

# Georgia and Armenia

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26 April to 7 May 2017

## Introduction

Georgia and Armenia! It's hard to think of two more bird-rich and evocative countries in the Western Palearctic. So, when my brother Dom and I were looking at where to go for our first birding trip outside Israel, where Dom lives, the decision was easy. In the event, the trip exceeded even our expectations!



*Dom and me at dawn in the Greater Caucasus mountains, with the Gergeti Trinity Church behind us (with thanks to Zviad).*

The itinerary neatly split into three: first a few days in the Greater Caucasus mountain range in the north of Georgia, then an amazing off-road trip to the wild steppe in the far east of the country and finally an all-to-brief two and half days around Yerevan in Armenia. The birding in both countries was exceptional. Their relatively undeveloped or semi-wild landscapes support an abundance of birdlife of a wide range of species that I have rarely seen in Europe, including several birds at the northern/western end of their ranges. In spring most of them are in pristine plumage and singing!

Our primary goal was to see the near-endemics of the Great Caucasus – Great Rosefinch (one of the most exotic Western Palearctic species I can think of), Güldenstädt's Redstart, Mountain Chiffchaff, Caucasian Black Grouse and Caucasian Snowcock. In Armenia we wanted to see Radde's Accentor, White-throated Robin, Crimson-winged Finch and Grey-necked Bunting. We also wanted to find Lammergeir, Wallcreeper, Eastern and Western Rock Nuthatches, Snowfinch and Green, Ménétries and Paddyfield Warblers. In the end we saw 14 of the 17 'target species' (missing only Crimson-winged

and Snowfinches, and in my case adequate views of Green Warbler). More than anything we enjoyed incredible views of a wide range of stunning birds, with 205 species in total.

## Itinerary and Birds Seen



Day	Date	Place (in Georgia unless stated)	Birds seen (first sighting)
1	26-April	Botanic Gardens in Tbilisi	Black-bellied Dipper, Red-breasted Flycatcher
2	27-April	Travelling to and around Kazbegi	Steppe Eagle, Red-billed and Alpine Choughs
3	28-April	Around Kazbegi	Lammergeier, Wallcreeper, Güldenstadt's Redstart
4	29-April	Gergeti and the eastern slopes of Kazbegi	Ménétries Warbler, Caucasian Grouse, Mountain Chiffchaff, Red-fronted Serin, Caucasian Snowcock
5	30-April	Kazbegi and driving to Dedoplistskaro	Great Rosefinch, Horned Lark, Twite
6	01-May	Vashlovani Protected Area	Pied Wheatear, Imperial Eagle, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Rose-coloured Starling
7	02-May	Chachuna Managed Reserve	Lesser Kestrel, White-tailed Eagle, Common Rosefinch, Black Francolin, Citrine Wagtail
8	03-May	Davit Gareja monastery and return to Tbilisi via Lake Jandari; train to Armenia	Eagle Owl, Western Rock Nuthatch, Demoiselle Crane
9	04-May	Mount Aragats, Armenia	White-throated Robin, Radde's Accentor, Alpine Accentor
10	05-May	Vedi Gorge and Urtz Ridge (Armarsh village), Armenia	Grey-necked Bunting, Finsch's Wheatear, Bimaculated Lark, Eastern Rock Nuthatch



Day	Date	Place (in Georgia unless stated)	Birds seen (first sighting)
11	06-May	Armash Fish Ponds, Armenia; taxi journey back to Tbilisi	Broad-billed Sandpiper, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, White-tailed Lapwing, Paddyfield Warbler
12	07-May	Visiting Botanic Gardens in Tbilisi	Nothing new

## Day by Day

### Day 1 – Arriving in Tbilisi – Wednesday 26 April

I had left Stansted the previous afternoon and after a 3-hour 30-minute transit in Istanbul Airport (which is truly the meeting point of all peoples of the earth!) arrived at Tbilisi in the dark at 02:20 a.m. Zviad, our driver for the Georgia portion of the trip, met me and whisked me to the Hotel Ambassadors in central Tbilisi. After my largely sleepless night, this was a great start, thanks to the support of the Georgia National Tourist Administration (GNTA).

