



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

## **BIRDING IN ANCIENT BULGARIA A BIRDS, NATURE & CULTURE TOUR MAY 3–19, 2025**

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Eurasian Griffon, Rhodope Mountains, Bulgaria © Martin Prochazkacz/shutterstock

**Bordered by Romania, Greece, Turkey, and the Black Sea, Bulgaria straddles the migration route of many of the birds that winter in Africa and breed in eastern and northeastern Europe. Our own journey in search of those and so many other birds takes us across the country, from the capital of Sofia in the west and the stunning mountains of the south to Bulgaria's Black Sea coast and the Danube River in the northeast.**

In Sofia, Common Swift and colonies of Western House-Martin nest under the eaves of attractive National Revival buildings while Eurasian Collared-Dove and Eurasian Blackbird sing in the leafy city parks. Above the city, in the dramatic Vitosha Mountains, Pallid Swift, Ring Ouzel, and Common Firecrest may be among the first birds to welcome us as we begin our explorations.

As we travel south into the western Rhodope Mountains, our sights will be set first on birds of agricultural habitats, then on the great diversity of species inhabiting the rivers, gorges, crags, and forests. Birds we hope to meet within these dramatically scenic areas include European Turtle-Dove, Alpine Swift, Crested Tit, Red-rumped Swallow, White-throated Dipper, and Common Nightingale—to some ears, Europe’s finest songster. If we are fortunate, the star of the show will be the extraordinary butterfly-like Wallcreeper.

At lower elevations in the eastern Rhodope Mountains, we will concentrate on finding Black and White storks, Egyptian Vulture, Eurasian Griffon, Eurasian Scops-Owl, Eastern Subalpine Warbler, Spanish Sparrow, and Black-headed Bunting.

Our journey then takes us eastward through rolling hills and flower-filled countryside to Sozopol on the coast of the Black Sea. We may see Booted and Imperial eagles and Lesser Kestrel, and numbers of European Bee-eater and European Roller will increase noticeably. Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Green Woodpecker, and Lesser Gray and Woodchat shrikes are often seen on the roadside. We will make a special effort to find Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and the extremely local Masked Shrike and Olive-tree Warbler.

North of Sozopol, the wetlands of Burgas and Pomorie are a paradise for waterfowl and other aquatic birds. Here we should see Common Shelduck, Pygmy Cormorant, Great White Pelican, and perhaps our first Dalmatian Pelican. Various herons and egrets and large numbers of Greater Flamingo are also present. The handsome Pied Avocet is a common breeding species.



The dazzling European Bee-eater © Brian Gibbons

Among a wide range of migrant shorebird possibilities, we will be on the lookout for Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, and Spotted Redshank, while noisy

**Yellow-legged Gull and Common, Sandwich, and Whiskered terns vie for our attention overhead. Cetti's Warbler and Great Reed Warbler fill the reedbeds with their noisy songs, and we will likely find Western Marsh Harrier quartering the marshes in search of prey.**

**Moving north along the Black Sea coast, we will explore mature oak woodlands in search of lowland forest species including the lovely Semicollared Flycatcher, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, and Short-toed Treecreeper. We will also visit dry steppes filled with wildflowers and wheatears, with Crested Lark singing overhead. Our hoped-for finds at reed-fringed lakes include Ferruginous Duck, Squacco Heron, Mediterranean Gull, and the extremely local Paddyfield Warbler, here at the western limit of its range.**



**/Purple Heron © Faisca**

**The final leg of our journey will take us just south of the Danube River, to the Srebarna Biosphere Reserve. Here we will enjoy a wonderful mix of wetland birds including Graylag Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Ferruginous Duck, Great Crested Grebe, and Purple Heron. Common Cuckoo is truly common in this area, and European Bee-eaters present a dazzlingly colorful delight at their colonies. Syrian and Lesser Spotted woodpeckers, along with Eurasian Golden Oriole, Red-backed Shrike, and Corn Bunting are common in the area too, and we will be serenaded night and day by the classic symbol of music and love, the Common Nightingale.**

**Along the way, we will have the opportunity to learn some of Bulgaria’s 8,000-year-long history with visits to Thracian sites including the ancient city of Perperikon, and tours of excellent museums in Sofia and Varna.**

**May 3–4, Days 1–2: Departure from home and arrival in Sofia, Bulgaria.** Most flights from the United States bound for eastern Europe leave in the afternoon or evening, arriving the next day. If you depart on May 3, Day One of our tour, you will arrive at Sofia International Airport (airport code SOF) on May 4, Day Two. Once you have cleared immigration and customs and gathered your bags, a representative of our ground agent will be waiting for you outside the baggage claim area for the 30-minute ground transfer to the **Hotel Jasmin**, where a room has been reserved in your name.

After check-in, you can relax in your room or join your fellow tour participants for an optional walking tour of the Bulgarian capital. We will visit the historical city center where attractions include imposing National Revival architecture, Saint Alexander Nevsky — the Bulgarian Orthodox Cathedral — the ancient St Sofia and St George’s churches, the well-preserved underground Roman ruins of the ancient town of Serdika, and the Parliament Building amongst others. Along the way, we are sure to encounter some of the common urban birds including Common Wood-Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Eurasian Magpie Alpine and Common swifts, Western House-Martin, Great Tit, and Eurasian Blackbird. This evening there will be a welcome reception and dinner at a local restaurant.



Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Sofia © Pudelek/Creative Commons

Should you want more time to rest after the long transatlantic journey or want to see more of Sofia on your own, you should arrive one or two (or more) days in advance of the tour. Given sufficient advance notice, the VENT office will be happy to help you with arrangements for an early arrival.

NIGHTS: Aboard international flight (Day 1)  
Hotel Jasmin, Sofia (Day 2)

**May 5, Day 3: Vitosha Mountain Nature Park and the National History Museum.** Established almost a century ago, Vitosha Mountain was Bulgaria’s first nature park—and the first anywhere in the Balkans. It preserves more than 100 square miles of forest, high-elevation grassland, and marshes, with comfortable access on easy trails through rich spruce forests and open meadows. A favorite destination of visitors from nearby Sofia, Vitosha Mountain is especially well known for the ancient churches and monasteries that dot its varied landscape, some of them dating back as far as the tenth century.



**The Vitosha Mountains Rise Behind Sofia © Stolichanin/Creative Commons**

We will make an early start this morning in search of some of the nearly 250 species of birds known from the park. Fully half of them breed locally, making Vitosha an especially rewarding springtime destination. In addition to many other common woodland birds, we have good chances at encountering such specialties as Northern Nutcracker, Ring Ouzel, and Willow Tit. We’ll check cliffs and other rocky habitats for Pallid Swift, Eurasian Crag-Martin, and Black Redstart. Among the colorful passerines we are likely to enjoy here are European Robin, Common Firecrest, Common Chaffinch, European Greenfinch, and Yellowhammer.

After a good lunch, we will pay a visit to the National Museum of History, set against the stunning backdrop of Vitosha Mountain. The museum’s extensive holdings document the development of Bulgaria and the Balkans over 8,000 years, from the sixth millennium BC to the Ottoman era and beyond. Housed in a massive late Brutalist structure originally built as the residence of the general

secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the museum's exhibits include breathtaking gold vessels and other precious objects from Thracian hoards discovered over the past two centuries.

We then return to our hotel for dinner and to reflect on our impressions of what will have been a very full and exciting day.

NIGHT: Hotel Jasmin, Sofia

**May 6, Day 4: Sofia to Trigrad.** We will set out this morning on the 3.5-hour drive to the village of Trigrad, surrounded by the imposing stone massif of the Rhodope Mountains just a few miles from the Greek border. Along the way, we will make several stops to enjoy our first encounters with many of the characteristic birds of open country, among them White Stork, European Bee-eater, and Calandra and Crested larks. We will be paying special attention to the search for such regional specialties as Rosy Starling and Corn and Black-headed buntings. The starling is unpredictable in its distribution, essentially nomadic, while the buntings can be relatively common. Corn Bunting, though visually undistinguished, is famous for its constantly repeated jangly, hissing song, while Black-headed Bunting is one of the most striking members of the family, males combining lemon-yellow underparts and a warm rusty back with a neat black "helmet"; the song of this species is a bright and cheerful metallic carol, one of the most evocative sounds of spring in eastern Europe.



The gorgeous Black-headed Bunting © Robert

Our accommodation for the next two nights is in the very heart of the Bulgarian Rhodope. If time allows, we may be able to stop to visit the famous Devil's Throat, a cave traditionally identified as the site where Orpheus entered the underworld to retrieve his beloved Eurydice. Today, the cave is familiar to television viewers as the atmospheric setting for a popular Bulgarian detective series.

NIGHT: Hotel Yagodina, Yagodina

**May 7, Day 5: Trigrad Gorge.** Over millions of years, the swift waters of the Trigradska River have cut through nearly seven hundred feet of marble to carve a valley that narrows into a dizzyingly steep gorge. These are the haunts of one of Eurasia’s most fascinating birds, Wallcreeper. Widespread but nowhere common, Wallcreeper can be surprisingly inconspicuous as they quietly sidle and hop up sheer rock surfaces; they are most easily detected by patiently watching cliffs for the momentary flick of a wing. In flight, those wings are intricately patterned and incredibly colorful, making the bird resemble nothing so much as an enormous butterfly. Though this sometimes-elusive species can never be guaranteed, the Trigrad Gorge is among the most reliable sites anywhere in the world, and if we are very fortunate, our local colleagues will have identified a nesting territory and “staked out” this most charismatic of European passerines.



**The remarkable Wallcreeper inhabits the canyon walls of Trigrad Gorge © Nrik Kiran**

The immediate environs feature a pleasant variety of additional habitats, including scattered stands of pine, broadleaf forest, meadows, and cultivated land. Together with the gorge’s cliffs, ledges, and caves, those habitats are home to a wide range of highly sought-after bird species. Both Alpine and Pallid swifts nest in the crooks and crannies of the canyon walls, while White-throated Dipper feed in the turbulent waters of the river below. Overhead, we have a good chance to see a European Honey-buzzard, Eurasian Crag-Martin, or Red-rumped Swallow. Scattered trees and bushes offer song perches for Mistle Thrush and Ring Ouzel, while the more forested reaches are home to Eurasian Blackcap, Long-tailed and Crested tits, and European Serin.

