

THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

TRAVEL | EXPERIENCE | CONSERVE



ARMENIA

Demoiselle Cranes in Autumn

30 August – 11 September 2016

TOUR REPORT

Leader: John Muddeman

Despite sounding familiar to many, the Republic of Armenia, which gained independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991, is very much 'off the beaten track' for UK tourists in general. Sandwiched between Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Iran, this small country offers a rich cultural heritage, mountainous scenery and a continental climate of hot dry summers and cold winters, resulting in new landscapes around every corner. Hot dry semi-deserts border the fertile Araks Valley floor south of the capital Yerevan; dry Mediterranean scrub gives way to rich temperate woodland in the centre-north, and high altitude grassy montane steppe in drier upland areas, with abundant rocky crags and peaks. Naturally, this provides home to a wealth of habitats and species, including a rich assemblage of resident and migrant fauna, including birds, mammals, butterflies and dragonflies of particular note, plus an incredibly diverse flora. And with modern farming methods almost impossible to implement, huge areas are still under very traditional management regimes, further helping to maintain this biodiversity.

Most of the group came simply to experience this little known country, with the process of looking for one of its rarer birds simply an excuse! This tour aims to provide a fine introduction to the main birdwatching sights in the country as well as savouring some of the history and culture, and, as it turned out, exceptional cuisine as well.....without doubt, this was the best I've ever experienced on tour in over 20 years!

Wildlife highlights included wonderful brown bears, Bezoar goats, lammergeiers and other raptors, Dalmatian pelicans, white-tailed lapwings, other waders, blue-cheeked bee-eaters and kingfishers at Armash, incredible numbers of European bee-eaters everywhere, eastern and western rock nuthatches, various wheatears and tail-waving Menetries's warblers, plus a fascinating variety of butterflies, including a new species for Armenia: Anatolian Skipper (*Muschampia proteides*).

Tuesday 30 August

Arrive Armenia

Meeting at the departure gate in the pleasant Charles de Gaul airport in Paris for our Air France flights, we boarded a slightly delayed flight to Yerevan, which otherwise went without a hitch, even just starting to descend in time to give those with window seats an inkling of the hilly semi-desert conditions on the ground. Apart from the glaring white security lights lining a motorway close to the Turkish border, it wasn't until we were close to Yerevan (and the remarkable sprawl of İğdir on the Turkish side) though, that we noticed anything other than pinpricks of light from the tiny settlements and villages scattered widely across vast areas of East Turkey.

We walked straight out into the modern Zvartnots Airport and after clearing the friendly and swift passport check, soon retrieved all our bags and were out to meet our charming cultural guide, Lilit, in the arrivals hall. With the vehicle rapidly loaded up we were quickly on our way, and after cutting across the confusing road system of Yerevan (unrecognisable compared to my visit 21 years ago), checked swiftly into the hotel and came down almost immediately for a light but very tasty dinner, as it was gone 9:30 pm already. Although the time was three hours ahead of the UK, the five hour flight and almost day-long transfer meant we were happy to retire early and get ready for our cultural introductory day in the country.

Wednesday 31 August

Arch of Charenc, Garni Temple, Geghard Monastery, Yerevan

With temperatures forecast to reach around 35°C, we had an 8 am breakfast and were out within the hour. Despite it being the 'cultural day' of the tour, we all took binoculars along anyway, and with good reason, as it turned out!

The dry grassy hillsides, with occasional scrub, wooded patches and orchards around the villages, are still rich in birds, and while we were about to stop at a small monument erected to mark the famous viewpoint enjoyed by one of Armenia's most famous poets, a shout meant we were out looking at a couple of raptors just before this. A gorgeous long-legged buzzard was circling and sparring with a pale morph booted eagle, much to our delight, while numerous European bee-eaters adorned the wires behind and a super Eurasian hoopoe bounded along the road towards us, avoiding the traffic, before dancing off to one side. Walking the short distance to the Arch, we noted a couple of lesser whitethroats in the trees alongside a brief garden warbler, though the beautiful sounds of a duo of singers singing traditional folk songs naturally stole the show.

The electricity wires along one stretch were peppered with birds, including a few European rollers and lesser grey shrikes among abundant European bee-eaters, while some 30+ raptors along one stretch were a flock of migrant lesser kestrels. We left all these for our return though, knowing we had two important cultural sites to visit.

The Garni Temple is quite remarkable, not because of its beauty, despite being perched out on the edge of the Azat Gorge above basaltic columns cliffs, but because of its remarkable history. Although disputed, the prevailing view is that it dates from the period of Tiridates I and was built in 77 A.D., according to one interpretation of a Greek inscription on a large stone block mounted near the entrance. Destroyed by the huge earthquake of 1679, it was rebuilt from 1969-75. Sadly, the lead used to bind the blocks together and provide resistance to further earthquakes was also subsequently fundamental for making bullets and so chunks of the supporting blocks were simply hacked out to reach it, even though only a few were original. The hole in the temple roof was also explained, with mirrors originally in place to direct sunlight down onto a source of volatile oils in the centre of the floor, so supposedly creating a mystical experience for 'normal' visitors, and so elevating the status of the kings that used the site as a summer palace! The underfloor heating system of some nearby remains was also explained, illustrating just how ancient this technique is too.

It wasn't all culture here though, and quite a few butterflies were around the site, though in the heat were rarely settled, defying identification, but a pair of distant golden eagles circled up opposite, a migrant ortolan bunting sat in a tree for most, and a few of us heard the song of western rock nuthatch a couple of times. Several wall lizards scuttling around also avoided being photographed but were good to see.

We finally moved on to the extraordinary Geghard Monastery, further up the same valley. This is another truly remarkable historic site, a linked series of small inner churches having been hewn out from solid rock from the top down, while the abundance of crosses cut into or left in relief on the rock faces has to be seen to be appreciated. Indeed, the separate and individually unique 'rock crosses' adorning the site were also extraordinary in themselves.

With the intense sun seemingly getting less hazy, only a little time was spent outside, including near the river, though enabled us to enjoy some of the many Eurasian crag martins hunting along the slopes, a brief red-billed chough, another – and this time closer – passing golden eagle, plus a few butterflies including large cardinal fritillaries.

Time was pushing on though, and we wanted a quick check of the lesser kestrels on the way back! Only two were present on our return, plus single roller and lesser grey shrike, but they were still worth the quick stop.

A large and exquisite lunch was finally taken indoors in a lovely restaurant in Yerevan, though with time running on in consequence, our subsequent planned siesta was off as we decided to do the 'city tour' part first and try and return earlier. We headed to the 'Waterfall', a remarkable sloping multi-story construction to allow walking access between the upper and lower part of the city. Much to our great surprise, it was adorned with a stunning selection of art works, starting with casts of hares, horse statues made from horseshoes and the three (as always!) exceedingly overweight Botero figures amongst others in the lower park, through a stunning variety of art forms in the main gallery, both within and on the main terraces of the building itself. Wow!

We finished off with a quick visit to the Mother Armenia statue, though the military feel and heat quite quickly drove us back to our hotel with a couple of hours before meeting for dinner again. Once again, this was taken out at a classy restaurant in Yerevan, with more delicious and flavoursome food a delight.

Thursday 1 September

Arماش Fishponds

With temperatures expected to reach the mid 30s in the Araks Valley, we made an early start, leaving at 8 am. Hasmik, our wildlife guide was there well in time with the driver, and we were away smoothly. A bit of traffic in Yerevan was followed by a smooth run, even allowing us a little time to spot one or two birds on the drive across the flat and fertile Araks Valley plain, including a couple of western cattle egrets and white storks. The twin peaks of Mount Ararat towered high over the nearby Turkish border, and though still not completely clear, were much more visible than the day before.

We stopped briefly just before reaching the fishponds turnoff, picking up a bag of 'chish-mish' (tiny and delicious seedless grapes) and also some amazingly pungent tiny striped melons, which were a new crop for the region from one of the remarkable roadside fruit and veg stalls.

After a short wait at the entrance gate, where the first of numerous blue-cheeked bee-eaters for the morning adorned the wires, we were in and looking at a cloud of pygmy cormorants which rose up over one the nearby 'ponds' (AKA lakes), plus a slightly distant roller on some wires. Continuing, we parked between two of the lakes, and after a quick scan which revealed the presence of hundreds of white-winged terns in the area, took a walk to keep the pools on one side and open grazed salt-marsh on the other. A stiff breeze really helped to keep the temperature down to an acceptable level, though made it very difficult to

spot small birds, but the sometimes quite thick vegetation along the tops of the bank made going quite tough.

Our first main goal was quite soon reached though, when near a shallow pool which held feeding common redshank, black-winged stilt, wood sandpipers, little stints and a fine marsh sandpiper, a gorgeous white-tailed lapwing flew up and away, before dropping down in view again around 500 metres ahead. A couple of common teal were also noted on the pool by Helen.

Continuing on, we gained much closer views of the bird on the ground, though two or perhaps three more flushed from the same meadow as we went, these travelling much further and moving around again in flight later. With the heat rising, most of us took a quick scan over a lake with over 100 squacco herons amongst 500+ pygmy cormorants and a small flock of Eurasian penduline, then one or two of the party started to return, while the most intrepid carried on. Fortunately, the track gradually improved as we went, making the three kilometre and four 'ponds' walk progressively easier. A few migrant willow warblers perched out in the reeds and small bushes, a stunning adult lesser grey shrike hunted from wires and a juvenile red-backed shrike put in a brief show as did a typically dully coloured common whitethroat of the Middle Eastern *icterops* race.

Just five of us made it to the fourth pool, where white-headed ducks sometimes appear, and though we were out of luck in the late morning heat, a few ferruginous ducks were just reward. The long walk back was enlivened a few times by various birds, including a couple of flying little bitterns for Judith and John.

Once we'd all returned and water and sugar levels were restored, thanks in part to the grapes, we headed off towards an early lunch under the shade of the only tree in the whole area – a Russian olive complete with picnic table underneath. A quick stop beside a shallowly flooded grazing field turned into a lot longer stop, with green and wood sandpipers, a small group of common snipe and above all, a group of flighty western yellow wagtails keeping us busy. The wagtails though kept dropping quickly down out of view, making it tricky to get everyone on them, but the call of "Do you get pied wagtails here?" lead us to discover a super winter-plumaged citrine wagtail 'dancing' over the meadow before it turned and sadly headed off towards the border.

A different citrine wagtail in another area of grazed shallow pools was also associating with numerous black-headed wagtails, including a couple of nicely black-headed birds, but again refused to show well and despite a short walk round was only seen in flight a couple of the group.

We left quite early, given the heat and relative lack of birds at midday (this being due to all the accessible pools having high water levels), and wound our way down towards our hotel for the next three nights at Vayk. Workmen outside are never a good omen, but actually illustrated just how new it was, and with WiFi in the bar area, plus a large balcony giving a wide view over the town below and up the valley, was an excellent spot.

