

## **South West Turkey, 29 April – 13 May 2019**

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I spent two weeks birding between Manavgat in the east and Koycegiz in the west, and inland to Akseki and Lakes Burdur, Isikli and Acigol, with the object of adding to my life list. My main guide was Dave Gosney's 2014 book 'Finding Birds In South West Turkey', and I also bought 'The Birds Of Turkey' (Kirwan et al 2008), a hardback book which although much more expensive, gives much interesting background on the birds and their distribution. I also found Brendan Searson's 'Dalyan Birding' website very useful.

The two overlapping Freytag & Berndt Turkish Riviera maps from Stanfords at 1:150.000 cover much of the coast, but I couldn't find any large-scale maps covering west of Fethiye or the inland areas, a big disadvantage when navigating and trying to explore places not in the guides.

Accommodation is cheap and plentiful along the coast, I booked self-catering apartments in Side, Fethiye and Koycegiz. Inland it's a different story, apartments, hotels and even guesthouses are thin on the ground, and I based myself in a hotel in Keciborlu, near Burdur. Flights were with EasyJet to Antalya, where I hired a car through Rentalcars.com, returning it to the airport at the end.

This report is based on the areas covered rather than a day-by-day account, and I visited some sites several times. A few of the key sites I missed out altogether due to lack of time, and I confess also lack of likelihood of getting any further lifers! I haven't usually mentioned the commoner birds I saw out of a trip list of 140. Photos were taken with a Panasonic FZ150 camera with telephoto adaptor.

### **Side & Titreyengol**

My first two lifers were from the balcony of my accommodation in Side! – **Yellow-vented Bulbul** and **Laughing Dove**, both fairly common around the town. I also heard my only **Golden Oriole** of the trip from the balcony. I visited Side ruins once, seeing **Masked Shrike**, **Serin**, and **Bulbuls** again, but little else of note. **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** were everywhere, as they were throughout the trip.

The lake and reedbeds at Titreyengol produced good views of **Graceful Warbler** (at the north end of the path, opposite the Riverside Hotel) and a **White-winged Tern** over the lake.



**Laughing Doves, Side**



Graceful Warbler, Titreyengol

### **Manavgat River**

On the recommendation of an earlier trip report I took the long straight track down the eastern side of the Manavgat River to the river mouth. As promised, this turned out to be a superb area, and I made three visits. At the end of the track, by the river mouth, there's a concrete reservoir divided into 10 compartments, not obvious from ground level but clearly seen on Google satellite view. The compartments have damp patches and a greater variety of vegetation than the surrounding area and so are attractive to waders and other birds. Here I found at least 12 **Spur-winged Plovers**, **Ruff**, **Curlew**, **Redshank**, **Green**, **Common** and **Wood Sandpipers**, **Black-headed Wagtail**, **Tawny Pipit** and four **Red-throated Pipits**, plus **Ringed** and **Little Ringed Plovers**. In the nearby reedbed along the river there were **Squacco Heron**, **Little Bittern** and **Little Egret**, and I had groups of **Purple Heron**, **Grey Heron** and **Glossy Ibis** overhead. Around the reservoir I also had **Little Owl**, **Hoopoe**, **Bee-eater**, **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, **Calandra Lark**, **Red-backed Shrike** and more.



Spur-winged Lapwing, Manavgat River

### **Akseki & Cimikoy**

Another tremendous area, I visited twice, well worth the longish drive from Side.

The cemetery produced **Syrian Woodpecker**, **Masked Shrike**, **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** and **Kruper's Nuthatch**, plus **Turtle Dove** and some noisy **Jays**. Continuing past the town through pine woodland towards Cimikoy and stopping at a couple of suitable places beside the road produced many more Bonelli's and another Kruper's.

There's nowhere to leave a car in Cimikoy village, so I decided to leave it just before the village and walk through and along the track beyond, which goes through a traditional farming landscape of small fields divided by rocky walls and scrubby trees. I'm glad I did, I would not have seen so much from the car. If you do take a car there, after a slightly rough slope just outside the village, the sandy track is level and perfectly driveable apart from one or two bigish puddles, and there are one or two places where you could leave it. A pair of **Red-fronted Serins** showed well in the middle of the village, **Isabelline** and **Black-eared Wheatear** and **Rock Nuthatch** were easy to pick up, and a pair of **Sombre Tits** showed well. An **Eastern Orphean Warbler** was singing and briefly seen, and a few **Cretzschmar's Buntings** were drinking from puddles, although **Ortolan Bunting** was much more common. **Crag Martin**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Black-headed Bunting** and **Woodlark** were also ticked off. About 2km along the track was a water trough, where I had several more **Red-fronted Serins** and another **Sombre Tit**. It would certainly be worth going further than this, where it starts to get into more mountainous country, and the track was still fine to drive beyond there.



**Red-fronted Serin, Cimikoy track**



Sombre Tit, Cimikoy track

### 'Radio Tower Hill'

A very interesting area just off the main D400 road west of Korkuteli, easy to work. I made two visits, walking the slopes before and after the radio masts. A male **Finsch's Wheatear** showed well both times along the roadside just past the masts, and I also had the three other Wheatear species, a party of **Rock Sparrows**, **Red-billed Chough**, **Rock Nuthatch**, **Short-toed Lark** and **Rock Thrush**, and a **Ruddy Shelduck** flew over calling.