NIGHT: Hotel Yagodina, Yagodina

**May 8, Day 6: Trigrad to Madzharovo.** We will check out of our Yagodina hotel this morning to strike out for the eastern Rhodope Mountains. These magnificent hills are one of the best places in Europe for large birds of prey. Remote and wild, the area combines cliffs, meadows, woodland, and patches of scrub, a mix that appeals to an extremely diverse avifauna. Along our drive of about four and a half hours, we can hope to see Black Kite, Gray and White wagtails, and Red-backed and Woodchat shrikes.

Our route takes us to the archaeological complex of Perperikon, an ancient Thracian city that preserves the most extensive ensemble of megaliths in eastern Europe, but which was only discovered in 1990. Excavations conducted over the past quarter century have revealed the traces of human activity beginning as early as the sixth millennium BC; the site appears to have been continuously occupied through the Roman era, when an enormous fortified palace was built, and into the Middle Ages, finally abandoned only at the beginning of the Ottoman period in the fourteenth century.



**The archaeological complex of Perperikon © Kiril Kapustin/Creative Commons**

Later in the day, we will arrive in Madzharovo, our base for two nights and the site of a preserve specially created for the conservation of three impressive Old World vulture species.

NIGHT: Hotel Valchitza, Madzharovo



**May 9, Day 7: Eastern Rhodope Mountains.** Studen Kladenets is an ancient volcanic landscape of shady basalt cliffs, bizarrely shaped hoodoos, and blue-green zeolites, uncommon crystalline structures formed where alkaline water seeps through volcanic ash. As we admire the area's unique geology, we will also keep an eye to the skies for soaring birds of prey. This area is said to have the greatest raptor diversity anywhere in Europe, and likely sightings today include Eurasian Griffon, Egyptian, and Cinereous vultures. These great scavengers often share thermals, soaring alongside Common Buzzard and Black Stork.

We will continue our explorations in the Dolna Kula area, where the stony valley of the Krumovitsa River provides a mosaic of habitats including cliffs, scattered woody vegetation, and agricultural fields, attracting a broad assortment of birds, including several species of decidedly southern affinity. Traditional agricultural practices here afford nesting sites and feeding areas for European Roller, Eurasian Hoopoe, Little Owl, and Lesser Gray Shrike, that last a species now very scarce at best in northern and western Europe. Rocky slopes with sparse shrubs and trees are home to Chukar, Western Rock Nuthatch, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, and an excellent mix of warblers, including Olive-tree, Sardinian, Eastern Orphean, and Eastern Subalpine warblers.



Little Owl © Robert Warren

Ledges and cliffs offer nesting and roosting sites for Black Stork and Common Raven, while Eurasian Hobby and Levant Sparrowhawk inhabit streamside woodlands. Even the scattered villages have their special birds, with nesting White Stork and Spanish Sparrow often easiest to find in human settlements and sharing pole-top nesting sites!

We will return to Madzharovo for dinner, after which we will look for Eurasian Scops-Owl that sometimes forage around the village.

NIGHT: Hotel Valchitza, Madzharovo

**May 10, Day 8: Madzharovo to Svilengrad.** This morning we will check out of our Madzharovo hotel and head east to Svilengrad, where Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria meet. The drive is less than two hours all told, leaving us plenty of time to bird along the way. Our route takes us through fine stretches of scrubby hillside and open country, where we can hope to find Eurasian Hoopoe, Crested Lark, and Isabelline Wheatear. We also plan stops to look for an impressive array of raptors large and

small, including Eurasian Griffon, Western Marsh Harrier, Common “Steppe” and Long-legged buzzards, Booted and Imperial eagles, and Lesser Kestrel.

One species we hope to see today and on several other days of our tour merits special mention: European Turtle-Dove. Still tolerably common in eastern Europe, this charming pigeon was once a familiar sight—and its gentle purring song a familiar sound across most of the continent. Over the past fifty years, however, the European population overall has decreased by more than 75%, with a shocking 92% decline recorded in Britain since 1990. The apparent causes of this devastating loss are no real surprise: the intensification of agriculture has severely limited the traditional hedgerow habitat the turtle-dove prefers, necessarily reducing the abundance of the wild plant and animal species it feeds on. The increased use of pesticides and herbicides has exacerbated the situation, while hunting, both legal and illegal, removes tens, perhaps even hundreds of thousands of birds from the population every year. Bulgaria’s conservation community, with the support of EU programs such as Natura 2000, has focused in recent decades not just on “flagship species” like the Lammergeier and Imperial Eagle but also on the habitats, wild and anthropogenic, that continue to sustain so many organisms, like the turtle-dove, that are imperiled in the rest of their European range.