Meeting up again later, we stayed for some time just scanning over the bushes and trees on the slopes below, with several green Eurasian golden orioles giving great views in a fruit tree, flighty lesser whitethroats giving us quick glimpses and even the local 'feral pigeons' having largely pure rock dove phenotypes... A walk up the valley was thwarted when we discovered that there was no direct path through the village outskirts, but a remarkably plumaged wheatear just at the bottom had us scratching our heads. Indeed, apart from the tail, it looked as much like a winter-plumaged male common redstart from below as it did a wheatear, given an almost entirely orangey underside. We started the eastern black-eared versus pied wheatear conundrum, but it definitely showed features of both. A slightly scruffy first-winter bird in a ruined building as we returned round the corner only added fuel to the debate. Fortunately, the former was seen a couple more times again later around the hotel, suggesting it was a local bird, and we eventually went to bed pondering over its identity, knowing it ought to be eastern black-eared.

Things were far from over though. We sat out on the balcony with a drink to do the call-over, only to be interrupted a few times by various birds. A female sparrowhawk sped across a hillside before turning sharply round over a bluff, leaving us to think it was probably a Levant's, though much better seen were two different European honey-buzzards (a black morph female followed by a very pale whitish male) which circled up giving good views, though an adult Egyptian vulture cruising high over was too fast for the group, and another buzzard-like raptor way up the valley had to be ignored given the range.

We finally rounded off the day with the short drive back to Yehegnadzor for dinner. A long table covered in sumptuous starters was laid out, followed by a couple more equally delicious courses, and all washed down with homemade alcoholic drinks for those that wished: a dry white, then a dry red and then a sweeter cherry wine, 'rounded off' with an apricot vodka, followed by plum vodka and finished off with a cherry vodka for those with a robust constitution! It was simply superb and one of the best meals I have ever experienced!

Friday September

Jermook Road, Artavan Road, Vyke

Thankfully it was a later start again today, and we departed at 9 am. Indeed, it was cooler in general, with occasional spitting rain a couple of times, given patches of cloud forming over the higher mountains. An afternoon walk was a bit warmer, but compensated for by new raptors not seen in the morning.

A start along the old Jermook road in the bottom of a quite narrow valley looked very promising. The dry grassy slopes leading up to organ pipe basalt formations on the opposite side and rougher rocky crags on the near side boded well. A couple of local common buzzards of the *menetriesi* race wheeled up over a nearby crag, the youngsters noisily calling to their parents, this being a feature virtually throughout the day. A couple of smaller sparring raptors were actually a sparrowhawk dive-bombing a northern goshawk, though these were distant and quickly went out of sight. The first of numerous booted eagle for the day appeared, then a couple of sparring Levant's sparrowhawks went high over. Though too high for some, this was clearly a great start, further fuelled when a large female northern goshawk came down the valley, literally on the tail of a remarkably unhurried common woodpigeon, and a male then appeared behind, before spiralling up, a few moments later. Wow!

We continued walking gently up the road, searching hard for small birds, and despite two single blue rock thrushes, a very brief eastern black-eared wheatear and flitting grey warblers, it was actually the excellent butterflies which most caught our eye. Starting with abundant cardinal fritillaries on the roadside flowering thistles, it continued with various skippers, graylings, a stunning eastern Bath white and plenty of blues, and, apparently, a few anomalous blues (which are in fact brown!) amongst others. Not to mention an exquisite common swallowtail looking quite unlike any of those in western Europe.

Down in the river, white droppings on rocks raised the question of whether dippers were present, with "we're too low" being the answer. Wrong! After hearing one or two calling a little further up, one suddenly dropped onto a rock midstream and gave us lovely views, especially for Michael, it being his first ID. This particular spot also attracted a lovely local Eurasian jay of the eastern *atricapillus* race, the more contrasting general colour and black cap making it look very distinctive. The local long-tailed tits were also fairly dark on the head, but not as different from the UK birds as I had expected, especially perhaps given a few still pale-headed youngsters amongst a flock which bounded past.

Western rock nuthatches kept calling at us almost throughout the length of the walk, but whatever we tried, we just couldn't see one. By chance we even found a lovely example of their mud nests on the basalt on the opposite side while scanning for birds, but we had to save the bird for later.

More buzzards, a few booted eagles and flitting warblers plus frequent butterflies kept us busy, though the highlight was when Hasmik noted that there used to be an old bearded vulture nest on the cliffs close by, and an adult promptly leapt off the cliffs and sailed across the valley in front! Better still, its mate then

appeared on our side, giving us a great fly past before circling low over the crags and finally returning before disappearing round the corner. Wow again!

We finally pulled ourselves away and headed down to a nearby local bar for lunch, this being in a remarkable series of little cabins by the river, and a delightful setting. And during another delicious lunch, more long-tailed tits and a small group of garden warblers gave us good views.

Varying from the itinerary, we decided not to travel too far and take another small side-road. The road was a treat, winding its way up another quite narrow valley through juniper forest and rock outcrops. Butterflies were again very much in evidence and varied here, including several silver-spotted skippers, male Meleager's and Adonis blues, sooty copper and a range of flighty graylings, while a strange paler grey-blue blue, virtually lacking underwing markings was laying its eggs on the flowering heads of orpine on the cliffs. Was it just a holly blue?

A darter dragonfly with its wing veins infested with red mites prompted a bit of a stir, though small birds were basically absent, despite common blackbird and a mistle thrush being added to the list, and after a bit of a steep climb, we decided to take the bus up further to look for more open views. And what a decision! Climbing a series of hairpin bends, we levelled out overlooking the whole head of the valley, giving a huge vista across to distant grassy and wooded mountain tops. And with cloud bubbling up from various peaks and drifting over with sunny spells, there was terrific thermal activity. Masses of hirundineus fed overhead, including numerous house martins and barn swallows, plus extremely high alpine swifts, and not surprisingly, also raptors. Common buzzards and booted eagles formed the bulk, keeping us on our toes almost constantly, but standing and watching finally produced a terrific final variety, including two or three griffon vultures, the same number of short-toed eagles, including one perched on a nearby pylon, plus a couple of lesser spotted eagles. Despite the latter being very distant at first, one finally drifted towards us, joining a spiralling short-toed, only for a pale morph booted eagle to join them for a few moments!

We returned reasonably early to take a drink outside over call-over, despite a strong gusting wind, even adding passing Eurasian sparrowhawk and Eurasian hobby in the process.

Saturday 3 September

Gndasar Mountain, Noravank

After a 5.30 am coffee and tea meet, we were reading to leave at 6 am. Going up high in mountains to look for the elusive Caspian snowcock requires a bit of effort, and we had almost a two hour journey to get there, first by bus, then by 4-wheel drive. We left at first light, reaching our vehicle change point 30 minutes later by the impressive cliffs at Areni. Indeed, the first birds were on the move, strangely including a late common swift and a black-headed gull passing through the narrow gorge, though only seen by John who was first out of the bus.

We headed up to Yelpin along the main road, the back vehicle noting small numbers of lesser kestrels on virtually every large pylon en route, but we didn't stop in order to get up the mountain as soon as possible. Turning up through this still *very* rural village, we finally worked our way out of the far side and started along a series of at times very rough mountain tracks, perhaps for nearly 10 kilometres. We finally drove out through the surprising tall herb-rich grassy vegetation along a mountain spine to underneath some craggy peaks.

Having taken a packed breakfast now appeared to be a good idea, though we delayed breakfast even further as we immediately set about scanning the rocky outcrops and adjacent grassy patches in our search for the elusive snowcock. It soon became evident that this was no quick operation, and indeed we were even invited to move further ahead to look round a bluff on the mountainside, though I decided that it was unfeasible. It was just too steep, despite being a lovely temperature in dead still, dry conditions and so we held back, finally sitting down to scan, over and over, the innumerable crags and outcrops above us.

Somewhat surprisingly though, there was hardly a bird to be seen, despite a few calls from western rock nuthatch, red-billed chough and, some time later, a common raven, with a few very flighty water pipits and the wheezy calls of a couple of tree pipits also noted at one point.

Richard though came up trumps. In addition to a very distant long-legged buzzard sitting on a rock, he suddenly turned and said, "I have a couple of mammals". Looking through his scope revealed the seemingly impossible: a mother bear and two cubs moving swiftly down a little cleft in the mountainside! Remarkably, these had only just come into possible sight when he found them, and for nearly half an hour we enjoyed views of the two cubs, one more silvery than the other with a dark dorsal stripe, moving swiftly and finally down across the mountain slope below and opposite, with the mother holding back much longer to forage in a more open stony patch before she too moved swiftly after them!

And as luck would have it, high up in the upper cliffs, a couple of 'goats' suddenly appeared, standing pale against an area of dark red rock, these being young male Bezoar ibex or mountain goats. These have been recovering in number in Armenia after excessive hunting for years, but were still a real prize. I had been surveying birds in Armenia for five and a half months 21 years ago, but had not seen bears there, and the goats on just one occasion, showing just how remarkable the combination was.

A few more birds appeared too, to add spice to the morning, including a juvenile and an adult bearded vulture, which were seen on and off a few times afterwards too, plus a small group of griffon vultures circling with a cinereous vulture. The latter, despite drifting quickly off, appeared to reappear with another later (or were there three in total?!). Two lesser spotted eagles also cruised high over, seemingly on migration, with a very much closer Eurasian sparrowhawk moving past at eye level shortly before we left.

With a little cloud increasing, and time running on (it was only 1115 am though), we decided to call it quits and start the journey down. The first pick-up flushed a covey of grey partridge, which then flushed again in front as they continued, while a number of common quail were also flushed by the vehicles as we continued. Taking a diversion as we descended gave us a much more comfortable ride down, with a brief stop for a gorgeous rufous morph adult steppe buzzard perched in a tree being very welcome, plus a few European rollers as we went, though we didn't have time for the short-toed eagle or lesser kestrels on the pylons, before returning to a now hot Areni gorge.

Another fine lunch was calling, this time at the nearby Noravank church complex, not before seeing how the local breads, including the paper-thin *lavash*, was made, though unfortunately the abundant local wasps finally helped bring it to an end after the usual three or four delicious courses. Some of us had not been up the churches, so I walked up for a quick look, only to see a superb eastern rock nuthatch fly past at close range. Indeed, there were numerous eastern and western rock nuthatches calling here, and after a quick think we made the decision to stay and look better for them. The presence of water nearby meant it was quite rich in birds, and standing in the shade of the church with a breeze blowing was a very pleasant experience. A fine male eastern black-eared wheatear perched repeatedly in full view on a shaded church roof, several blue rock thrushes - including remarkably pale first-winters - appeared sporadically on the cliffs, a fine and surprise Isabelline wheatear perched out in front at leisure in full sun, without moving, while after numerous false starts and difficulties in locating spots on the vast area of cliffs, we finally all had excellent views of the impressive eastern rock nuthatches. A chukar called various times from the scrubby boulder-strewn slopes, though we were unable to locate it, while another adult bearded vulture drifted low across a rock face before finally spiralling high up and disappearing over the edge of the gorge.