Dom had arrived the previous day and birded the Tbilisi Botanic Gardens in the early morning while I attempted to catch up on sleep. Big mistake – he found the gardens swarming with flycatchers and warblers, including Semi-Collared Flycatcher and Green Warbler. We met there at lunchtime and re-traced his steps around the Botanic Gardens. The common warblers and **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were still present, but the scarcer species had moved on. Even so we saw a flyover flock of **Bee-eaters**, a **Redstart** and a **Black-bellied Dipper** bobbing on a rock by the stream in the warm spring sunshine.



*Red-breasted Flycatcher and Chiffchaff in the Tbilisi Botanic Gardens in late afternoon sunshine.*

Tbilisi is a lively place after dark. We settled on the Pirosmiani Restaurant on Kote Afkhazi Street in the tourist area and washed down a huge meal with local wine accompanied by lusty Georgian singing.

### Day 2 – Travelling to Kazbegi – Thursday 27 April

After an equally large breakfast (I find it difficult not to eat too much at hotel buffets!) we gathered our things and hurried down to the lobby to meet our companions for the rest of our Georgian adventure. Dachi Shoshitashvili, our guide from Batumi Birding was waiting for us. Together with Zviad we climbed into the high-wheelbase Landrover Discovery, also provided by the GNTA, which would be our home for the next week. As we drove north towards the Great Caucasus mountains along the Georgian Military Highway, the main artery connecting Georgia with southern Russia, our anticipation mounted.



*A side valley of the River Aragvi with the high peaks of the Great Caucasus in the background.*

The drab suburbs gave way to wooded hills which quickly gained height. Dilapidated classic cars lurked amongst the foliage in overgrown gardens by the road. Soon we joined the course of the foaming River Aragvi which snaked across a wide gravel floodplain next to us. Clouds gathered overhead as the valley steepened and the road surface roughened. Zviad made abrupt changes of line and speed as he skilfully negotiated access to the flattest patches of tarmac with the oncoming traffic. I was glad it was him doing it and not me!



*An Ortolan Bunting feeding by the Georgian Military Highway.*

We made a few stops for coffee and picked up a chance **Ortolan Bunting**, a migrating **Steppe Eagle** and, as the road ascended higher, **Ring Ouzels** and both species of **Chough**. The air cooled and snow covered the peaks around us, but we were anxious to get to Kazbegi and did not stop. Even at the Jvari Pass, the highest point of the road where concrete tunnels provide protection from avalanches, we kept going.



*Snowy peaks in the Great Caucasus range, seen from the Georgian Military Highway near Gudauri.*



Kazbegi, or Stepantsminda as it is now formally known, sits in the bottom of a cold mountain valley, its western side sundered in two by the gorge of the River Terek. The high peaks on all sides are often covered in cloud but as we approached the town it was bathed in sunshine. This was, in theory, not a good thing because in late April and early May bad weather is said to force the alpine birds down around the town. Under blue skies they ascend out of reach to their rocky breeding grounds around the peaks. In spite of the sun, the breeze was decidedly chilly, and the trees were only just starting to produce leaves, in sharp contrast to the lush greenery in Tbilisi.



*Scanning the eastern slopes above Kazbegi for Grouse and Snowcock (looking east).*