**European Turtle-Dove © Hrdlika Polna**

We will arrive in Svilengrad and check in to our hotel before reassembling for dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Parish, Svilengrad

**May 11, Day 9: Svilengrad to Sozopol.** We will leave Svilengrad this morning to continue our eastward journey to the shores of the Black Sea. The three-hour drive to Sozopol may produce such special birds as Black Stork, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock-Thrush, Olive-tree Warbler, or Eurasian Golden Oriole. Woodchat Shrike can be impressively common, and we will make a special effort to find the lovely Masked Shrike, which approaches the northwesternmost edge of its range in the woodlots, orchards, thorny scrubland, and gardens of eastern Bulgaria.



**Masked Shrike © Len Worthington/Creative Commons**

Today's selection of colorful finches may include the noisy and often gregarious European Greenfinch. The Hawfinch is in some respects the very opposite: usually deathly quiet when perched, and at this season generally seen only as single birds or pairs. But this very large, very large-billed finch, a close relative of the Evening Grosbeak, is a real beauty, well worth the time and patience often required to get satisfying looks. We also have a good chance at adding to our tally of Old World buntings; not only are Corn and Black-headed buntings present, but the attractive Rock and Ortolan buntings are also possible today.

Sozopol itself is a compact resort town on the Black Sea, still more popular with Bulgarian tourists than with foreign visitors. This is believed to be the oldest surviving human settlement on the Bulgarian seaside, and the charming old town is characterized by narrow cobbled streets, imposing public buildings in the National Revival style, and a thriving art scene with numerous galleries and shops. A seaside promenade affords wonderful views of the town and the water alike.

Birders are drawn here not only by the appealing setting but by the opportunities to see—right in the center of town and on the coastal trail—such eastern European specialties as Syrian Woodpecker

or even Red-breasted Flycatcher. The overgrown fields just south of town, are interspersed with more open grassland; hedges and thickets here attract a wide variety of passerine migrants when conditions are right.

NIGHT: Kalitea Hotel, Sozopol

**May 12, Day 10: The Burgas Lakes.** The wetland complex surrounding the city of Burgas, on the shores of the Black Sea, was declared a Ramsar site more than 20 years ago. Comprising four shallow lakes covering an area of more than 35 square miles, these wetlands and the associated reedbeds—the largest in Bulgaria—are the most productive birding sites in the country, with some 80% of the entire Bulgarian species list sighted here over the years. We may well record the highest single-day tally of our tour today, just 30 minutes away from our Sozopol hotel.

Almost any species of eastern European water bird can occur here. Among the waterfowl, we will be looking particularly for Common Shelduck, Garganey, and Common Pochard; we can also expect to find wild, native Mute Swan. The Burgas Lakes are a significant locality for both Great Cormorant, which nests on high transmission towers near the wetlands, and Pygmy Cormorant; this was long one of the most reliable sites in Europe for the latter species, which has recently increased massively in numbers and in range. Both Great White Pelican and the much less abundant and widespread Dalmatian Pelican are also among the birds we can hope to see here.



**The Dalmatian Pelican is a specialty bird of far eastern Europe © Iliuta Goean**

Unsurprisingly, Burgas is also a hotspot for long-legged wading birds. In addition to the widely distributed Gray Heron and Little Egret (the counterparts, respectively, of the American Great Blue Heron and Snowy Egret), the slender and secretive Purple Heron and the strikingly patterned

Squacco Heron are present here in good numbers. Eurasian Spoonbill and Greater Flamingo can be conspicuous out on the open flats where they prefer to feed.

Shorebirds, too, are among the Burgas specialties. Both Pied Avocet and Black-winged Stilt breed here, as do the delightful Little Ringed Plover and the dramatic Black-tailed Godwit. We will also be looking for Yellow-legged Gull and Whiskered Tern, as Cetti's Warbler and Great Reed Warbler sing from the extensive reedbeds.

NIGHT: Kalitea Hotel, Sozopol

**May 13, Day 11: Sozopol to Krapets.** More than 40,000 tons of salt are harvested in the Burgas and Sozopol regions each year. The shallow saline pools created by that industry are unfailingly attractive to birds, and we will start the day in search of more shorebirds and waterfowl, possibly including Mediterranean Gull, Little Tern, Curlew Sandpiper, or Ruff. Some of these salt pans are equally interesting to human guests, who come to bathe in the noisome but putatively salutary black mud on the edges.

Nearby stands an extraordinary cultural and architectural monument, which we will drop-in to see. This Roman-era Pomorie Tholos, or beehive tomb, is a domed mausoleum built for a wealthy pagan family in the second or third century AD. Five niches for the disposition of ashes are arranged around a massive central column, which expands to form a hemispherical roof. Unique in the Balkans, this amazingly well-preserved monument has been recognized as a national architectural treasure since 1965.



Thracian Tomb, Pomorie © Sasha Coachman/Creative Commons

After lunch, we will continue northward, with a stop to look for a number of locally distributed oak woodland species. Bulgaria is famous among European birders for the diversity of its woodpeckers, and this habitat is ideal for Black and Middle Spotted Woodpecker. The dapper little Semicollared Flycatcher breeds here, too, as does the inconspicuous Short-toed Treecreeper.

