

Gourmet Birds Programme 2018

FOR various reasons production of next year's modest programme of Gourmet Birds tours has been delayed, but here at long last are our plans for the coming year.

As I am sure you will appreciate, the sharp fall in the value of the pound against the euro has made travelling in Europe considerably more expensive, which explains why these holidays are around 20% more costly than they would have been two years ago. However, we still retain the original Gourmet Birds philosophy of ensuring the holidays are all-inclusive, with wine included at dinner (and lunch if you want it), and putting emphasis on great picnics with local produce (not boring packed hotel lunches) and interesting evening meals.

Cyprus

22 to 29 March



We have visited Cyprus many times before, but this will be our first visit for some years. Spring comes early to this, the most easterly of the Mediterranean islands, while with a little luck we should enjoy warm sunny days. Migration will be well under way, while the local swallows will already have started nesting and great spotted cuckoos will be back on their breeding territories. March is a good month to see such early migrants as blue-cheeked bee-eaters and bluethroats,

spotted crakes and sand plovers, but anything can turn up. We expect to see between 120 and 140 species, including the two Cypriot endemics, the Cyprus warbler and the Cyprus wheatear.

Since our last visit considerable conservation work has taken place at several of the major wetlands, including Phassouri Reedbeds and Oroklini Marsh, so it will be



fascinating to visit these areas again.

In the past we have stayed in Episkopi, but this year we are planning to use a small hotel in the village of Pissouri which has a reputation for good food and comfortable accommodation. The cost is £1275 – there may have to be a single room supplement, but it will be kept to the absolute minimum. Flights with easyJet from London Gatwick, departing at 0710 on the 22nd. Current prices are £39.49 outward, £45.49 return.

Estonia

14 to 21 May

The last official GB visit to this small Baltic state was in 2010, but last spring I went back with three friends and was reminded of just how good the birdwatching is here. Estonia is a quiet, interesting country with a small population, and has changed radically since my first visits in the early years of this century. In Haapsalu, for



example, where we stay for the first four nights, there are now excellent small



example, where we stay for the first four nights, there are now excellent small restaurants offering interesting and beautifully presented food. As our hotel doesn't do evening meals, we will eat out each night – the restaurants are just a short distance from our hotel, which has fine views over the bay.

There is great birdwatching within walking distance of our hotel, while one of the



features of our stay will be the noisy parties of barnacle geese migrating north, often flying right over the hotel. Our visit is timed to coincide with the peak of the wildfowl migration, but we will also see a wide range of waders, while thrush nightingales will be already back from their wintering grounds in Africa. In the forests we will look for black and hazel grouse, Ural owls and woodpeckers: we should see well over 150 species of birds in total.



To keep travel to a minimum, we will be staying in just two hotels, with four nights in Haapsalu and three nights on the coast south of Parnu, where you can watch flocks of goldeneye and long-tailed ducks migrating north from your bedroom window.

Price £1175: no SRS. Flights with Ryanair from Stansted, departing at 0645 on the 14th. Currently £46.99 each way.

Galicia – Green Spain

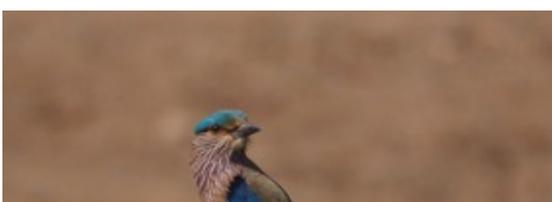
11 to 18 June



Over the last 30 years Gourmet Birds has visited every province of Spain except Galicia, so this will be a GB first. As this is new territory for us, we will be using an experienced local guide who knows where to find the birds. Galicia has a wide variety of habitats, from the rocky coast and Atlantic estuaries to the mountains and plains. We can expect to see an equally wide variety of birds, while we will also be looking out for butterflies, too. One special bird we will be looking out for is the melanic Montagu's

harrier, a black morph of this attractive species. Curiously, half of the Galician population is melanic. I am currently waiting for our local guide to let me have a detailed itinerary for this trip, but I should receive it shortly, so if you are interested let me know and I will send it to you.

The price of this holiday will be around £1350: hopefully it won't be necessary to charge a SRS. Flights with easyJet from London Gatwick to Santiago de la Compostela, leaving at 0545 on the 11th. Currently £30 out, £27 return.



Looking to the future, I'm likely to make my now annual autumn trip to Kerkini in November. Always good for birds, we usually see a terrific variety of species, including three species of eagles



birds, we usually see a terrific variety of species, including three species of eagles plus lesser whitefronted geese, one of Europe's rarest birds.

In January 2019 I'm planning an exciting trip to **India** looking for southern Indian endemics. This will be a 14-day holiday with a first-class local bird guide, and the price (not including the airfare) shouldn't be much over

£2,000.

For more details of any of these trips, either email me at dhtomlinson@btinternet.com or call 01359 269657.

David Tomlinson

November 2017

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