It seemed to have been a long time in the planning but on Friday, 22nd September, sixteen of us boarded the plane for Burgas to begin our week's trip to the Black Sea Coast. After a late arrival and night in our first hotel, the next morning started at 7am with an early walk down to the harbour, before boarding our spacious coach and heading north to Russalka where we were to spend the next three nights.

En route, after a spot of wine tasting, a shopping stop for picnic lunches (and wine) we arrived at our beautifully situated resort where we each had spacious rooms, a wonderful view over the Black Sea, and even an outdoor hot tub refreshed by a thermal spring! We ended our first day in Bulgaria with a total of 86 species including Pygmy Cormorant, Great White Pelican, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Marsh and Montague's Harrier, Crested Lark, Red-footed Falcon and huge numbers of migrating White Wagtails and Red Backed Shrikes.

Pelicans R.Poyer

On Sunday we headed to Cape Kaliakra as our guide Mitko anticipated a good showing of migrating birds due to favourable winds. This was an unforgettable day with hundreds of raptors overhead heading south on the Via Pontica on their way to the Bosphorus and Africa! Marsh, Pallid and Montague's Harrier were joined by Booted Eagle, Osprey, Lesser Kestrel, Hobby and Red-footed Falcon in a continuous stream of birds! We added another 18 species to our list!Next day started with our now familiar pre-breakfast dawn walk followed by a drive up to the causses looking for Stone Curlew-unsuccessful!

A visit to Lakes Durankulak, Shabla (Centre for Red-breasted Goose Conservation) and Yailata plus a little loafing on dunes bordering Romania enabled us to increase our list, adding amongst others, Ferruginous Duck, Grey Partridge and (a rarity!) Ring Ouzel which delighted our guide!

First Stop : Richard Poyer

Poda Reserve : Liz Harrison

On Tuesday we reluctantly left Russalka and, with storm clouds gathering, headed back towards Pomerie with its Thursday, another unsettled day weather-wise, found us at the Poda reserve, opened in 1989 and covering 100 hectares. Situated on the eastern migration route, 287 species have been recorded there due to its varied habitats of fresh, brackish and sea-water habitats. The reserve is run by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds so we were made very welcome! The world's only colony of Great Cormorants which nest on disused power pylons use this reserve! Our final evening saw Kath declared the lucky winner of the sweep to 'Guess the final total' with a figure of 157 (N.B. final total later confirmed by Mick as 162 species).

Great Cormorants nesting on Pylon: Richard Poyer

All too soon Friday came round again with its lunchtime check-in for the flight home; we spent most of the morning in an oak forest, with picnic lunch taken at a reserve near to the airport. Take 16 people with similar interests, some unforgettable bird sightings, mix with a lot of laughter and a fair amount of Bulgarian wine and that was the recipe for a great week!

Liz Harrison

3rd October 2017

Little Ringed Plover: Richard Poyer