We will check in to our hotel on arriving in Krapets, a beachside town surrounded by vast fields of wheat and sunflowers.

NIGHT: Yanitza Hotel, Krapets

**May 14, Day 12: Durankulak and Cape Kaliakra.** From our base in Krapets, we will visit two very different localities today featuring two very different habitats. The small village of Durankulak is the northeasternmost settlement in Bulgaria, first inhabited as long as 7,000 years ago. The nearby brackish wetland of the same name—just over three miles from the border with Romania—is protected under both Bulgarian and EU law as a refuge for a number of rare wild plants and animals, including two species of polecat, the Eurasian otter, and the endangered European ground squirrel or Souslik.

The breeding birds of Durankulak include internationally significant numbers of Kentish Plover and Lesser Gray Shrike; the extensive reedbeds lining the lakeshore are home to substantial populations of Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, Eurasian and Little bitterns, Spotted and Little crakes, Bearded Reedling, and Savi's and Paddyfield warblers. Drier uplands support nesting Eurasian Thick-knee, European Bee-eater, and Red-footed Falcon.



Eurasian Thick-knee © Fáisca

Thirty miles south, the limestone cliffs of Cape Kaliakra rise nearly 200 feet above the Black Sea. This is the only breeding locality in Bulgaria for the European Shag; other seabirds we will watch for here include Yelkouan Shearwater and Yellow-legged Gull. For centuries, this exposed headland was fortified against possible invaders, and the ruins of those stone walls now provide welcome nest sites for Eastern Black-eared, Isabelline, and Pied wheatears.

Just inland, the scrubby steppe is home to Calandra and Greater Short-toed larks, Lesser Gray and Woodchat shrikes, and Corn and Black-headed buntings. Eurasian Hobby and Red-footed Falcon can sometimes be seen hunting here, especially in the evening.

NIGHT: Yanitza Hotel, Krapets

**May 15, Day 13: Krapets to Vetren.** We will make another excursion this morning to the beaches, cliffs, and steppe grasslands of Kavarna, adjacent to Cape Kaliakra, hoping to run across any seabirds or coastal species we might have missed thus far. Land birds can be equally exciting, and there is always the chance of encountering a Great Spotted Cuckoo, a wandering flock of Rosy Starling, or some other avian surprise.



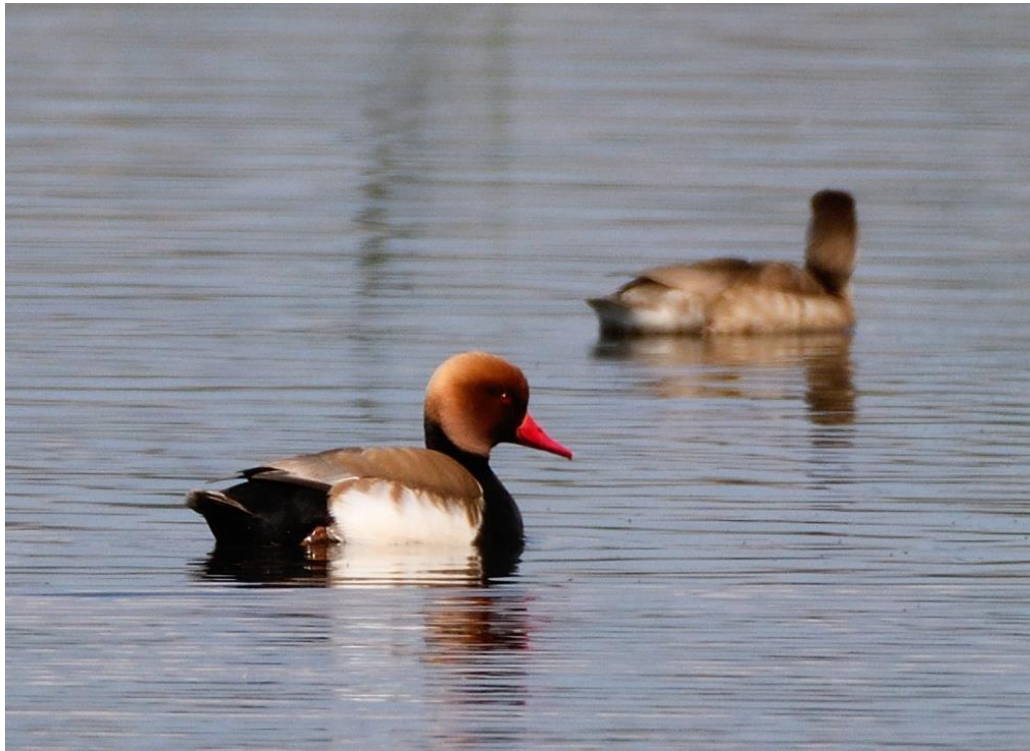
European Robin © Brian Gibbons

Afterward, we will head inland and west toward Vetren and our tranquil birding lodge. We aim to have time for a wander around the peaceful village to enjoy the evening concert of bird song. Among the most talented choristers, we may hear European Robin, Common Nightingale, Eurasian Blackbird, Song Thrush, Eurasian Blackcap, and Common Chaffinch. All of the “pied” woodpeckers—Syrian, Great Spotted, Middle Spotted, and Lesser Spotted—are possible here, as are Red-backed Shrike and Eurasian Golden Oriole.