Taking dinner at 7.30 pm, we met half an hour earlier for call-over. Very few birds were noted as the sun set, though several hundred hooded crows came in in large flocks from the surroundings, apparently going to roost down in some large trees on the far edge of town.

Sunday 4 September

Sulemi Pass, Martuni, Lichk, Gull Island, Sevan

After another very windy early part of the night, the day started fresh and clear, the breeze dropping quickly and the temperature rising. Having planned to leave at 8.30 am, we delayed a little as the baggage came down at different times, allowing us to first hear, and then see a calling female Syrian woodpecker in the trees below at last. A couple of eastern black-eared wheatears were also present in the bushes on the slope, along with the first great tits for most.

Working our way back along the same stretch of road we were now fairly familiar with, we stopped not far from Vayk as a dark raptor cruised across a rockface. One of two juvenile Egyptian vultures, which turned and landed adjacent to its sibling and one of the adults as well, giving excellent scope views.

We continued up the increasingly winding pass to the *caravanserai* just before the Sulemi Pass. The slopes and short open grass among rocky areas rich in herbs are a bit of a magnet to small birds, especially migrants, and despite it having been clear overnight, was busy with birds. Several white wagtails rubbed shoulders with northern wheatears and a small flock of Eurasian linnets, while plenty more of the latter flitting about the rocks sent us looking in all directions. But there was a lot more....one bulkier bird on a stem was a drab common rosefinch, though this disappeared before all could get good views. A fine ortolan bunting was one of two hiding in the vegetation, a small flock of rock sparrows sped over and were missed, but not so a dark whinchat which repeatedly popped up onto a rock and gave great views. Moving round, we finally got clear views of one of the several juvenile red-backed shrikes present, though a bulky bird feeding quietly on seeds on a rock just in front was a head-scratcher. The pink on the wing feather edges wasn't fully visible, and the pale head suggested Mongolian finch. It wasn't until we got better view as it hopped up a bit out of the grass and we could see its size, that we realised that it was a juvenile Asian crimson-winged finch, and a cracking bird! Another look over onto the rocks peppered with white droppings showed a cryptic greyish bird, and a lovely wryneck was added to the tally. Calling tree pipits called as they flitted overhead, with one or two finally coming down to give views on the ground.

But the raptors were also excellent. A few local common and several long-legged buzzards came over the brow of the hill regularly, including a relatively dark juvenile long-legged alongside its presumed parent. A couple booted eagles, a small flotilla of passing griffon vultures and even a high cruising bearded vulture were noted sporadically, plus a fine lesser spotted eagle. Terrific, but little did we realise that these were largely just coming over after resting for a while on the high and relatively flat grassy mountain steppe which extended out for kilometres just after topping the pass, with many more present as well. We stopped a couple of times to look at the raptors, including long-legged buzzards and lesser spotted eagles on the ground, plus added a small flock of Eurasian skylarks plus numerous European bee-eaters on the wires, single European roller and lesser grey shrike were noted in passing too, and a couple of water pipits finally showed themselves after passing over on a few occasions.

We finally dropped down to the surprisingly large town of Martuni, which took up far more land than normal for its population, given that every house was surrounded by its own small orchards and/or vegetable and fruit gardens, and huge rectangular tapered haystacks were piled outside one in four of the houses in preparation for feeding the cows and other livestock which will be brought down from the mountains in the autumn and winter.

Another delicious lunch was taken in a restaurant; we were more than aware by now that it would be four courses long, with the pear, lemon and estragon 'fruit' juices glaring in colour, and indeed in flavour! The lurid green estragon drink had a hint of absinth in its flavour, not surprisingly considering that it originally derived from wormwood, but was probably just as 'false' as the other two (but much better in taste!). A Eurasian hoopoe in the garden was excellent as we arrived, and while the red admiral had gone by the time we came out, a fine comma and hummingbird hawk-moth were present.

Time was running on, but given that we were at around 1,900 metres above sea level, though the sun was hot, the air was cooler, and we took a gentle walk along a small river from near Lichk village towards a couple of smaller lakes. This was fantastic, with an incredible number of red-backed shrikes present, including a few adults still feeding young, being one of the main features. But other birds came thick and fast, including a drab barred warbler, a stunning citrine wagtail, a fidgety mountain chiffchaff, preening Cetti's warbler, the first of two flying ruddy shelduck (or was it the same?), and the first numbers of duck, including our first mallard, gadwall, garganey, pintail and common pochard for the tour. A gunshot had put many of these into flight, plus plenty of waders, though the latter sadly sped off before we could see most, including a few black-tailed godwit. A few lesser spotted eagles were also present, giving fabulous close views on occasions, one spooking a terrific group of over 40 grey herons which wheeled up and over, providing an unusual sight, while a marsh harrier hassling one of the eagles was fun to watch. A young black-crowned night-heron crouched on the edge of the reeds of a nearby pool while a flock of around 35 gull-billed terns 'ke-wicked' as they circled high over.

We finally pulled away knowing that time was running away and we still had a stop to make. We discussed stopping at the famous 'Gull Island' reserve, finally plumping for a quick visit, which as it turned out was all it needed. That said, we saw hundreds of Armenian gulls en route, and a few while there, but a flock of ten ruddy turnstones on the beach as we stepped out were most unexpected, and two black-necked grebes on the water beyond more usual. With dropping temperatures and cloud pouring over the mountains opposite from Ngorno-Karabagh we set off again soon, a short stop being made on the flat steppe of the reserve to watch a few of the 150+ greater short-toed larks present in a single flock there, fortunately from the comfort of the bus.

We finally arrived with over an hour before our 8 pm dinner, enjoying free WiFi once again, and after dinner and call-over went through our plans for the following day... Fortunately there were no dissenters to hearing that it would be a 5.30 am departure, but it would have been good to have had an extra night here!

Monday 5 September

Artavaz area, Sevan Pass, Lermontov

We left in still starlit conditions, very different from the spitting rain and strong wind of the evening before. It was cool outside, requiring us to add an extra layer or two, though climbing the almost straight relatively steep track up through forest soon got us warm! We finally reached a slightly flatter area, where in addition to a common whitethroat on a rose just in front, we could see up and to a wide sweep of the mountain screes and grasslands above the treeline, albeit from quite some distance. As small numbers of mountain chiffchaffs called incessantly from the surrounding forest, we scanned and scanned, perhaps more in hope of not having to walk further than of actually connecting with our quarry! We did strike lucky though, when a tiny black blob was noticed amongst the grass, and another, rather more visible, in flight and flashing white on the underwings as it went, passing over it almost simultaneously. A male Caucasian grouse was sat quietly in the grass, occasionally moving a metre or so and disappearing sporadically from sight, though only rarely was the long tail visible. But, we all finally achieved views of it moving and without so much difficulty.

Indeed, the same spot also produced a significant number of other birds, including a flurry of activity next to a large fruiting rowan, where a small group of ring ouzels flew in to feed. A minimum of four common rosefinches were present next to it in a dead tree at one point; great tit and a couple of Eurasian jays and also tree pipits also perched for a while. After watching a very nervous mountain chiffchaff come down to bathe for a few seconds several times in front in the tiny stream in the track, we headed back down to the bus and our second picnic breakfast. And when a passing car stopped and the man invited us to have coffee in the nearby hotel complex, we took little persuading! A loudly calling European green woodpecker pitched into a tree where a flycatching common redstart was a stunning male of the *samamiscus* race, but this was only seen by the leaders before vanishing into the adjacent oak woodland. We finally managed to see just one juvenile bird before leaving, but not before enjoying the antics of a juvenile great spotted woodpecker on a nearby trunk and also good views of circling lesser spotted eagle. The woodpecker

moment was further enlivened when a purple hairstreak suddenly dropped onto Judith's hat and stayed for a long time, and just as I went to get her camera to photograph it, another dropped onto my outstretched finger, allowing prolonged views!

Having finished grouse watching so early, we headed a short way up the road to a steep-sided valley. A couple of whinchats were good, but the track had been blocked off and even though we were allowed entry on foot, this was only for a few hundred yards before having to turn around. More common buzzards, a flock of late passing common swifts, plus several puddling blues and red admiral butterflies kept us looking, though it wasn't very productive. Most unusual was a greater short-toed lark flock which flashed past just after we had boarded the bus again.

We returned along the old Sevan road to lunch in a remarkable hotel, the *huge* lunch including whitefish from Sevan lake. Our subsequent drive included a tiny detour to recover a hat left behind in the hotel, as we happened to be passing, and we used the moment to scope the Armenian gulls resting on the roofs.

We headed to the Sevan Pass on the old road, hoping for luck, with water and a tree pipit, flocks of European bee-eaters passing low beside us, then a northern goshawk followed by three separate Eurasian sparrowhawks, before thick cloud billowed up from below and called an end to play. We continued directly from here to the hotel, getting in early to relax near the pool, with nearly everyone seeing a stunning pair of Eurasian bullfinches and Richard even managing to spot a furtive green warbler before call-over.

A large hot buffet dinner was very welcome, especially given the distinctly cool conditions, and we came out shortly before a mountain storm hit, including nearby lightening strike and some heavy rain for some time.

Tuesday 6 September

Stepanavan, Yagdan River, Odzun, Debet River Gorge, Haghpata, Tsakhkashat Road

Early morning around the hotel was quite interesting, with a few common redstarts, coal tit, common chaffinches, an all too brief semicollared flycatcher, and great and Eurasian blue tits seen, though a couple of furtive green warblers were impossible to get for the group. After a slightly delayed breakfast a few of us also watched a very pale darter near the pool, this apparently being a female of the very poorly known *Sympetrum vulgatum decoloratum* and just before leaving Hasmik picked out a distant golden eagle in flight.

The early cloud lifted and broke and we enjoyed a hot and sunny remainder to the day, a light cool afternoon breeze in the Haghpata area being very welcome. We headed north towards Stepanavan, enjoying watching how the numerous faces of Armenia continued to unfold before us, stopping on an area of flat steppe for a kestrel, which despite not giving especially good views appeared to be a female lesser kestrel. A number of northern wheatears were also present, plus a flighty whinchat, and a number of raptors at distance, including two black kites, long-legged and common buzzards and a couple of lesser spotted eagles which were seen in flight. Two European goldfinches pitched into a tree right overhead, being the first for a few.

