers & Allies (Acrocephalidae)	
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Sylviid Babblers (Sylviidae)	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>
Wrens (Troglodytidae)	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Treecreepers (Certhiidae)	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
Starlings, Rhabdornis (Sturnidae)	
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Thrushes (Turdidae)	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae)	
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Buntings (Emberizidae)	
Corn Bunting (H)	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Total seen	71
Total heard only	2
Total recorded	73