NIGHT: Pelican Birding Lodge, Vetren

**May 16–17, Days 14–15: Srebarna Nature Reserve.** Our comfortable home base in Vetren is just a mile from the Danube River and not much farther from the Srebarna Nature Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There is excellent birding within remarkably easy reach of the lodge, and we will visit lakes, woodlands, and the banks of the blue Danube as we enjoy a wide range of species.

Special waterfowl to be seen in the area include Ruddy Shelduck, Garganey, Red-crested Pochard, and Ferruginous Duck. In addition to Pygmy and Great cormorants and Great White and Dalmatian pelicans, we will also be searching aquatic habitats and reedbeds for Glossy Ibis, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, and Great Reed Warbler. Both Whiskered and Black terns are possible, too.



**Red-crested Pochard**  
**one of Europe's most beautiful waterfowl species © Robert Warren**

In open areas and on brushy fields, we hope to find Ring-necked Pheasants, the sadly imperiled European Turtle-Dove, Common Cuckoo, and two of Europe's most outlandishly colorful birds, European Bee-eater and European Roller. Red-backed Shrike, Greater Whitethroat, and Corn Bunting are likewise characteristic species of this area. Especially toward evening, Eurasian Hobby hunt swifts, swallows, and other small-winged prey over the grasslands.

The banks of the Danube and small woodlots and parks may turn up Syrian and Lesser Spotted woodpeckers, Common Nightingale, Lesser Whitethroat, or Eurasian Golden Oriole. The oriole, only distantly related to the American birds bearing the same English name, can be remarkably hard to see, in spite of its large size and the male's brilliant plumage, but we will be listening carefully for the loud, spirited whistles that can help locate this spectacularly colorful singer high in the dense foliage.

NIGHT: Pelican Birding Lodge, Vetren



**May 18, Day 16: Vetren to Varna, and Flight to Sofia.** An optional pre-breakfast walk will be a last opportunity to enjoy some of the many birds we've come to know during our time together in Bulgaria. Afterward, we will drive a little more than two hours to Varna, back on the shores of the Black Sea.

We will have lunch there, then tour Varna's impressive Archaeological Museum. In addition to an important collection of icons created from the Middle Ages to the close of the Ottoman era, this large museum is famous as the home of the Varna Gold, a 13-pound gold treasure recovered from a Copper Age cemetery in the 1970s and 1980s. The jewelry and other ornaments that make up the trove are believed to have been created some 6500 years ago. The richness of the materials and, especially, the concentration of precious objects in just a few graves are valuable clues to the wealth and structure of an otherwise mute society reaching back to the fifth millennium BC.

A short afternoon flight will take us from Varna to Sofia for the last night of our tour.

NIGHT: Hotel Jasmin, Sofia

**May 19, Day 17: Departures.** Tour participants can arrange their departure from Sofia for any time today. The hotel offers complimentary airport shuttle service.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 10 participants.

**TOUR LEADER(S):** This tour will be led by **Mark Brazil** and a local leader. **Mayumi Brazil** will assist.



Mark Brazil is a frequent expedition leader of small, land-based, wildlife-focused expeditions in Africa, South America, South Asia, and East Asia. He is a regular lecturer on expedition cruise vessels traveling widely from the Arctic to Antarctica and many destinations between. He is best known for his extensive experience of birding in Japan and for his many publications. Born and educated in the UK, Mark has degrees in Biology, English Literature, and Psychology. He has had careers in conservation biology, in natural history television (20+ years), as a university lecturer (9 years), and now works mainly as a freelance author, editor, and wildlife-expedition leader. He has lived in England, Scotland, and New Zealand, and is now a long-term resident of Hokkaido, northern Japan, where he and his wife, Mayumi, live in the Akan-Mashu National Park. Mark began birding as a child in the UK, studied avian behavioral-ecology for his PhD, and has since birded on

every continent. He is fascinated by the amazing diversity of avian behavior. He began leading nature tours in Europe in 1980 and has since travelled the length and breadth of the continent—Bulgaria is his favorite European birding destination in both winter and summer. Mark became involved in the expedition cruise industry in 1998, and since 2007 he has worked exclusively in the wildlife and adventure travel industry as a consultant, expedition leader, guide, and lecturer. In the last few

years, he has been increasingly involved in outdoor guide training in Japan. His extensive travels across the length and breadth of Japan since 1980 have given him intimate knowledge of that country's birdlife, natural history, and culture. He is well-known for his numerous articles and books relating to the region. Mark's most recent books are: *Japan: The Natural History of an Asian Archipelago* (2022) and *Wild Hokkaido: A Guidebook to the National Parks and other Wild Places of Eastern Hokkaido* (2021). His past books include: *Helm Field Guide to the Birds of East Asia*; *The Nature of Japan*; *Helm Field Guide to the Birds of Japan*; and *A Birdwatcher's Guide to Japan*.



