

Croatia, Montenegro & Bosnia
4 – 10 May 2008

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References:

- A. *Surfbirds: Croatia 8-15 July 03* by Jon Hornbuckle.
- B. *The Collins Guide to birds of Britain & Europe, with N Africa and the Middle East* by Hermann Heinzel, Richard Fitter & John Parslow.

INTRODUCTION

A last minute.com holiday to Croatia with my wife resulted in some enjoyable if not brief birding. Trips to Montenegro and Bosnia were interesting with a few good birds seen; however there was only one possible target bird, which was Rock Partridge. I had read the article at Ref A, however this had resulted in an unsuccessful outcome, so I departed UK and wasn't very hopeful.

Car hire was £32 a day, it would have been cheaper if I had booked it for longer and petrol was about 80p a litre. Beer was about £1.80 and lunchtime snacks were about £6. The aim of the trip was a family quick break to the sun prior to me departing with Birdseekers in June to Russia alone.

DAY 1 – 4 May

We arrived in Croatia near Dubrovnik mid morning to brilliant sunshine and a refreshing sea breeze. Quickly heading off to the hotel in Mlini about 11Km east of Dubrovnik and 8Km from the airport at Chilipi; it was ideally situated and just below the hills described by Jon Hornbuckle; where the Partridges could be. En route Alpine Swifts, Swallows and House Martins hawked above us. After booking into our room, an hour or so on the balcony delivered a migrating Honey Buzzard, several Yellow-legged Gulls and several species of common bird.

DAY 2 – 5 May

An early morning bus journey to Dubrovnik produced a Golden Eagle moving along the escarpment, whilst Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler and a Wood

Warbler moved about the vegetation. Later in Dubrovnik Pallid Swifts were present in good numbers along with 2 Alpines and a male Red-backed Shrike, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler were present in the eastern moat. On returning to the hotel a Little Egret flew by and a Common Sandpiper was on the beach. From the hotel balcony a male Golden Oriole was seen flying to roost.

DAY 3 – 6 May

A sea taxi to Cavtat took about 20 minutes and 4 Oystercatchers were seen roosting on some exposed rocks in the bay. A walk around Cavtat produced a Spanish Sparrow, Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchat, Sand Martin and a Peregrine Falcon above the hills. A relaxing lunch and a few beers at the harbour restaurants brought the day to a close.

Day 4 – 7 May

A trip to Montenegro, Kotor and Budva started with a brief stop in the village of Chilipi where several Nightingales and Golden Orioles were heard whilst a migrating group of 7 Honey Buzzards made steady progress North. The only Cuckoo of the trip was also seen here although several others were heard during the week. Near Kotor 2 Subalpine Warblers were noted singing and later in Kotor a Grey Wagtail was seen feeding young. Along the coast at Budva a Hooded Crow was seen scavenging food near a local restaurant.

DAY 5 – 8 May

This was the first day that I had hired a car for and headed to the mountain plateaux above Cavtat in search of migrants, summer visitors and Rock Partridges. Whilst driving around the numerous tracks in the area at least 11 Black-eared Wheatears were seen (Eastern form) along with Spotted Flycatchers, 2 Short-toed Eagles, 3 Honey Buzzards, a Western Rock Nuthatch, 2 Black-headed Buntings, several Cirl Buntings, numerous Whinchats, Red-backed Shrikes, 2 Woodchat Shrikes, many Nightingales and a single Hoopoe.

Later we drove the road to Velji Do ending at the restaurant at Konoba Konavoshi Konim and the information board described at Ref A.

Directions:

Follow the main Dubrovnik to the Airport road drive past Mlini towards Cavtat. After approximately 400m past the Kurem Supermarket on your left turn left signed Duba 14Km. Continue uphill and take a hairpin bend to the right, there is a large white house with balconies on your left, just after here turn left again up a hill signed Velji Do & Konoba Knavoshi Konim or Kona Vinica 4Km – the signs are on your right and may not be immediately obvious. Continue uphill to the summit; turn left at the top signed Velji Do. Continue along the road past a viewpoint until you see a track on the left with an obvious information board as described at Ref A. Walk along the track for about 200m named the

Ronald Brown Pathway. As it bends left and starts downhill, stop here and listen for partridges. Look half right and there is a line of small trees about 200m away in the valley running diagonally to you. There are many rocks below the trees, I saw a male Rock Partridge calling from a rock under a tree with a female stood below, along with another male calling from elsewhere in the valley which was not seen. There is a very good local restaurant in the village, which is good for a drink or lunch, (I recommend the grilled chicken and octopus salad).

Later that day a Whitethroat and another male Golden Oriole were seen from the balcony of the hotel.

DAY 6 – 9 May

An early morning walk along the previously discovered Ronald Brown Pathway and the surrounding habitats brought an interesting couple of hours. There had obviously been a massive fall of migrants, with at least 200 Whinchats being present with many more passing over. In amongst them a Wryneck, numerous Whitethroats and Lesser Whitethroats, Spotted Flycatchers and the commoner residents that had been seen the previous day. Interestingly another Rock Partridge was heard calling from the same location as the previous day.

As I drove towards the main road once more, I stopped at a wooded area about 100m short of the junction, as I had heard a call that was interesting. Here a Woodchat was noted and the only Sombre Tit of the trip as 3 migrating Honey Buzzards passed overhead.

Returning to the hotel to collect my wife we headed off west along the coast to the arboretum at Trsteno and later Ston. At Trsteno at least 12 Nightingales sang and 7 were seen well, whilst in the coastal scrub 3 Sardinian warblers sang and flitted about.

As we arrived at Ston and drove a little further on, I could hear the familiar racket of Great Reed Warblers and one was seen well atop a reed. A Serin was also noted along with a Cetti's Warbler and I flushed a male Little Bittern from a water channel. More Whinchats were seen in good numbers, a single Fan-tailed Warbler and on the estuary an Oystercatcher, Great Crested Grebe, 7 Grey Herons and 2 Great White Egret. A male Spanish Sparrow was also seen whilst departing. Shortly after reaching the main road and heading towards Dubrovnik, 2 Ravens flew over the road in front of me.

DAY 7 – 10 May

A day trip to Mostar added some interesting birds, at Neum a Honey Buzzard drifted overhead and a Subalpine Warbler sang and was seen in scrub. Whilst once again transiting the Mediterranean Delta in Croatia near Metrovica a Hooded Crow was noted. Of interest is an Ornithological museum in the town of Metrovica, easily located on the main street.

Once again in Bosnia during a short stop at Pocitelj (a village of Turkish origin), the only Red-rumped Swallow, 11 Jackdaws and a Magpie were seen.

Approaching Mostar from the South 6 European Bee-eaters were seen on wires along with 2 European Starlings and in Mostar, 3 Grey Wagtails were seen, from the famous (rebuilt) bridge.

During the return journey, south of Metrovica 3 Pygmy Cormorants sat in a dead tree next to the road and later a Red-backed Shrike was seen in Dubrovnik. A final few moments at the hotel, ended the trip with 2 more Golden Orioles, a Wood Warbler and a singing Nightingale.

An early morning return flight to Gatwick saw us back home in London for about 1230.

SUMMARY

A really enjoyable week, in picturesque and relaxing surroundings. An ideal destination to combine a family holiday in the sun, with sightseeing and birdwatching for a relatively small cost.