We continued on along a small road, paralleling the base of grassy mountains and a vertically-sided narrow gorge, finally stopping at a sharp bend in the road where it crossed a smaller tributary of the gorge. This was quite hot down in the bottom, with plenty of small butterflies around, including a fine male short-tailed blue and a pale clouded yellow species, but birds at first were completely absent, despite a calling white-throated dipper. Persistence paid off though, with a first-winter blue rock thrush discovered eating elderberries in a small bush, then at least two more on rocks on the far side, with a couple of agama lizards sunbathing there too. Hasmik then discovered a stonechat in the rank vegetation above the river, but this was in heavy moult and tricky to see well, and when we discovered a male nearby could finally confirm that these were European stonechats and not the hoped-for Siberian. As we started to leave, a western rock nuthatch called from cliffs on the opposite side and we finally got good views in the scopes.

The remainder of the drive to our *excellent* (now expected) lunch spot was broken when a European roller was spotted on a treetop adjacent to the road, and then another ahead showed in rather better light, its turquoise wings and body providing a gorgeous sight in flight. A goshawk circled over a village as we passed and we didn't even get out of the vehicle for a fine adult bearded vulture which drifted high overhead. Lunch was largely taken outside in the garden of a superb guesthouse, the wife speaking fluent French, having been the former French teacher at the local school, and we finished off with cake and coffee, or tea, inside.

There was now only a relatively short drive to our hotel, though little was to prepare us for the remarkable views as we descended into the impressive Debets River Gorge, then past a remarkably polluting (and large derelict) copper mine in otherwise stunning scenery. We finally climbed out to Haghpat, heading first to the Kusanats Anapat Church, a 10 Sep – 13th century monastic complex above the town, and once we'd enjoyed this, including its wildlife in the form of a stunning wall lizard and large agama on one of the towers, headed down for just over half an hour in a forested valley below.

The forest vegetation was very varied, though included abundant oriental beech of particular note, and while barely a bird was seen or even heard (namely a couple of rock buntings which eluded us), we still managed to see a couple of new butterflies, including a lovely southern white admiral, and as we boarded the bus, even noted the remains of a squashed freshwater crab on the road. A special quick stop just down the road, now in more open arid conditions towards the valley bottom was made for Christ's thorn, both in flower and fruit, to allow close views of this special plant.

With the checklist finished over a beer, once the sun dropped, so did the temperature, but we soon adjusted to this and enjoyed a good meal outside, including seeing the lightning of a distant thunderstorm rolling across the mountains to the west.

Wednesday 7 September

Haghpat, Debet River Gorge, Lori Castle, Geghasar, Jajur Valley and Lake, Gyumri

A short meeting in the hotel garden before breakfast (which was subsequently taken outside by the hardier given the fresh conditions) produced calling Eurasian tree sparrow and calling Syrian woodpecker of most note, but there were plenty of common house martins and barn swallows overhead, plus house sparrows, Eurasian blue tits and a brief lesser whitethroat in the bushes and trees. Michael had been out earlier, but noted it had been very quiet, though he had picked up a distant flying European green woodpecker.

One of the party members was under the weather, so we made a couple of impromptu stops en route for them to rest and recover, including one where we noted some large cannabis plants growing wild on the roadside, the first many had ever seen. But there were actually thousands growing as weeds in the surrounding fields too.

Bee-eaters were again quite evident, especially given a general lack of small birds, though a longer walk out onto the steppe near Lori castle was again productive. A few whinchats and northern wheatears were present, a couple of European goldfinches pitched into a tree overhead, flighty red-backed shrikes kept us busy, and a Eurasian skylark gave the closest views on the ground I've ever had, making me think it was possibly a migrant from a remote steppe area somewhere, so not recognising humans as possible predators. Raptors once again included a black kite, lesser spotted eagle and long-legged buzzard, though the sheer number and variation in colour of the abundant local common buzzards here was remarkable, as indeed later throughout the day. We rounded off here down by the gorge itself, adding several tree pipits and of most note at least three western rock nuthatches.

Our picnic lunch was bought in Stepanavan, allowing us to observe a little of the typical town life in the process, then we pressed on to a little stop with covered picnic tables and clean clear spring water for lunch itself. A flighty mountain chiffchaff in the willows eluded most, but not so a female common redstart feeding on a bank opposite, nor a superb white-breasted dipper sitting very quietly in the shade at the base

of a large willow overhanging the river. A super sight! Small birds then basically eluded us but just after lunch a super melanistic common buzzard circled up with a more typical rufous bird, giving our first good views of this black colour morph.

It was still fairly early, so we risked a hot mid afternoon walk up a subalpine mountain valley in the hopes of finding something. A few and varied monuments at the bottom held our interest, along with a few interesting butterflies, including apparent turquoise and Chapman's blues. Water spilling out of a spring and down a track had attracted a gorgeous grey wagtail, while an adult and moulting juvenile coal tit in some adjacent pines were the first for some. A few mistle thrushes flitted between the trees, finally only showing well as we were leaving. We walked up the quite steep track in rather dry and very sunny conditions, and though at first nothing was present, we did finally succeed in seeing a few birds. First, a superb adult golden eagle circled low over the slopes ahead, before disappearing round the corner. Then, a couple of flighty rock buntings disappeared up into some dense bushes, though a moulting juvenile stayed a little behind and fortunately sat in a small rose bush long enough for most of to see as well. Finally, a ring ouzel flew out of dense bushes and low across the slopes up the valley, though simply vanished later, seemingly into thin air, when we walked after it. The return was interesting too, when two chunky and rather grey finches flew in towards the water, with one perching high in a treetop, its orange rump only being visible for a second as it flew down towards the water - common crossbills. Sadly they were flushed by some sightseers and 'chucked' rapidly off into some nearby pines.

We also made an impromptu stop shortly ahead when we spotted a small lake off to one side. Though this was sadly filthy with plastic waste, a few birds were present, including numerous corvids along the dam, these being playful western jackdaws and also rooks, though the very first gull, slightly apart from the rest, had a very long and slender bill on a long sloping forehead and looked very like a Caspian gull. Unfortunately, no sooner were we onto it than a feisty jackdaw started teasing it, even in flight, and drove it quickly away. Armenian gulls and a little grebe were slim pickings at an otherwise promising site.

We soon reached our hotel in Gyumri. Like many others towns in this area, it was very badly hit by the last big earthquake, so was looking much more modern than many other towns we'd visited. The view out of the back was a reminder of what had happened though, but even here there was of interest, with a few black redstarts, kestrels and numerous corvids, plus a tremendous roost of rock sparrows. We ate out at an eclectic restaurant in the main square before returning for a surprisingly quiet night, despite being beside one of the main roads.

Thursday 8 September

Tsohamarg, Tavshut, Lake Ardenis, Lake Arpi

Quite a long day, with crystal clear skies almost all day long and a powerful sun despite cool to mild air temperatures. Very good for birdwatching! After a leisurely breakfast we headed north towards Georgia up a winding road. A shout went up though as a small harrier was seen passing off to one side, and when we jumped out, we realised that there was significant passage going on. Some six or seven Montagu's and a male marsh harrier were spiralling rapidly up over a nearby hill, though were either just too fast or far for most to see clearly. On the opposite side, while looking to see if more were coming, we suddenly also realised that there was a distant line of raptors on the move, though it wasn't until one group kettled up that we could see that they were black kites, with about 100 or so in the flock.

Shortly ahead we stopped again, not quite catching the harrier migration head-on, so continued until we turned off towards Lake Arpi, our main goal for the day, only to stop again for more Montagu's harriers passing, mostly off to one side and/or high up, but a couple gave good views, including a moulting immature male. Common and long-legged buzzards were constantly on the wing or perched on rocks or hay bales, as throughout the day, and a flock of western yellow wagtails attracted our attention too, with two lovely adult male blue-headed wagtails (i.e. of the central European race) amongst them.

Being on this higher plateau meant it was cooler, and greener than just a little way below, with lots more small birds around in consequence. Indeed the whole route along was interrupted by northern wheatears, numerous whinchats and then, to our delight, a Siberian stonechat amongst them - the first of at least three during the day. These gave us a terrible run-around though, being very flighty, but with several stops consequently necessary along the track, it broke the somewhat bumpy journey.

A huge plain lay below us, requiring a few stops to look for birds, and at one point the adrenaline flowed when we caught sight of two cranes in the distance... a fine pair of common cranes! The nearby small Lake Ardenis was very productive. Abundant eclipse plumaged duck all over it included common teal, garganey, northern shoveler, common pochard and plentiful tufted ducks, including ducklings still, with a couple of black-necked grebes catching our eye and a single white-winged tern careering back and forth. The rooks and jackdaws in the village all suddenly took to the air, heralding the arrival of a huge female northern goshawk which sped past below us before disappearing into some ruins. A few bugling calls also betrayed the presence of a family of two adult and two juvenile common cranes passing high over. Another close call.

Some corn buntings along the track ahead were our first, delaying us a little yet again, and indeed we didn't reach the lake until just after 1 pm. Meeting a couple of Vahram's friends, we drove down to near the shore for lunch in the steppe. Despite a large herd of cows coming our way, but given very few birds visible on the lake from here, we sat and ate our picnics, which had been made by Vahram's wife. A fine male Siberian stonechat made a first, but poor, appearance, but even more interesting were two groups of nine and later four Dalmatian pelicans which circled over, the first disappearing north into Georgia. Thinking that I'd relocated them a little later, another surprise was a very distant flock of great white pelicans, which also disappeared north. Lake Arpi appears to be the southernmost of a series of high lakes, with several nearby in Georgia now attracting the bulk of the birds.

We then headed to the north shore to see if the shoreline was closer and if there were any birds. A scan from one point revealed a wealth of birds about, but mostly very distantly, including ruddy shelduck, plenty of greylag geese (as we later found out), grey Herons and a flock of cranes. The latter were over three kilometres away and it wasn't clear what species they were. The drive round was quite rough, though expertly navigated by Vahram, requiring two stops to finally get them clear enough and with the sun in our faces to see that all 26 were also common cranes. A disappointment in one regard, but great to see from another! The geese were identified here, a flock of Eurasian spoonbills were seen and a chance scan also revealed a resting black stork out on the upper mud line. Time was now really running on, so we were about to jump in the van when Hasmik picked out a superb scaly rufous-tailed rock thrush on a nearby bluff, adding yet another species to our tally.

The day had been long, so even when a tawny pipit landed on the track in front, we decided to pass, and despite one or two quick stops to look from the bus, including at a lone juvenile lesser grey shrike, we made it back at a reasonable 6.20 pm after a truly terrific day. There was even time for the group to scope the amassing rock sparrows from a cleaner's room window!

Friday 9 September

Mount Aragats

Despite the quite long drive necessary to reach Yerevan, the main road from Gyumri is in good condition. Better indeed than the majority of roads in Armenia, so we were perplexed to find a huge long section of it under 'improvement'. It also made it all but impossible to make any stops along it, which was frustrating given good numbers of migrant lesser kestrels and European rollers on roadside wires and pylons (along with the now expected abundant European bee-eaters).

We finally turned off and worked our way up another good though narrow road through a couple of villages at the beginning of our ascent of Mount Aragats, the highest mountain (and an extinct volcano) in modern

Armenia (despite the mighty double peak of Mount Ararat clearly visible off to the south in modern day Turkey).