Mayumi Brazil is a National Government Licensed Interpreter Guide. She was born and educated in Hokkaido, Japan. Her interests include Japanese Literature, film, and contemporary Japanese culture. She enjoys cross-cultural experiences and particularly enjoys explaining her own culture to others. She is self-confident in a multi-cultural environment, organized, and attentive to detail and customer needs. She is motivated to provide a positive experience for those with whom she travels. Mayumi has worked in various capacities in the travel and service sector. Since 2009, she has worked as a fixer and an interpreter, traveling extensively throughout Japan from

Hokkaido to Okinawa with clients ranging from BBC Radio to groups and families. Her overseas travels have taken her to North and South America, Europe, East Africa, South and East Asia, New Zealand, and Australia. Mayumi has worked on expedition cruise ships as a lecturer and cultural demonstrator around Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, and for various companies including: Abercrombie & Kent (2009, 2016, 2023), Noble Caledonia (2010), Orion Expeditions (2011 & 2012), Silversea Cruises (2014), Albatross Expeditions (2019), and Zegrahm Expeditions (2010–2020). On land, she has co-led wildlife-focused expeditions with her husband, ornithologist and expedition leader Dr. Mark Brazil, in Bhutan, Brazil, Bulgaria, India, Japan, Nepal, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Zambia, and has worked as an interpreter/guide in Japan for various companies catering to photographers, naturalists, and birdwatchers. Mayumi and her husband live in Teshikaga, east Hokkaido.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$9,495** per person in double occupancy from Sofia, Bulgaria. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 17, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, internal flight on Day 16, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Sofia, Bulgaria and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$785**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the

VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (**December 4, 2024**) prior to the tour departure date.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

**Cancellation by Participant:**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant's refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant's deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

**Cancellation by VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit.** VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available. Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents. \*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit:

**<https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>**; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-

payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and ensure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

**Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

**[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)**

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international. \* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

**BAGGAGE:** The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. We recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items: <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring/all-list>.

**CLOTHING:** As this trip combines birding with some historical/cultural experiences, you will want to pack a mix of clothing that prepares you for several types of activities. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple pairs of pants are recommended. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular and more reasonably priced than in the past.
- **Shirts:** Several t-shirts, (long and short-sleeved), in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather.
- **Swimwear:** At least two of the hotels on our tour route have swimming pools.
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential.
- **Outerwear:** Generally, mild weather is expected on this trip, but a sweater, fleece or light coat will come in handy on some mornings and evenings. A warm jacket, preferably one that water repellent, is recommended in case we experience rain or cool temperatures.

**FOOTWEAR:** We recommend a good trail-walking shoe or light hiking boot when in the field. Athletic shoes are not recommended for our birding locations. A lighter shoe, like an athletic shoe, will come in handy when relaxing around the hotels.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry service will be available for an extra charge at some of the hotels where we stay; however, the service should be requested only at those places where we will spend more than one night.

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** May is one of the better months to travel in Bulgaria. Our time will be spent at a variety of inland and coastal locations ranging from sea level to a little over 1,000 feet. Mild weather is expected, but daytime temperatures could reach into the middle 80s (°F). Along the Black Sea coast, sea-breezes have a cooling effect and keep the temperatures about 5–10 degrees cooler than in the interior regions. Night and morning temperatures may drop to the mid-50s. Overall, participants should be prepared for cool mornings, warm days, and cool evenings. Precipitation in the form of rain, related to a very late cold front, is certainly possible but not expected. Finally, we emphasize that the above description of expected conditions refers to historical norms. The effects of climate change are being felt noticeably across Europe, the consequences of which are that abnormal weather events are now documented with regularity almost everywhere. Participants should come prepared for a variety of unexpected conditions including cold rain and excessive heat.

**CONDITIONS:** Your trip to Bulgaria combines birding activities with exposure to some of the country's historical and cultural attractions, including its cuisine. Most days will be dedicated to birding and natural history pursuits amid Bulgaria's highly varied landscapes; however, the program's historical/cultural component includes world-class museums in Sofia and Varna, along with brief visits to stunning archaeological sites at Perperikon and Pomorie. For our historical and cultural activities, we will be joined by licensed local guides who will provide expert interpretation. Overall, the balance of birding to historical and cultural pursuits will be about 80%–20%. At times, the emphasis could be on either birding or archaeology while at other times the circumstances of

the moment will incorporate elements of both. We make the point that our culturally-oriented activities will not result in a loss of birding opportunities.

Physical demands will be easy to moderately strenuous (Perperikon is situated on a hilltop accessed by a trail with steps, making it moderately strenuous, but it is set in natural habitat with a visitor center beside the carpark, so while it is wonderful to reach the hilltop site, it is not essential). Please bear in mind that our guided tours will involve a moderate amount of walking and standing. We emphasize that no one will be subjected to physical demands that exceed their capabilities. All walking will be done at a slow pace.

