

Romania Carpathian Mountains 3rd - 17th August 2013

Trip Report

By Bob Shiret



Introduction

This was our first trip to Romania, my wife is a non-birder so it was intended the holiday would be geared to walking/wildlife and culture. Our base was the mountain ski resort of Poiana Brasov which in summer can be used as a hiking centre; it is 1000m above sea level and had one gondola working which went up to 1900m (£6 up/down). The weather during our trip was unseasonably hot in the first week 28-35°C; the second week it calmed down to a more normal 22-28°C. The trip was booked through Balkan Holidays and our hotel was the Sport which was good, with buffet meals and clean, modern rooms. Cheapest wine with the meals was around £15 for a nice white. Half board cost for the holiday was £1650 for the two of us including private transfers and scheduled flights from Heathrow.



Romania - The Place and People

Forget your perceived ideas about Romania; it is a truly beautiful country with about a third covered in forest. Full of unspoilt countryside, charming villages and a rural way of life, it is how Britain would have been 50 years ago. On our trip we visited five castles/citadels as well as some of the finest medieval cities in Europe including Brasov and Sighisoara. Romanian people we found pleasant and friendly, interestingly most younger people under around 35 spoke fluent English as it is taught in all schools. It was noticeable that they were very family oriented with many families with teenagers in tow, out together as a unit. Forget the vision of Romanians in Park Lane, these are Gypsies who are a minority and are viewed by ordinary Romanians the same as we do in the UK.



View from inside Rasnov Castle

Getting Around/Information

For a birdwatching and walking it is absolutely essential to obtain the relevant walking maps as soon as possible. The Tourist Information office in Poiana Brasov is not open in summer and the one in Brasov town square was only open for 3 hours per day and was of limited use. All is not lost however as there is a good bookshop selling maps on Strada Muresenilor which is the main road in Brasov leading to the main square, also in the square was a market stall selling walking maps. Maps we purchased were: - 1) "Dimap - Piatra Craiului Buccegi, Postavarul, Piatra Mave, Cincas" titled the maps of Brasov and Sinaia. 2) Postavaru - Poiana Brasov Tourist Map 1:25000. Car hire is apparently possible in Romania, but is not something that we would undertake due to the large number of farm and other animals wandering onto the roads day and night. Without going into too much detail we were involved in a serious accident involving two horses roaming a dual carriageway on our transfer to the hotel. Buses were cheap where available, for example a trip from Poiana Brasov to Brasov (11km) cost £1 each way. One way that worked for us was to hire a taxi at an agreed fare to take us further afield, e.g. we went to the Busteni cable car which was one hour drive and 6 hours later return for £30. Prior to our trip I could find no trip reports of Poiana Brasov so purchased "A Bird Watching and Wildlife Guide" by James Roberts and for general information the "Insight Guide" Romania Guide. James's book was useful and his hand drawn maps were best utilized with the road maps in the "Insight" book.

Poiana Brasov

Our trip coincided with the main holiday period in Romania so the village was full of Romanian day trippers, which was not a problem as 200m into the surrounding forest you were alone. Common birds seen in the village were **White Wagtail**, **Black Redstart** and **Raven**. Seen on one day only possibly on migration were three **Red-backed Shrike**, two **Spotted Flycatcher** and a **Whinchat**.



Black Redstart



Red-backed Shrike



Whinchat

The forest surrounding Poiana Brasov however is where the real gems were found. I will describe in detail directions to one particular area which was really productive in terms of birds and other wildlife. Walking down the hill in the town past the hotel with a lakefront, at the car park on the right-hand side, where market stalls reside, turn right and continue for a few hundred metres. On reaching a way-marked track on the right, take this turning and continue along and down a steep slope to where a ski station resides. About 100m ahead on the left is where the forest starts; from this point, for about 50m is where I made contact with woodpeckers on every visit and on one occasion with ten different woodpeckers of four different species:- **Black**, **White-backed**, **Three-toed** and **Great Spotted**. Also here were **Willow** and **Marsh Tits**, **Nuthatch**, **Steppe Buzzard**, **Sparrowhawk**, **Jay**, **Raven**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Firecrest**, **Crossbill** and **Treecreeper**. A distant **Eagle Owl** was heard on one occasion. The area just before the forest was also best for butterflies with many different species found. **Bears** were encountered here and footprints of **Lynx** were found in the mud.





Black Woodpecker



White-backed Woodpecker



Three-toed Woodpecker



Steppe Buzzard



Treecreeper



Crossbill



Marsh Tit

Bruccegi Massif

The plateau area at over 2000m high is accessed from the gondola in Busteni, about one hour drive from Poina Brasov. As we were in the middle of Romanian summer holidays, when we arrived at nine thirty there was a 30 minute queue. Unfortunately, it was fairly cloudy along the massif area, which masked the areas where *Wallcreeper* occur. Birds that were seen here included **Water Pipit**, **Black Redstart**, **Raven** and **Alpine Chough**; hoped for birds that do occur but not seen were *Alpine Accentor* and *Golden Eagle*.