Short-toed Lark, Radio Tower Hill



**Finsch's Wheatear, Radio Tower Hill**

I ventured further inland for a couple of days, covering the lakes in Gosney's guide.

### **Lake Burdur**

There was nothing of interest on the water, but the lake shore held **Black-winged Stilt**, **Ruddy Shelduck** and **Spur-winged Lapwing**, a **Long-legged Buzzard** flew over, and the scrubby slopes had many common warblers and other passerines, including **Spotted Flycatcher**.



**Ruddy Shelduck, Lake Burdur**

### Lake Isikli

The marshes viewed from the main road were full of herons, including about 100 **Squacco Heron**, plus many **Grey Heron**, **Purple Heron**, **Little and Great Egret** and **Glossy Ibis**, plus a few **White Storks** and **Black-winged Stilts** – a tremendous sight! I also found a **Black Stork** and a **Cattle Egret** there, and heard **Bittern**. Several **Pygmy Cormorants** flew over and there were many **Marsh Harriers**, 2 **Whiskered Terns** and a **Short-toed Eagle**.

The track to the lake shore had a signpost to a tower hide, so I was full of anticipation of some more good birds, but halfway along it got just a bit too rutted for my hire car, so I had to abandon that idea – frustrating, as I could see the hide in the distance, but nowhere to leave the car and too far to walk.

### Lake Acigol

Again the lake held little of interest, but the surrounding area was worth the visit. A flock of **Spoonbills** were on the shore, plus more **Spur-winged Lapwings** and **Ruddy Shelducks**. The scrubby slopes along the road were the most interesting though – stopping at several laybys and walking the slopes produced another lifer - a pair of **White-throated Robins**, plus **Syrian Woodpecker**, **Isabelline**, **Black-eared** and **Northern Wheatears**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Red-backed** and **Woodchat Shrike**, many **Spanish Sparrows**, and **Cirl**, **Ortolan**, **Black-headed** and **Cretzschmar's Buntings**, plus a good selection of other warblers and passerines. In the fields a flock of **Rooks** had a single **Red-billed Chough** with them.



Cretzschmar's Bunting, Lake Acigol



White-throated Robin, Lake Acigol

#### Koycegiz – Hamitkoy

Hamitkoy bridge produced nothing much, but exploring the channels off the track leading south from the village (Gosney p.12 site 2) was much more interesting, producing **White-breasted Kingfisher**, **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Penduline Tit** and a migrant **Whinchat**, plus much more. I tried to access the tracks into the marshes further east described by Gosney, but couldn't find a good accessible track without climbing over fences etc.

The muddy beach on the lake shore just west of Koycegiz before the bridge looked interesting, and I found **Ringed** and **Little Ringed Plover**, **Little Stint** and **Curlew Sandpiper** there.

#### Dalyan Rocky Outcrop

This was well worth it, I made two visits. **Penduline Tit**, **Zitting Cisticola** and **Rufous Bushchat** showed well, **Alpine Swifts** were overhead and several **White-winged Terns** passed by.

### Dalaman beach pools

I had more good views of **Rufous Bushchat**, and there were **Spur-winged Lapwing**, **Black-winged Stilt** **Little Ringed Plover**, **Black-headed Wagtail**, **White-winged Tern** and a **Bittern** around the pools.



**Rufous Bushchat, Dalaman pools**

### Calis Beach Marsh, Fethiye

As others have said, this was disappointing, with poor viewing and few birds – certainly not the paradise promised on the signboard! I couldn't see how to get up the tower Gosney mentions, but there's a platform on the roof of the hotel security hut further on which you could climb up, but it wasn't even worth the 10TL parking fee. The access from the east side along the main road was a bit more interesting though. There's a new signboard (see photo), it gives no information at all about access, but just north of it a path leads along the shore next to the old signboard, where I had **Turnstone**, **Black Tern** and **Slender-billed Gull**.



**Calis Beach Marsh – not the promised paradise!**

### **Babadag**

I could see the top was shrouded in mist and the very long track is narrow and steep in places, so I made do with exploring the scrubby slope just below the security gate, where **Ruppell's Warblers** were very active and songflighting.

### **Patara Beach**

I spent some time around the ruins and pools, finding a blue-headed flava wagtail of either the nominate race or possibly one of the eastern races (see what you think from the photo!), plus plenty of warblers, buntings and other passerines.



**Yellow Wagtail (flava or eastern race?), Patara Beach**

### **Gogu-Beli Pass**

I couldn't see any water troughs at all at the summit of the pass, but there were at least 30 **Red-fronted Serins** at the roadside and on the surrounding slopes, plus a few **Common Serins** and the usual **Northern** and **Black-throated Wheatears**.

### **Summary**

I found nearly all my target birds surprisingly easy to pick up except for **Crimson-winged Finch**, which I failed to find, although more time spent at Cimikoy might have got it. I did have a couple of possible sites for **Black Francolin** but as a very outside possibility I didn't go for them, nor did I go for the **Brown Fish Owls**. **Chukar** was the only other one I didn't connect with, but I was happy with 18 out of 20 of my target birds.