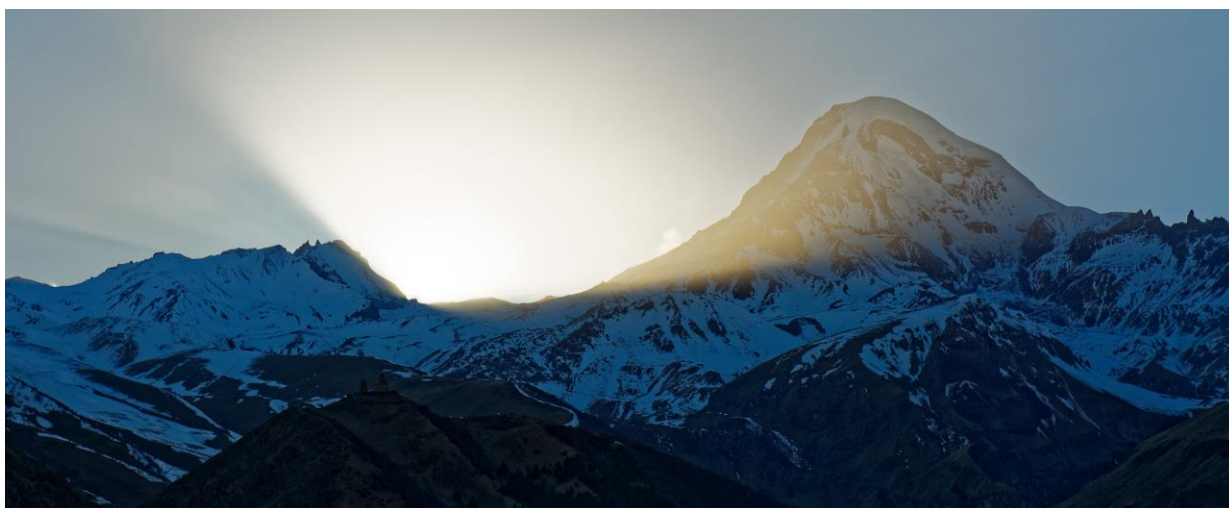
East of the town the land rises ever more steeply up to the snow-covered crags. This is a prime location for the Caucasian Black Grouse and Caucasian Snowcock. We bumped up the track eastwards to the picturesque church of Ioane Natlismcemeli, hidden from below by a small pine wood. Keeping going, we parked by a knoll which gave views of the slopes soaring above us. We scanned for an hour or so in the cold wind and found no gamebirds but did see a male **Tûr** nonchalantly munching some vegetation quite close to us. Slightly discouraged by the vastness of the mountainside and the smallness of the birds we headed back down for a late lunch.

The best places for passerines are the areas of buckthorn scrub around the town. After lunch we worked the scrub and paddocks in the grassy valley northwest of the town. We found no Rosefinches but did see a few **Common and Black Redstarts** (including one *semirufus*), a **Rock Bunting** and some more **Ring Ouzels**. Best bird award went to a **dukensis White Wagtail** with its white flight feathers – a gorgeous bird!



*White Wagtail dukensis – they breed in Siberia and winter in Georgia.*

As the sun dropped lower we headed to Rooms Hotel beneath the eastern slopes where we took in a breath-taking 'sunset' across the valley behind the Gergeti Trinity Church. Surprisingly, there was no red tinge in the light, but the western mountains cast an amazing shadow.



*The sun setting behind Mount Kazbek (and the Gergeti Trinity Church) seen from the balcony of Rooms Hotel, Kazbegi.*

### Day 3 – Around Kazbegi – Friday 28 April

A severe dehydration headache kept me awake most of the night. Again, I lay in bed the following morning while Dom, Dachi and Sviad went back to the eastern slopes. Fortunately (from my point of view) they saw nothing new apart from a Red-fronted Serin which landed a few feet in front of them as they scanned. I hauled myself out of bed and after some lunch began to feel human again. We then met the final addition to our party. Brecht Verhelst is a leading conservationist and founder of Batumi Birding, and he had agreed to act guide us for the rest of our time in Georgia, assisted by Dachi.

Brecht took us to the track which runs south along the west side of the river from the bridge joining the eastern and western parts of Kazbegi. We walked along it to scan over the large swathe of buckthorn scrub which borders the river. After about 10 minutes Dom happened to turn around. 'This looks big', he said, as a very large bird with long, narrow, down-swept wings glided straight towards us along the river valley and passed directly overhead, without a single wing-beat. Viewed head-on, it initially looked almost like an albatross, but it quickly became clear it was a **Lammergeier**!



*Lammergeier and Golden Eagle in the River Terek valley.*

Elated, we turned back to the scrub and the gleaming white crown of a **Golden Eagle's Redstart** shone like a beacon at the top of bush quite close to us. There were also 3 **Rock Buntings**, a couple of **Common Sandpipers** on the river and 2 **Griffon Vultures** soaring over the crags. As we walked back into town we checked the dried mud cliff next to the track. A **Wallcreeper** flicked its scarlet-spotted wings as it hunted insects amongst the roots and dried grasses. Three lifers in 25 minutes!