Our first stop was on a grassy slope near a few bushes, ruined buildings, tin-roof shelters and even scattered small modern tombs surrounded by railings. Not exactly a great-looking site, but actually remarkably productive. A male blue rock thrush moved from pylon to building to rock outcrop, while a pair of noisy western rock nuthatches preferred the railings and scattered boulders. A spotted flycatcher and an extensively rufous-bellied black redstart also preferred the shelter of the little make-shift hut where a couple of eastern black-eared wheatears, including a gorgeous male, were enjoying the shade. A dark pale-morph (or was it pale dark-morph?) booted eagle circled in the distance. Taking a short walk to see what might be hiding in the grass, a couple of tawny pipits popped out, but best of all was the discovery of a pair of Siberian stonechats, the male of which was finally a relaxed bird, apparently on territory, and so didn't disappear off at the first opportunity unlike those we'd seen before!

A few butterflies were present too, including a lovely 'cowpat grayling', which flashed its wings open as it fed on some fresh dung so revealing a series of long oblong white spots on its black upperwing, and making a fine sight.

A short climb up into the juniper scrub didn't seem too promising at first, with not a bird visible, but we finally began to see a bit of movement, including (the also ubiquitous) red-backed shrike, a willow warbler and overhead, a few passing lesser kestrels, Montagu's harrier, and even a passing juvenile pallid harrier. And down by a little herder's camp, where a mother and daughter sat washing hair and later fruit in the crystalline water gushing from a pipe into a drinking trough, we noted a few more small birds, and so walked down. Indeed, a small bird which flew out to drink at the trough, and then creep about on the grass in full view, was a Radde's accentor! A couple more were present in boulders on the edge of the road, including a bird in almost constant subsong, and finally, after considerable effort, we almost all had good views of at least one of these.

Time had rushed on, so we moved on in the bus to the Amberd Fortress, this allowing us magnificent views with the snow-capped Ararat in the distant behind the dark ruins of the fortress and with a fine church further down the ridge. A small souvenir stand here was well patronised by the group and the large trout in a 'tank' under the covered patio where we subsequently ate lunch (including two of them...) admired. Despite a distinct chill to the breeze in the shade, outside in the sun it was hot, and with a seepage line providing water just below the restaurant area to late flowers, the butterflies present here were excellent too, including a fine selection of blues, a couple of coppers, skippers, clouded yellows, late lesser spotted fritillary and brown argus. Most were content to just enjoy the views and delicious trout and potato stew of the main course!

The rest of the afternoon was taken with a drive almost to the top of the mountain. It was almost still in the shelter of a ridge at 3,000 metres, fortunately allowing us to hear that a few birds were present. A distant Asian crimson-winged finch was a good find, but too far for most, and while a few more were present shortly ahead, the climb up at this height was too difficult for most, and as they arrived in the bus, the birds spooked. A lovely little trilling call quickly caught our attention though, and finally we tracked down a superb *penicillata* race horned lark sitting quietly on a rock, which allowed a quite close approach and a superb viewing opportunity.

Some of us again continued on foot, revelling in the clear mountain air, finally stopping to overlook an area of rock rubble, when another call caught our ear. A couple of black redstarts flicked around, though a chunkier bird with some orange on the flanks flew straight down towards us before disappearing behind a little ridge. Rock thrush? No, a lovely alpine accentor, which crept about amongst the rocks and finally sat to preen in the shade giving good scope views. Another appeared on a further boulder line too.

We all walked the final few metres up towards the old observatory to take a look at the lake. Finally from here we could see part of the true peak of Aragats, plus small snow patches, though no birds were present other than a lone Armenian gull which flew in for a quick drink and clean and was off again. Enjoying the views on the rocky shoreline, we also noticed numerous ladybirds on the rocks beside the water, and bent down to take a closer look. And to our enormous surprise, from under my feet, another alpine accentor hopped out from under the rock I was standing on, before inching its way along the shoreline feeding on aphids as it went and giving unparalleled views!

We finally dragged ourselves away, descending quickly down the mountain and then via another occasionally badly potholed road towards Yerevan, the temperature rising as we went, reaching our hotel 6.20 pm after another terrific day. Dinner was taken out by the group at another fine restaurant.

Saturday 10 September **Vedi, Armash Fishponds**

Our last full day, though taking in just two sites to ensure we returned a little earlier with time to pack and, where possible, check-in online. Leaving at 8.30 am, we headed straight for the semi-desert hills near Vedi. And indeed as soon as we hit the first ridge of rocks, birds were very apparent in the cool conditions. A juvenile crested lark sat in the track just in front, then a couple of western rock nuthatches on the adjacent crag got us looking from the bus. But when a couple of warblers appeared, standing on the rocks and waving their long black-ended tails around, we quickly got out. At least two Ménétries's warblers chased around, one finally landing in a bush just yards away before finally popping out in full view onto an adjacent rock when teased out by a few noises. A flash of black and white nearby also alerted us to a superb male Finsch's wheatear present nearby, which also then gave terrific views, and was the first of plenty during the morning.

Walking ahead it was suddenly quiet again, so we jumped aboard for the next several hundred metres as far as the bus could go. Sunscreen on and filled water bottles in the bags, we set off along a dry track towards and narrowing valley, searching for birds and wildlife as we went. A lovely slender red fox walked off as we advanced, its black-backed ears and large white tip to its brush making it a striking animal, while the first of abundant grayling butterflies rose up as we continued, flashing variably black and white or cream, or orange and brown, depending on the species. A fine adult Egyptian vulture cruised along some cliffs.

Our main goal was to check two or three spots along the otherwise dry riverbed where water emerges, in the hope of finding birds coming to drink. The first had none, so we continued, finding a few migrant common whitethroats and garden warblers in the scattered tamarisk bushes, plus a flighty Ménétries's or two as well. Eastern rock nuthatches called loudly from the cliffs, and finally gave us excellent views, though it took much longer to locate some very vocal chukar partridges. Fortunately, as the family party scrambled high up the scree, they dislodged some small stones which as they fell clinked melodiously, making me think it was a calling finch or other small bird. They headed for some cliffs, and being on a steep slope were readily observed in the scopes, despite the distance.

We finally made it to the upper spring, where clouds of supping butterflies rose as we continued, but two moulting buntings flitted off at distance, leaving us wondering if they were grey-necked, and then two tiny brown birds sped off across the steep rocky valley side, and despite stopping briefly, this pair of trumpeter finches also gave us the slip. We opted for a sit and wait strategy, which unfortunately didn't give us views of either of these again, though we enjoyed the remarkable sighting of a Eurasian sparrowhawk trying to catch an eastern rock nuthatch by bouncing around on the top of a thorny bush the nuthatch was hiding under. It soon gave up the chase, but reminded me of similar behaviour I've witnessed of both northern goshawk in Spain and Cooper's hawk in the USA, chasing their prey on foot in an attempt to spook them into the open. It was a hot walk back, though we unexpectedly had plenty of time to drink water and recover in the shade of the bus as we met a large funeral procession on the edge of the village.

Fortunately, Vahram had been off during our walk to pick up lunch, and we set off for the short drive to the Armash fishponds again. We quickly headed into and through the fishponds area and into the shade of the picnic site. A cooling breeze was blowing, but it was still quite hot and didn't stop a few hungry mosquitoes to come out; but they were hardly a major issue. A lovely lunch, including hot kebabs, was taken.

Given a negative answer to the question of if there were any ponds being drained when we'd come in, we walked a few hundred metres along the main track as we returned just to see if anything was present in the main pools and the wet grassland and along the channels, despite it being mid afternoon. Two white-tailed lapwings rose up but only came down when out of scope range, noisy wood sandpipers and a single 'scratching' common snipe did the same. Two citrine wagtails rose and whizzed off, though variably coloured western yellow wagtails sat out to be admired. Shortly ahead a few more birds were well watched as well, including a superb common kingfisher plunge-diving to bathe in a nearby channel, flighty Eurasian tree sparrows in reeds opposite, and then a delightful little troupe of Eurasian penduline tits which came out to feed, upside-down on a tall goosefoot bush. Pygmy cormorants flew over, a few white-winged terns flew past and a jumpy squacco heron was 'chased' down the track while we were back in the bus.

Time was running out though, so it was very frustrating to suddenly discover a partly drained pool, ahead. A couple of little egrets and purple, grey and squacco herons were feeding in a long, weed-filled pool immediately ahead, but in the next pool beyond them, hundreds of small birds were lined-up long the exposed mud. Long distance views of a few of these were made with the most powerful scopes, but it was at the limits of ID range for the numerous waders present. A couple of northern lapwings were readily seen amongst them, along with a couple of black-bellied dunlin, but it was just too far and slightly too hazy for any of the group to get onto the common greenshank and spotted redshank, and who knows what else amongst them. Hundreds of marsh terns were present too, but again given the lack of time and the distance, we decided it was a lost cause anyway to try and get closer, and headed back with a couple of hours spare before call-over and dinner. Just enough time for most to check-in on-line and pack, ready for an early start the following day.

We headed out to dinner in Yerevan again, this time to the Tavern Yerevan, complete with local music and dancing. We finished relatively early and headed off to a souvenir shop, where odds and ends were acquired (so much cheaper than for the same articles in the airport the following day), before finishing off in the Republic Square, where the amazing sound and colour-coordinated fountain display was being admired by the locals and a few other visitors.

Sunday 11 September

Depart Armenia

Following a quick very early breakfast we were soon on our way just with our local driver, and readily reached Yerevan airport without problems. We quickly checked-in and, after a short delay for take-off, reached Paris without too much delay. The UK connection went smoothly and even arrived a little ahead of schedule, rounding off a terrific tour.

Species Lists

BIRDS - AVES

GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS - Anatidae

Greylag goose *Anser anser* : 100+ at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep.

Common shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* : 1 at Lichk + 1 en route on 4 Sep, 100+ at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* : plenty at Lichk on 4 Sep, several at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* : plenty at Lichk on 4 Sep, 4+ at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep.

Northern shoveler *Anas clypeata* : 50+ at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep, 2 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Northern pintail *Anas acuta* : 1 female at Lichk on 4 Sep.

Garganey *Anas querquedula* : 2+ at Lichk on 4 Sep, 3+ at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep.

Eurasian teal *Anas crecca* : 2 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, a few at Lichk on 4 Sep, 150+ at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep.

Red-crested pochard *Netta rufina* : Several at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Common pochard *Aythya ferina* : 6+ at Lichk on 4 Sep, 2+ female at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep.

Ferruginous duck *Aythya nyroca* : 3-4 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Tufted duck *Aythya fuligula* : 15+ at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep.

GROUSE, PHEASANTS & allies - Phasianidae

Caucasian grouse *Lyrurus mlokosiewiczi* : 1 male at Artavaz on 5 Sep.