Water Pipit

From The Car

Various birds were seen on our car journeys including **White Stork** in fields around Rasnov, probable **Lesser Spotted Eagle** were in the semi-forested areas on the way to Sighisoara. On our return transfer to Bucharest airport **White Stork**, a pair of **Steppe Buzzard** and single migrating **Red-footed Falcon** and **Black Stork** were seen.

Mammals

Around 50% of Europe's **Brown Bears** 35% of **Wolves** and **Lynx** live in Romanian forests. Around Poina Brasov **Lynx** footprints were seen in mud and evidence of recent **Bear** activity was seen almost daily, informed locals said **Wolves** live here as well. I have heard **Bears** in forests before so am not generally worried about them, they very rarely attack humans. One late dark and cloudy afternoon however whilst alone in the forest I heard a large growl from about 100m away that I thought might be a very large dog, so got my small "dog dazer" ready; as I did so it dawned that this was no dog! A few seconds later there was an ear splitting r----oar from a very angry **Bear** which was the loudest noise I have ever heard from an animal, it bellowed and echoed around the whole valley. At this point I made a slow dignified exit! I suspect the **Bear** had either come across another of its kind or another large mammal such as a **Lynx** or **Wolf** and was showing its displeasure. **Red Squirrels** were seen on two occasions and **Wild Boar** "diggings" were common.



Lynx Footprint



Wasp nest ravaged by Bear

Butterflies

A good variety of butterflies were seen in most locations:- Large White, Mountain Small White, Marbled White (*f. procida*), Swallowtail, Common Glider, Small Heath, Common Blue, Red Admiral, White Admiral, Comma, Wall Brown, Dusky Meadow Brown, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Painted Lady, Large Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Large Ringlet, Dewy Ringlet, Sudeten Ringlet Mountain Ringlet, Ringlet, Arran Brown, Clouded Yellow, Silver Washed Fritillary, High Brown Fritillary, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Purple Emperor.



Mountain Small White



Marbled White (f.procida)



Swallowtail



Common Glider



White Admiral



Dusky Meadow Brown



Large Ringlet



Probable Dewy Ringlet



Sudeten Ringlet



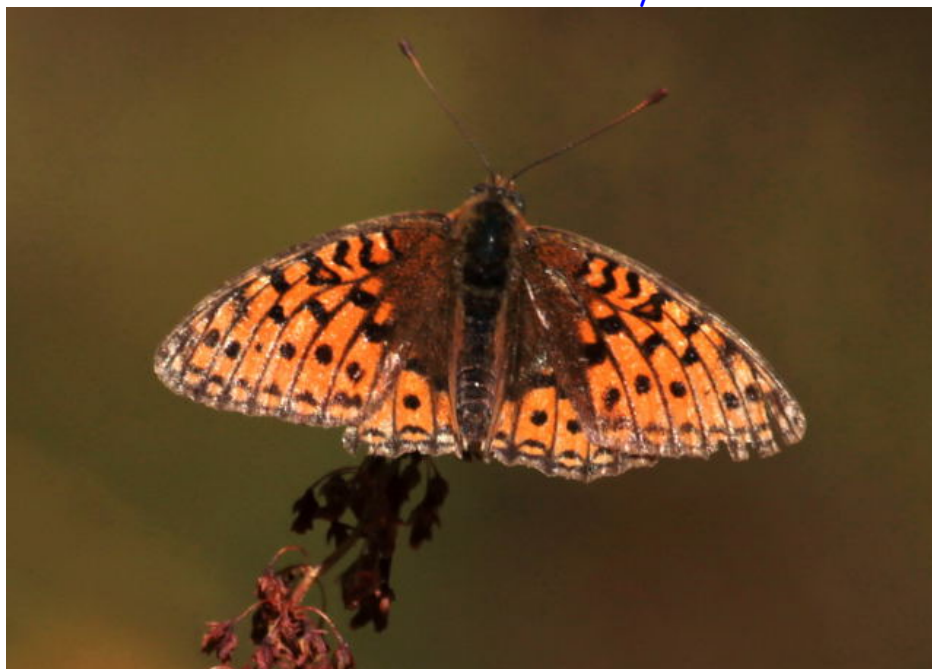
Mountain Ringlet



Arran Brown



Silver Washed Fritillary



High Brown Fritillary



Queen of Spain Fritillary



Purple Emperor

Conclusion

For a walking/Wildlife/Culture holiday the Carpathian Mountains must rank amongst the best places in Europe. Our holiday was a success in all three areas and we will return soon, probably in May/June when it will be cooler and more birds (than the 40 species we saw) will be around.