*Wallcreeper on the mud cliff next to the River Terek.*

After lunch we headed back to the eastern slopes, but this time we worked another patch of buckthorn scrub at their base. Still no Rosefinches but two more **Güldenstädt's Redstarts** hopped up onto the tops of bushes, and two more **Lammergeiers** soared high above us. The distant call of a **Snowcock** could be faintly heard drifting down from the crags. Encouraged, we went back to the same knoll as yesterday. The wind was as cold and the sun as bright and once again we could see no Snowcocks or Grouse. The trilling of a few **Red-Fronted Serins** was carried past us on the wind and a huge flock of **Alpine Choughs** repeatedly lifted into the air from the slope opposite and settled back down. As the shadows lengthened the temperature fell and we drove back down into Kazbegi for warmth and food.



*Scanning the eastern slopes above Kazbegi (looking north).*



## Day 4 – Gergeti and the eastern slopes – Saturday 29 April

We decided to get serious in our quest for Grouse and rose at 4 am to be high in the hills at dawn. Zviad carefully guided the Discovery in the dark up the rough track to the Gergeti Trinity Church overlooking Kazbegi from the west. Ignoring the church, we kept ascending and when the vehicle could go no further we scrambled up the steep hillside on foot, our lungs straining in the cold air.



*West beyond Gergeti Trinity Church – home of Caucasian Black Grouse and, in the birch woods to the right, Mountain Chiffchaff.*

At 2,500 metres the wind whipped across the hillside and our legs sank through the crust of the snow fields. **Water Pipits** were everywhere defending territories, some of which were still mostly snow! A few **Swallows** darted past on their way north to Russia. Scoping the slopes above us we resolved some black dots on the snowfield into **Caucasian Black Grouse**, and with care we could pick out their lyre-shaped tails. A group of four females appeared closer to us and a male emerged to perform his ritual flapping dance. The females promptly flew off and the male retreated to nurse his wounded pride.

Our route down took us past the highest birch woods, next to the curved snow patch to the right of the photo above. A **Mountain Chiffchaff** sang from the leafless stems. Further down the track a flock of **Red-fronted Serins** was trilling in a clearing, accompanied by two **Eurasian Bullfinches**.



*Mountain Chiffchaff and Red-Fronted Serin in the birch woods above Gergeti.*



After lunch we went back to the eastern slopes and this time we climbed them. Up and up we went, almost to the crags, the ground getting steeper and the plaintive calls of Snowcock getting slowly louder. Looking across the valley we saw that we were even higher than the Gergeti Trinity Church. We scanned the outcrops above us again and again, trying to locate the echoing wails, until suddenly a couple of **Caucasian Snowcock** popped up on a nearby rock and gave amazing views through the scope. Then two more appeared, a little further off, and four **Black Grouse** flew close by and landed. The red eye-brows of the male were very striking. A pair of **Lammergeiers** did several flypasts and Dom and Brecht saw a Golden Eagle. Unfortunately, some large raindrops started to fall from the darkening cloud and we decided we did not want to be caught out in a storm halfway up the mountain.

On our way back down, we searched the buckthorn scrub at the base of the slope one more time (unsuccessfully) for Rosefinches. Instead, we found a rather light female **Ménétries Warbler**, like a Sardinian Warbler in the 'milky coffee' colours of a Booted Warbler – a strange bird! Presumably a migrant forced down by the weather. When we got to the vehicle it was raining steadily and the day was ending, so we went back to Rooms to warm up by the fire, very satisfied with the day's birds.

## Day 5 – Around Kazbegi and travelling to Kakheti – Sunday 30 April

Despite the previous day's success, there was still a major omission from the trip list: Great Rosefinch. Looking out of the window as we packed we could see that the cloud layer had descended further, and fresh snow had dusted the flanks of the mountains. Although we had a long drive to Kakheti, in the far east of Georgia, we had an hour or two for one last roll of the Rosefinch dice.



*Great Rosefinch in the buckthorn scrub west of Kazbegi.*

The western valley, now gashed end-to-end by the track of the new road, was chilly and grey and a few spots of rain fell. We moved slowly along the scrub, which had mercifully been spared by the builders. Brecht spotted two **Great Rosefinches** lurking in the depths of the buckthorn, but both gave poor views. After a nerve-wracking few minutes, the male hopped up the stems and sat in full view for 10 seconds – enough to capture a shot of this magnificent bird. High-fives all round!!