Chukar partridge *Alectoris chukar* : Heard at Noravank on 3 Sep, approx. 10 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Grey partridge *Perdix perdix* : 6 at Gndasar on 3 Sep.

Common quail *Coturnix coturnix* : 3+ at Gndasar on 3 Sep.

GREBES - Podicipedidae

Little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* : 1+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, several at Lichk on 4 Sep, 1 at Jajur lake on 7 Sep, plenty at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep, approx. 10 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus* : Several Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 15+ Lichk + Gull Island on 4 Sep, 6 Armash on 10 Sep.

Black-necked/eared grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* : 2 Gull Island on 4 Sep, 2 Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep.

STORKS - Ciconiidae

Black stork *Ciconia nigra* : 1 immature Lake Arpi on 8 Sep.

White stork *Ciconia ciconia* : Plenty en route on 1 Sep, 3 en route on 3 Sep, lots at various sites on 8 Sep, 2 en route on 10 Sep.

IBISES & SPOONBILLS - Threskiornithidae

Eurasian spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* : 6 at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep.

HERONS & BITTERNS - Ardeidae

Little bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* : 2 females at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Black-crowned night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* : 1 juvenile at Lichk on 4 Sep, 1 juvenile at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep, 27 en route on 9 Sep, 1 juvenile at Armash on 10 Sep.

Squacco heron *Ardeola ralloides* : 100+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, approx. 10 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Western cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis* : 2 at Armash Fishponds+ on 1 Sep, approx. 20 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Grey heron *Ardea cinerea* : 1 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 42+ at Lichk on 4 Sep, lots at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep, 6+ Armash on 10 Sep.

Purple heron *Ardea purpurea* : 6+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 6 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Little egret *Egretta garzetta* : 6+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, several on Gull Island on 4 Sep, 3-4 at Armash on 10 Sep.

PELICANS - Pelecanidae

Great white pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* : 12 at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep.

Dalmatian pelican *Pelecanus crispus* : 9 + 4 + 1 at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep.

CORMORANTS - Phalacrocoracidae

Pygmy cormorant *Microcarbo pygmeus* : 500+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 2 at Lichk on 4 Sep, 15+ at Armash on 10 Sep.

Great cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* : 2 at Lichk + 20 on Gull Island on 4 Sep.

HAWKS, EAGLES & allies - Accipitridae

Lammergeier/bearded vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* : Pair at Jermook road on 2 Sep, 2(-4) at Gndasar + 1 adult at Noravank on 3 Sep, 1 adult at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 1 adult en route on 6 Sep.

Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus* : 3 at Vayk on 4 Sep, 1 adult en route on 7 Sep, 1 adult at Vedi on 10 Sep.

European honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* : 2 at Vayk on 1 Sep.

Griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus* : 2-3 at Artavan Road on 2 Sep, 3 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, 6-7 at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep.

Cinereous/monk/black vulture *Aegypius monachus* : 2(-3) at Gndasar on 3 Sep.

Short-toed snake eagle *Circaetus gallicus* : 2+ at Artavan Road on 2 Sep, 1 en route on 3 Sep, 1 at Mineral water valley on 5 Sep, 1 at Lori Castle on 7 Sep, 1 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Lesser spotted eagle *Clanga pomarina* : 2-3 at Artavan Road on 2 Sep, 2 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, 5+ at Sulema pass + 2 at Lichk on 4 Sep, 2+ at Ani hotel resort on 5 Sep, a few at Gargar on 6 Sep, several at Lori Castle on 7 Sep, 1 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Booted eagle *Hieraetus pennatus* : 1 pale morph at Arch on 31 Aug, 6+ at various sites on 2 Sep, 2 en route + 2 at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 1 at Mineral water valley on 5 Sep, 1 en route on 7 Sep, 2 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* : 3 at Garni + at Geghard on 31 Aug, 1 at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep, 1 at Jajur valley on 7 Sep.

Levant sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes* : Pair at Jermook road on 2 Sep.

Eurasian sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* : 2 at various sites on 2 Sep, 1 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, 3 at Sevan pass on 5 Sep, 1 en route on 6 Sep, 1 at Lori castle on 7 Sep, 1 at Aragats on 9 Sep, 1+ at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Northern goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* : Pair at Jermook road on 2 Sep, 1 at Sevan Pass on 5 Sep, 1 en route on 6 Sep, 2 en route on 8 Sep.

[Western] marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus* : 3 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 6+ at Lichk on 4 Sep, 1 at Sevan on 5 Sep, 10+ at various sites on 8 Sep, 1 en route on 9 Sep, 1 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Pallid harrier *Circus macrourus* : 1 juvenile at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Montagu's harrier *Circus pygargus* : 1 male at Artavaz on 5 Sep, 15 at various sites on 8 Sep, 4+ at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Black kite *Milvus migrans* : 2 at Gargar on 6 Sep, 1 at Lori castle + 1 en route on 7 Sep, 100+ en route on 8 Sep.

Long-legged buzzard *Buteo rufinus* : 1 at Arch on 31 Aug, 1 en route on 1 Sep, 1 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, 20+ at Sulema Pass+ on 4 Sep, several en route on 5 Sep, a few en route on 6 Sep, plenty at various sites on 7 Sep, 30+ at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty en route on 9 Sep, 1 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Common buzzard *Buteo buteo* : 15+ at various sites on 2 Sep, 2 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, several at various sites on 4 Sep, abundant en route on 5 Sep, lots at various sites on 6 Sep, dozens everywhere on 7 Sep, 100+ at various sites on 8 Sep, abundant at various sites on 9 Sep, 1 en route on 10 Sep.

Steppe buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus* : 1 at Arch on 31 Aug, 1 at Gndasar on 3 Sep.

RAILS, CRAKES & COOTS - Rallidae

Water rail *Rallus aquaticus* : Heard at Armash on 10 Sep.

Common moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* : 1 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, plenty at Lichk on 4 Sep, 2 at Jajur lake on 7 Sep.

Eurasian coot *Fulica atra* : 100s at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1000s at SL on 4 Sep, 1 at Jajur lake on 7 Sep, plenty at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep, lots at Armash on 10 Sep.

CRANES - Gruidae

Common crane *Grus grus* : 2 en route, 4 at Lake Ardenis and 1+26 at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep.

STILTS & AVOCETS - Recurvirostridae

Black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus* : Several at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS - Charadriidae

Northern lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* : 2 at Armash on 10 Sep.

White-tailed lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* : 3+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 2 at Armash on 10 Sep.

SANDPIPERS, SNIPES & allies - Scolopacidae

Common snipe *Gallinago gallinago* : 6+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa* : 4+ at Lichk on 4 Sep.

Common redshank *Tringa totanus* : 2 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Marsh sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* : 2 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Green sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* : 5+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1 at Jermook Road on 2 Sep, 5+ at various sites on 4 Sep.

Wood sandpiper *Tringa glareola* : 15+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 4+ at Lichk on 4 Sep, 4 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Ruddy turnstone *Arenaria interpres* : 10 on Gull Island on 4 Sep.

Little stint *Calidris minuta* : 3 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* : 2 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* : 6+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS - Laridae

Black-headed gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* : 12 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 6+ at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep.

Caspian gull *Larus cachinnans* : 1 Jajur lake on 7 Sep.

Armenian gull *Larus armenicus* : Plenty at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, abundant at various sites on 4 Sep, abundant at various sites on 5 Sep, plenty at Jajur lake on 7 Sep, plenty at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty en route on 9 Sep, a few at Armash on 10 Sep.

Gull-billed tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* : 35 at Lichk on 4 Sep.

White-winged [black] tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* : 100s at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1 at Lichk on 4 Sep, 1 at Lake Ardenis on 8 Sep, 100s at Armash on 10 Sep.

PIGEONS & DOVES - Columbidae

Rock dove *Columba livia* : Feral on 31 Aug, plenty at Vayk on 1 Sep, plenty at Vayk+ on 2 Sep, plenty at various sites on 3 Sep, plenty at various sites on 4 Sep, several at various sites on 5 Sep, 1 fantail on 6 Sep, plenty at various sites on 7 Sep, several at various sites on 9 Sep.

Common wood pigeon *Columba palumbus* : Several at various sites on 2 Sep, few en route on 3 Sep, few at Lichk on 4 Sep, 4 at Gargar on 6 Sep.

Laughing dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* : 1 at Yerevan on 31 Aug, 1 at Yerevan on 9 Sep.

SWIFTS - Apodidae

Alpine swift *Tachymarptis melba* : 40 at Gar on 31 Aug, 1 at Artavan Road on 2 Sep, 1(?) at Areni on 3 Sep.

Common swift *Apus apus* : 20+ at Mineral Eater Valley on 5 Sep, 1 at Haghpat on 6 Sep.

ROLLERS - Coraciidae

European roller *Coracias garrulus* : 1 en route on 31 Aug, several at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 3 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, 2 en route on 4 Sep, 1 at Mineral Water Valley on 5 Sep, 2 en route on 6 Sep, 2 en route on 9 Sep, 1 en route + 1 at Armash on 10 Sep.

KINGFISHERS - Alcedinidae

Common kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* : 2 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 2 at Armash on 10 Sep.

BEE-EATERS - Meropidae

Blue-cheeked bee-eater *Merops persicus* : 100+ at Armash Fishponds+ on 1 Sep, 30+ at Armash on 10 Sep.

European bee-eater *Merops apiaster* : 100s en route on 31 Aug, approx. 20 at Vayk on 1 Sep, plenty at various sites on 2 Sep, 50+ at Vayk on 3 Sep, 100s en route on 4 Sep, abundant at various sites on 5 Sep, numerous at various sites on 6 Sep, plenty at various sites on 7 Sep, at plenty various sites on 8 Sep, masses en route on 9 Sep, 15+ at Vedi on 10 Sep.

HOOPOES - Upupidae

Eurasian hoopoe *Upupa epops* : 1 at Arch on 31 Aug, 1 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, 8+ at various sites on 4 Sep.

WOODPECKERS - Picidae

Eurasian wryneck *Jynx torquilla* : 1 at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 1 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Syrian woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* : Heard at Noravank on 3 Sep, 1 female at Vayk on 4 Sep, heard at Haghpat on 7 Sep.

Great spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* : 1 juvenile at Ani Hotel resort + heard at Tezh Ler on 5 Sep, 1 at Haghpat on 6 Sep.

European green woodpecker *Picus viridis* : 1 at Ani hotel resort on 5 Sep, heard at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep, 1 at Haghpat on 7 Sep.

FALCONS & allies - Falconidae

Lesser kestrel *Falco naumanni* : 2 en route on 31 Aug, 1 female at Gargar on 6 Sep, lots en route + at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Common/Eurasian kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* : Plenty at Geghard on 31 Aug, a few at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, a few at various sites on 2 Sep, several at Gndasar on 3 Sep, a few at various sites on 4 Sep, lots at Gyumri on 8 Sep.