Most days will begin at a “reasonable” hour, with breakfast available at 7 or 7:30 a.m. Those who would like to join Mark on some mornings for an early pre-breakfast wander to enjoy morning birdsong, are most welcome. On most days, we will be in the field by 8:00–8:30 a.m., and on many days we will stop for picnics or at local restaurants for a mid-day break. Our return time to our accommodations at the end of each day will depend on our scheduled activities, varying from 4:30–6:00 p.m. We will always aim to allow for an hour in the hotel each night before dinner.

**EQUIPMENT:** One of the most important aspects of an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with the proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Bulgaria:

- **Backpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, optical equipment, etc.
- **Notebooks and pens or tablet**
- **Travel alarm clock** – Battery-operated is best (if not using this feature on your mobile phone).
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – Highly recommended for those who have trouble walking.
- **Umbrella** – A small collapsible umbrella can be indispensable should we be caught on the trail in the rain.
- **Refillable wide-mouth water bottle**
- **Tissue packs**
- **Small flashlight or headlamp (important, given the lack of reading lamps in some hotels and lodges)**
- **Small folding stool** – Many people find this extremely useful when patiently waiting for shy forest birds.

### **BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES**

**Binoculars** – We strongly recommend good 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 binoculars. We recommend that you NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people carry “minis” because they are small and lightweight, but they have an extremely narrow field of view and very poor light-gathering power, making it difficult to locate birds. Trying to find a bird through mini binoculars is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 8x32 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

**Spotting Scopes** – Your tour leaders will have a telescope and tripod available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

## **TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

**PASSPORTS** - A valid passport is required for entry into Bulgaria. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid for three months beyond your trip return date, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States, this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk's office. You may also visit <https://state.gov/travelers/> for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport and keep the photocopies in a safe place, so that if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

**VISAS** - Citizens of the United States and Canada are not required to obtain a visa for entry into Bulgaria. Rules and regulations pertaining to citizens of other countries vary; please check with your local Bulgarian consulate or embassy.

**CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS:** Your trip fee includes all necessary expenses; however, you may want to bring some cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as gifts, laundry, gratuities, alcoholic beverages, meals on your own, and personal items. It is best to carry small denominations, as hotels and lodges may be unable to provide change for large bills. If you plan to extend your time in Bulgaria beyond our program, do consider obtaining local currency. It is best to acquire local currency before leaving home, or at the airport on arrival in Sofia.

The official currency of Bulgaria is the Bulgarian Lev (BGN). You can check the latest conversion rate at <http://www.xe.com/>.

Major credit cards are accepted at many places. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information about banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

**ELECTRICITY:** Bulgaria operates on a 230V supply voltage and 50Hz. Electrical outlets conform to Types C & F (Europlug and Schuko plug, respectively), both with a two-round-pin configuration. A plug adapter will be necessary. Please be sure your devices and appliances can handle the much higher voltage (120V in the United States). If you have doubts or otherwise are unsure, you should bring a voltage converter to protect your electronic equipment.

**INTERNET ACCESS:** Internet access is widely available at our accommodations; however speed may be variable.

**LANGUAGE:** Bulgarian is the language of Bulgaria. English is also spoken quite widely and can be expected at most of the touristic places, namely hotels.



**TIME:** Bulgaria is on Eastern European Standard Time (EEST) and is seven hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT).

**HEALTH:** VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal prescription or over-the-counter medication, be sure to bring an ample supply that will last through the entire tour. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19.

**Biting insects** – Biting insects, mosquitos in particular, are not an anticipated problem. However, your tour leaders will carry repellent just in case.

**Sun Exposure** – The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even on cloudy days. Anytime you are outdoors, you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. Severe sunburn can be very painful and will affect your enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors, and be sure to bring an ample supply of high-SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultraviolet-blocking, polarized sunglasses.

**Food and Water** – Although tap water is considered safe to drink everywhere in Bulgaria, the mineral content varies and it is not always tasty. This is due to dissolved iron and chlorine in the water in some places. Bottled water will be available at all times. All food is safe for consumption.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

## **FIELD GUIDES:**

### **Birds:**

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. ***Birds of Europe. 3rd Edition.*** Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2023 (third edition).

**This is the most important and comprehensive natural history book for this trip.** It is the best all-around field guide to the birds of Europe and is also available as a smartphone App.

### **Mammals:**

MacDonald, David and Priscilla Barrett. ***Mammals of Europe.*** Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2002.

### **Reptiles and Amphibians:**

Speybroek, Jeroen, Wouter Beukema, Bobby Bok, Jan Van Der Voor, and IlianVelikov. ***Field Guide to The Amphibians & Reptiles of Britain & Europe.*** Bloomsbury Wildlife Guides. Bloomsbury Publishing New York, NY, 2016. An outstanding newer guide.

### **Butterflies:**

Tolman, Tom and Richard Lewington. ***Butterflies of Europe.*** Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2002.

### **History and Culture:**

Kapka, Kassabova. ***Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe.*** Granta Publishing, 2017.

A highly regarded book that is parts travelogue, personal memoir, and historical overview.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

**RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on March 12, 2024, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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