

Birds and bears in the Balkans

Slovenia is a beautiful country with lakes, forests and meadows. At this time of the year summer visitors are arriving in numbers throughout the region, making the country a migration hot-spot within the Balkans. This is a good time of the year in which to observe woodpeckers and owls plus an opportunity to watch Brown Bears from the safety of purpose built hides.

Day 1: We fly to Ljubljana, arriving late afternoon, and on arrival transfer to our hotel in the Markovec area. In the Dinaric forests around the hotel our target species will be Ural Owl, Three-toed, White-backed, Grey-headed and Black Woodpeckers, Crested Tit, Firecrest and Willow Tit.

Day 2: Today we visit Lake Cerknica, a seasonal lake surrounded by wet meadows and reedbeds. When full, for about half the year, it is the biggest lake in the country. It starts to disappear in spring and leaves behind a field where farmers cut hay through the summer. The birdlife is dependent on the water level, but we hope to locate Great Crested and Red-necked Grebes, Squacco Heron, White and Black Storks, Wood and Common Sandpipers, Eurasian Curlew, Ferruginous Duck, Black Tern, Great Reed, European Reed, Savi's and Banded Warblers.

After lunch we explore the magnificent Mount Nanos, a huge island-rock which stands above the surrounding plain. The mountain has a very interesting flora and fauna, and holds many rare butterflies. A habitat of dry stony grasslands are attractive to Eurasian Hoopoe, Woodlark, Cirl Bunting, Short-toed Eagle, Eurasian Wryneck and Common Stonechat. The area also has sections of scenic limestone cliffs home to Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting, Alpine Swift, Crag Martin and possibly Eurasian Eagle Owl.

Lots of interesting reptiles live here, including the enigmatic Nose-horned Viper, and it is the home of Golden Eagles and Chamois. On the high plateau of the hill we look for Alpine Accentor and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush. The shy and elusive Rock

Dates

Friday April 13th - Wednesday
April 18th 2018

Leader: Domen Stanic

Group size: 8

Birds: 130-160

Partridge is also a possibility at this time of the year.

Day 3: We spend most of today in Krajinski a large area of forest with a mix of mature trees and shrubs. We have the possibility of recording a wide range of woodpeckers including Black, Green, Grey-headed, Great and Middle Spotted, and if there have been any recent fires the uncommon and localised Three-toed Woodpecker. In patches of older trees we may find Crested Tit. Krajinski is also famous for its owl populations and we can expect to observe Ural, European Scops, Pygmy and the more elusive Tengmalm's Owl which sometimes utilises nest boxes. Later in the afternoon there is a return visit to Lake Cerknica.

Day 4: Our main interest today is Skocjanskizatok nature reserve, near the coastal town of Koper. This amazing wetland hosts numerous breeding waterbirds including Black-winged Stilt, Purple Heron, Little Bittern, Kentish Plover and Little Tern. Other common non-breeders include Pygmy Cormorant, Little and Great Egrets. In the extensive reedbeds we look for Cetti's and Great Reed Warblers, Zitting Cisticola and possibly the scarce Moustached Warbler. In the afternoon we



Black Stork Photo: Roger Ridley

visit Secovljescalinas (saltpans), not far from Skocjanskizatok, home to a wide variety of waterbirds. Divaca is close by with a habitat of a grassland plateau. This habitat is a major attraction for birds of prey and we have good chances of observing Short-toed and Golden Eagles, Red-footed Falcon, Hen and Montagu's Harriers, European Honey Buzzard and Common Buzzard. It is also possible that we may encounter Eurasian Griffon Vulture, Alpine Swift and Melodious Warbler. Before returning to our base in Markovec we visit the coast for the endemic Mediterranean subspecies of European Shag, Mediterranean and Yellow-legged Gulls and Sandwich Tern.

Day 5: Today we revisit one of our favourite areas or target species which we may have missed earlier in the tour. In the late afternoon we give you the chance to take an optional Brown Bear excursion. There is no guarantee that the bears will show although the population in this area of Slovenia is increasing in numbers. For

those wishing not to take this option we continue birding until dusk.

Day 6: Return to Ljubljana for flights back to the UK where the tour concludes.

Prices

Ground Price: £1,145
 Single room: £100
 Deposit: £100
 *Air Fare: £220

This holiday is fully inclusive of boat trips, accommodation and meals, transport, guidance and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature and any relevant fuel surcharges, baggage and credit card charges and any flight meals to and from Ljubljana.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*