Eurasian hobby *Falco subbuteo* : 1 at Vayk on 2 Sep.

Lanner falcon *Falco biarmicus* : 1 at Tsoghavard. on 8 Sep.

SHRIKES - Laniidae

Red-backed shrike *Lanius collurio* : 1 en route on 31 Aug, 1 juvenile at Vayk on 1 Sep, 1 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, 12+ at Lichk on 4 Sep, plenty at various sites on 5 Sep, a few at Gargar on 6 Sep, plenty at various sites on 7 Sep, several at various sites on 8 Sep, a few at Aragats on 9 Sep, a few at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Lesser Grey shrike *Lanius minor* : Lots en route on 31 Aug, lots at various sites on 1 Sep, 1 at Martuni on 4 Sep, 1 juvenile en route on 8 Sep, 1 at Armash on 10 Sep.

FIGBIRDS & OLD WORLD ORIOLES - Oriolidae

Eurasian golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus* : 3+ at Vayk on 1 Sep.

CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES - Corvidae

Eurasian jay *Garrulus glandarius* : Several at Geghard on 31 Aug, 1 at Jermook Road + 2 en route on 2 Sep, 1 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, several at various sites on 5 Sep, heard at Haghpat on 6 Sep, 1 at Haghpat + 1 at Jajur valley on 7 Sep.

Eurasian magpie *Pica pica* : Plenty at various sites on 31 Aug, plenty at various sites on 1 Sep, 1 en route on 2 Sep, lots en route on 3 Sep, plenty at various sites on 4 Sep, plenty at various sites on 5 Sep, several at various sites on 6 Sep, several at Haghpat on 7 Sep, several at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty at various sites on 9 Sep, plenty at various sites on 10 Sep.

Red-billed chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* : 1 at Geghard on 31 Aug, heard at Gndasar on 3 Sep, heard at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 8 at river crossing on 6 Sep.

Western jackdaw *Coloeus monedula* : Plenty at Garni on 31 Aug, several at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, few en route on 3 Sep, plenty at Sevan+ on 5 Sep, lots at Jajur lake on 7 Sep, 100s at various sites on 8 Sep, abundant en route on 9 Sep, plenty at Armash on 10 Sep.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* : plenty at Sevan on 5 Sep, plenty at Jajur lake on 7 Sep, 20+ at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty en route on 9 Sep.

Hooded crow *Corvus cornix* : A few sy various sites on 31 Aug, several sy various sites on 1 Sep, abundant en route on 3 Sep, abundant sy various sites on 4 Sep, lots sy various sites on 5 Sep, lots sy various sites on 6 Sep, abundant sy various sites on 7 Sep, abundant at various sites on 8 Sep, abundant at various sites on 9 Sep, common at various sites on 10 Sep.

Northern raven *Corvus corax* : 1 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep and Artavan road on 2 Sep, 1 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, plenty at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 2 en route on 6 Sep, plenty at various sites on 7 Sep, 2-4 at Aragats on 9 Sep, 2 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

TITS & CHICKADEES - Paridae

Coal tit *Pariparus ater* : 1 at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep, 2 at Jajur valley on 7 Sep.

Great tit *Parus major* : Heard at Artavan road on 2 Sep, 2 at Vayk on 4 Sep, 2+ at Artavaz on 5 Sep, several at various sites on 6 Sep, heard at various sites on 7 Sep.

Eurasian blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* : 1 at Lichk on 4 Sep, 1 at Ani Resort on 5 Sep, plenty at Tezh Ler + at Haghpat on 6 Sep, several at Haghpat on 7 Sep.

PENDULINE TITS - Remizidae

Eurasian penduline tit *Remiz pendulinus* : 15+ at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 3 at Armash on 10 Sep.

BEARDED REEDLING - Panuridae

Bearded reedling *Panurus biarmicus* : 2 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

LARKS - Alaudidae

Greater short-toed lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* : 150+ on Gull Island on 4 Sep, 30 at Mineral Water Road on 5 Sep.

Crested lark *Galerida cristata* : 1 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, plenty at Vedi + few at Armash on 10 Sep.

Eurasian skylark *Alauda arvensis* : 6+ at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 1 at Lori castle on 7 Sep, plenty at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep, 1 en route on 9 Sep.

Horned lark *Eremophila alpestris* : 1 + heard at Aragats on 9 Sep.

SWALLOWS & MARTINS - Hirundinidae

Sand martin *Riparia riparia* : Lots at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 100s at various sites on 4 Sep, several at various sites on 5 Sep, 1 at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep, abundant at Armash on 10 Sep.

Barn swallow *Hirundo rustica* : A few at various sites on 31 Aug, plenty at various sites on 1 Sep, plenty at Artavan Road on 2 Sep, plenty at Gndasar on 3 Sep, 100s at various sites on 4 Sep, lots at various sites on 5 Sep, lots at various sites on 6 Sep, plenty at various sites on 7 Sep, 100s at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty at various sites on 9 Sep, plenty at various sites on 10 Sep.

Eurasian crag martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* : Abundant at Geghard+ on 31 Aug, 1000s at various sites on 2 Sep, abundant at various sites on 3 Sep, plenty at Sulema Pass+ on 4 Sep, a few en route on 6 Sep.

Common house martin *Delichon urbicum* : 100+ at Artavan Road on 2 Sep, plenty at Haghpat on 6 Sep, lots at various sites on 7 Sep.

CETTIA BUSH WARBLERS & Allies - Cettiidae

Cetti's warbler *Cettia cetti* : 1 at Lichk on 4 Sep.

BUSHTITS - Aegithalidae

Long-tailed tit *Aegithalos caudatus* : Plenty at various sites on 2 Sep.

LEAF WARBLERS & allies - Phylloscopidae

Willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* : Plenty at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1 at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 1 at Aragats on 9 Sep, 1 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Mountain chiffchaff *Phylloscopus sindianus* : 1 at Lichk on 4 Sep, lots at Artavaz on 5 Sep, a few at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep, 1 at Geghasar on 7 Sep.

Green warbler *Phylloscopus nitidus* : 1 at Tezh Ler (Richard) on 5 Sep.

REED WARBLERS & allies - Acrocephalidae

Sedge warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* : 3 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Eurasian reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* : 2 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1-2 at Armash on 10 Sep.

SYLVIID BABBLERS, PARROTBILLS, MYZORNIS - Sylviidae

Garden warbler *Sylvia borin* : 1 at Arch on 31 Aug, 4+ at various sites on 2 Sep, 1+ at Noravank on 3 Sep, 1 at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 1 at Aragats on 9 Sep, and 2 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Barred warbler *Sylvia nisoria* : 1 at Lichk on 4 Sep.

Lesser whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* : 2 at Arch on 31 Aug, 1 at Jermook Road on 2 Sep, 1 at Vayk on 3 Sep, 1 at Vayk on 4 Sep, 1 at Haghpat on 7 Sep, 1 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Common whitethroat *Sylvia communis* : 1 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1 at Artavan Road on 2 Sep, 1 at Gndasar on 3 Sep, 1 at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 2+ at various sites on 5 Sep, 3+ at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Menetries's warbler *Sylvia mystacea* : 3+ at Vedi on 10 Sep.

NUTHATCHES - Sittidae

Western rock nuthatch *Sitta neumayer* : Heard at Garni + at Geghard on 31 Aug, heard at Jermook Road on 2 Sep, several at Noravank on 3 Sep, heard at Vayk on 4 Sep, 1 at river crossing on 6 Sep, 3 at Lori castle on 7 Sep, 4+ at Aragats on 9 Sep, 2 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Eastern rock nuthatch *Sitta tephronota* : 2+ at Noravank on 3 Sep, 2+ at Vedi on 10 Sep.

STARLINGS & RHABDORNIS - Sturnidae

Common starling *Sturnus vulgaris* : 5+ at Lichk on 4 Sep, 4 at Sevan on 5 Sep, 200+ at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty at Gyumri+ on 9 Sep, 300+ at Armash on 10 Sep.

THRUSHES - Turdidae

Ring ouzel *Turdus torquatus* : 3+ at Artavaz on 5 Sep, 1 at Jajur valley on 7 Sep.

Common blackbird *Turdus merula* : 3+ at Artavan road on 2 Sep, heard at Haghpat on 6 Sep, 2+ at Jajur valley on 7 Sep.

Song thrush *Turdus philomelos* : 2 at Artavaz on 5 Sep.

Mistle thrush *Turdus viscivorus* : 1 at Artavan Road on 2 Sep, 15 at Lichk on 4 Sep, plenty at Artavaz on 5 Sep, 6+ at Jajur valley on 7 Sep.

CHATS & OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS - Muscicapidae

Black redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* : Several at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Common redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* : 1 at Ani Resort on 5 Sep, 3+ at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep, 1 at Geghasar on 7 Sep.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* : 2 at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 2+ at Sevan pass on 5 Sep, 1 at Gargar on 6 Sep, 3+ at Lori castle on 7 Sep, 15+ at various sites on 8 Sep, 1 at Armash on 10 Sep.

European stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* : 2 at the river crossing on 6 Sep.

Siberian stonechat *Saxicola maurus* : 3 at Lake Arpi+ on 8 Sep, pair at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Isabelline wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* : 1 at Noravank on 3 Sep.

Northern wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* : Several at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, loads at Gargar on 6 Sep, several at Lori castle on 7 Sep, lots at various sites on 8 Sep, abundant at various sites on 9 Sep.

Eastern black-eared wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca* : 1 male + 1 juvenile at Vayk on 1 Sep, 1 at Jermook Road on 2 Sep, 3+ at Noravank + 1 at Vayk on 3 Sep, 2 at Vayk on 4 Sep, 1 male at Aragats on 9 Sep, 2+ males at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Finsch's wheatear *Oenanthe finschii* : 2+ at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Common rock thrush *Monticola saxatilis* : 1 (-2) at Lake Arpi on 8 Sep.

Blue rock thrush *Monticola solitarius* : 2 at Jermook Rod on 2 Sep, 5+ at Noravank + 2 at Vayk on 3 Sep, 3+ at river crossing on 6 Sep, 1 male at Aragats on 9 Sep, 1 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Spotted flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* : 1 at Yerevan on 31 Aug, 3+ at various sites on 2 Sep, 1 at Lichk on 4 Sep, 1 at Gargar on 6 Sep, 1 at Geghasar on 7 Sep, 1 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Semicollared flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* : 1 at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep.

DIPPERS - Cinclidae

White-throated dipper *Cinclus cinclus* : 1 + heard at Jermook Road on 2 Sep, 1 at Lichk on 4 Sep, 1 at river crossing on 6 Sep, 1 at Geghasar on 7 Sep.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS & SNOWFINCHES - Passeridae

House sparrow *Passer domesticus* : Plenty at Yerevan on 31 Aug, loads at various sites on 3 Sep, plenty en route on 4 Sep, plenty at lunch on 5 Sep, lots at various sites on 7 Sep, lots at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty at various sites on 9 Sep, plenty en route on 10 Sep.

Eurasian tree sparrow *Passer montanus* : Heard at Haghpat on 7 Sep, 6+ at Armash on 10 Sep.

Rock sparrow *Petronia petronia* : 15+ at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 12+ en route on 5 Sep, a few en route on 6 Sep, 40 at Gyumri on 8 Sep, lots at Gyumri on 9 Sep.

ACCENTORS - Prunellidae

Alpine accentor *Prunella collaris* : 3 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Radde's accentor *Prunella ocularis* : 2-3 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

WAGTAILS & PIPITS - Motacillidae

Western yellow wagtail *Motacilla flava* : Several at various sites on 4 Sep, 2 at Jajur lake on 7 Sep, plenty including ssp *flava* blue-headed individuals at various sites on 8 Sep, several at Armash on 10 Sep.

Black-headed wagtail *Motacilla [flava] feldegg* : Lots at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1 male on Gull Island on 4 Sep, 1 male en route on 8 Sep, several at Armash on 10 Sep.

Citrine wagtail *Motacilla citreola* : 2 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1 adult at Lichk on 4 Sep, 2 en route on 8 Sep, 2 at Armash on 10 Sep.

Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* : 1 at Geghard on 31 Aug, 1 at Jajur valley on 7 Sep.

White wagtail *Motacilla alba* : 1 at lunch Arpa River on 2 Sep, plenty at Noravank on 3 Sep, abundant at various sites on 4 Sep, abundant at various sites on 5 Sep, plenty at various sites on 6 Sep, plenty at various sites on 7 Sep, lots at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty at various sites on 9 Sep, plenty en route on 10 Sep.

Tawny pipit *Anthus campestris* : 2 en route on 8 Sep, 2 at Aragats on 9 Sep, 2+ at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Tree pipit *Anthus trivialis* : Heard at Gndasar on 3 Sep, several at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 2 at various sites on 5 Sep, several at Lori castle on 7 Sep, lots at various sites on 8 Sep.

Water pipit *Anthus spinoletta* : 1+ at Gndasar on 3 Sep, few at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 10 at Sevan pass on 5 Sep, 1 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

FINCHES & allies - Fringillidae

Common chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* : A few at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep.

European greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* : Several at Lichk on 4 Sep, 1 at Ani Hotel resort on 5 Sep, 1 at Gargar on 6 Sep.

European goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* : A few en route on 31 Aug, heard at Sevan pass on 5 Sep, 2 at Gargar on 6 Sep, a few at Lori castle on 7 Sep, 4 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Common linnet *Carduelis cannabina* : Abundant at Sulema Pass+ on 4 Sep, 3 at Mineral Water road + 3 at Sevan Pass on 5 Sep, 1 at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep, plenty at various sites on 8 Sep, plenty at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Eurasian crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguineus* : 1 juvenile at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 5 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Common rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* : 1 juvenile at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 4+ at Artavaz on 5 Sep.

Red crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* : 2 at Jajur valley on 7 Sep.

Eurasian bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* : Pair at Tezh Ler on 5 Sep, 1 at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep.

BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS & allies - Emberizidae

Corn bunting *Emberiza calandra* : 30 en route on 8 Sep, 1 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

Rock bunting *Emberiza cia* : 2 at Jermook Road on 2 Sep, 3 at Jajur valley on 7 Sep.

Ortolan bunting *Emberiza hortulana* : 1 at Garni on 31 Aug, 2 at Sulema Pass on 4 Sep, 1 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

MAMMALS - MAMMALIA

DOGS & allies - Canidae

Red fox *Vulpes vulpes* : 1 at Vedi on 10 Sep.

BEARS - Ursidae

Brown bear *Ursus arctos* : Mother + 2 cubs at Gndasar on 3 Sep.

CATTLE, ANTELOPE, SHEEP & GOATS - Bovidae

Wild goat / Bezoar ibex *Capra aegagrus* : 2 males at Gndasar on 3 Sep.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS – REPTILIA + AMPHIBIA

Agamas - Agamidae

Caucasian agama *Laudakia caucasia* : at several various sites on 6 Sep.

Wall/Typical Lizards - Lacertidae

Rock/wall/meadow lizard spp. *Lacerta / Podarcis / Darevskia spp.* : 3+ at Garni on 31 Aug, 1 at Noravank on 3 Sep, several at Tezh Ler on 5 Sep, plenty at Tezh Ler + 2 at Monastery Haghpat on 6 Sep, 1 at Lori castle on 7 Sep.

Colubrid or 'Harmless(!)' Snakes - Colubridae

Dice snake *Natrix tessellata* : 2 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Typical Frogs - Ranidae

Marsh frog *Rana ridibunda* : Several at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep, 1 at Mineral Water road on 5 Sep.

BUTTERFLIES - LEPIDOPTERA

Grizzled & spreadwing skippers - subf: Pyrginae

Mallow skipper *Carcharodus alceae* : 2 Sep.

Persian skipper *Spialia phlomidis* : 9 Sep.

Anatolian skipper *Muschampia proteides* : 2 Sep and 7 Sep.

Chequered & grass skippers - subf: Hesperinae

Silver-spotted skipper *Hesperia comma* : 2 Sep and 6 Sep.

Swordtails, Birdwings, Swallowtails & Fестоons - subf: Parnassiinae

Common swallowtail *Papilio machaon* : 2 Sep and 10 Sep.

Typical whites - subf: Pierinae

Small white *Pieris rapae* : Noted on a few days.

Eastern Bath white *Pontia edusa* : 9 Sep.

Small Bath white *Pontia chlorodice* : 2 Sep.

Yellows & Sulphurs - subf: Coliadinae

Clouded yellow *Colias crocea* : 4 Sep.

Eastern pale clouded yellow *Colias erate* : 2 Sep, 6 Sep and 9 Sep.

Hairstreaks - subf: Theclinae

Purple hairstreak *Neozephyrus quercus* : 5 Sep.

Coppers - subf: Lycaeninae

Sooty copper *Lycaena tityrus* : 2 Sep, 7 Sep and 9 Sep.

Anatolian fiery copper *Lycaena abasinus* : 31 Aug.

Small copper *Lycaena phlaeas* : 2 Sep, 3 Sep, 7 Sep and 9 Sep.

Blues & Opals - subf: Polyommatainae

Short-tailed blue *Everes argiades* : 6 Sep.

Holly blue *Celastrina argiolus* : 2 Sep and 6 Sep.

Armenian/Ripart's anomalous blue *Agrodiaetus erivanensis / ripartii* : 2 Sep, 5 Sep and 7 Sep.

Chapman's blue *Polyommatus thersites* : 7 Sep.

'Common' blue spp. *Polyommatainae* : Daily in variable number from 31 Aug. Most remain unidentified to species being so similar, but plenty of Common Blue *P. icarus* were seen.

Adonis blue *Lysandra bellargus* : 2 Sep, 6 Sep, 7 Sep and 9 Sep.

Meleager's blue *Meleageria daphnis* : 2 Sep, 5 Sep and 9 Sep.

Anatolian blue argus *Plebejus crassipunctus* : 4 Sep and 5 Sep.

Silver-studded blue spp. *Plebejus sp.* : 2 Sep and 5 Sep.

Admirals & gliders - subf: Limenitinae

Southern white admiral *Limenitis reducta* : 6 Sep.

Vanessids & smaller fritillaries - subf: Nymphalinae

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* : 9 Sep.

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* : 5 Sep, 6 Sep, and 7 Sep.

Comma *Polygonia c-album* : 4 Sep.

Larger Fritillaries & Heliconians - subf: Heliconiinae

Cardinal *Argynnis pandora* : 31 Aug, 1 Sep, 2 Sep, 6 Sep, and 7 Sep.

Browns, Ringlets & Satyrs - subf: Satyrinae

Speckled wood *Pararge aegeria* : 6 Sep.

Wall brown *Lasiommata megera* : 2 Sep.

Large wall brown *Lasiommata maera* : 4 Sep.

Small heath *Coenonympha pamphilus* : 3 Sep, 6 Sep and 7 Sep.

Meadow brown *Maniola jurtina* : Not uncommon, but overlooked: 2 Sep and 5 Sep. Some may have been other similar species.

Great banded grayling *Brintesia circe* : 2 at Jermook road on 2 Sep.

GreyAsian grayling *Pseudochazara geyeri* : 7 Sep and 10 Sep.

Thelephassa grayling *Pseudochazara thelephassa* : 2 Sep and perhaps other dates.

Klug's tawny rockbrown *Pseudochazara pelopea* : 2 Sep and perhaps other dates.

Hermit *Chazara briseis* : Common and widespread in lowland areas; noted 2 Sep, 9 Sep and 10 Sep.

Freyer's/tree grayling *Hipparchia fatua / statilinus* : 2 Sep.

Tree grayling *Hipparchia statilinus* : 5 Sep.

MOTHS - LEPIDOPTERA

HAWK-MOTHS - SPHINGIDAE

Hummingbird hawkmoth *Macroglossum stellatarum* : 1 at Vayk on 1 Sep, 1 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

TIGER, ERMINE, FOOTMAN MOTHS & allies - ARCTIIDAE

Jersey tiger *Euplagia quadripunctaria* : At Artavan road on 2 Sep.

DAMSELFLIES & DRAGONFLIES – ODONATA

HAWKERS & EMPERORS - Aeshnidae

Migrant hawkler *Aeshna mixta* : 1 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Lesser emperor *Anax parthenope* : 2 at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

CHASERS, SKIMMERS & DARTERS - Libellulidae

Broad scarlet [darter] *Crocothemis erythraea* : Several at Armash Fishponds on 1 Sep.

Red-veined darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii* : Plenty at Lichk on 4 Sep.

Moustached/vagrant darter *Sympetrum vulgatum decoloratum* : 1 male at Artavan Road on 2 Sep, 1 female at Tezh Ler on 6 Sep, 1 male en route on 8 Sep.

OTHER SELECTED INSECTS - INSECTA

Great green bush cricket *Tettigonia viridissima* : 1 at Gndasar on 3 Sep.

Rosechafer *Cetonia? sp.* : 2 at Gndasar on 3 Sep.

Seven-spot ladybird *Coccinella spp.* : 3 spp at Aragats on 9 Sep.

Ant-lion *Myrmeleonidae* : Plenty at Vayk on 1 Sep.

Praying mantis *Mantis religiosa* : 1 at Aragats on 9 Sep.

OTHER SELECTED TAXA - .

Wasp spider sp. *Argiope sp.* : 1 on 6 Sep.

Woolly' wolf spider sp. *Lycosidae* : 1 at Lichk on 4 Sep.

Freshwater crab sp. *Potamon sp.* : 1 squashed on road at Haghpat on 6 Sep.