We had one last piece of business in the Caucasus mountains – the Jvari Pass, the highest point of the Georgian Military Highway. There are places to pull off before and after the concrete tunnels. This is a good site for Snowfinch, but they were not showing during our visit. A **Horned Lark** and some **brevirostris Twite** were visible near the road, and the cry of a distant **Snowcock** could be heard. We would have liked to stay longer but the steppes of Kakheti, eastern Georgia, beckoned.



*Commercial traffic from Russia navigating the snow tunnels near the top of the Jvari Pass.*

The gentle warmth of the lower valley was a welcome change after the mountains. We briefly explored the broad-leaved woods, with leaves fully emerged, next to the road below Ananuri, perched above the huge expanse of the Zhinvali Reservoir. **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were singing everywhere but the putative calls of a Semi-collared Flycatcher and the possible song of a Green Warbler were not conclusive (the latter certainly not good enough for my life list). That is one I shall go back for!



*Spotted Flycatcher in the woods below Ananuri.*

The drive to Kakheti took us past reminders of the countries around us. A lorry from Kazakhstan had tipped sideways into the ditch part-way down the mountain, causing a brief traffic jam. Then as we entered Tbilisi we passed a sign saying 'Tehran 1,289 km'. Soon after there were signs to Yerevan in Armenia and Baku in Azerbaijan. It felt as though we were passing the turnings on the Silk Road.

As we sped east from Tbilisi through gently rolling vineyards (Georgia exports most of its wine to Russia, unfortunately for us) we noticed stalls by the road selling what looked like intestines suspended on strings protected by clear plastic. We stopped, and I cautiously tried one of the lumpy pink-orange fingers. My suspicion could not have been more misplaced – it was sweet and delicious! *Churchxela* (ჭურჭხელა in Georgian) is a traditional snack made from walnuts threaded on a string and dipped repeatedly in a mixture of reduced grape juice and flour. A couple of strings combined with a sweet black coffee each morning fuelled me through the next few days in the field. Perfect birding food! (The Armenian version is called *sujuk* and sometimes includes mulberry juice.)

## **Day 6 – Dedoplistkaro and Vashlovani – Monday 1 May**

1<sup>st</sup> May 2017 is in my top 10 days of birding. Such experiences are not just about the variety of species or the count of lifers. The weather that day was stunning and the landscapes simply beautiful. Most of the time we were off-road on dirt tracks, driving through the steppe of the Vashlovani Protected



Area. Birds were everywhere, and we hardly saw another human being. It was more like birding in an African national park than in Europe.



*Zviad, our tireless driver, with Christ's Thorn bushes in the background and the Greater Caucasus mountains in the far distance.*

Our birding day started as the sun rose over a misty Kochebi Lake just outside Dedoplistskaro. Dew glistened on the lush grass surrounding the shallow lake. 10 **Red-necked Phalaropes** spun on the glassy surface and **Red-throated Pipits** fed on the muddy margins. Many **Black-headed** and **Corn Buntings** sang from bushes. **Pallid** and **Montagu's Harriers**, **Hobby** and **Long-legged Buzzard** passed through and a **Roller** hunted insects from a nearby power line.



*Calandra Larks breed in high densities in the Vashlovani Protected Area.*

We left the tarmac and Zviad drove slowly southeast along a long low grassy ridge, with Azerbaijan visible to the south and the snowy tops of the Greater Caucasus range just visible on the northern horizon. A generous scattering of 'Christ's Thorn' bushes provided song perches for **Black-headed Buntings**. One Black-headed Bunting was literally close enough to touch as we slid past, far too close to photograph. **Lesser-grey and Woodchat Shrikes** swooped down for beetles. Flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** and **Ortolans** chattered. Overhead were two **Griffon Vultures** and a **Lesser-spotted Eagle**. In the neighbouring fields **Calandra Larks** sang and **Tawny Pipits** scampered.



*Griffon Vulture in the Vashlovani Protected Area.*

The ridge was broken by a gorge which cut through it into some low 'bad land' hills. We took the track down to the stiflingly hot bed of the gorge and followed its twists and turns on foot, Zviad driving behind us slowly. **Pied Wheatears, Eastern Orphean Warblers, Rock Sparrows** and **Blue Rock Thrushes** sang from the sides. **Alpine Swifts** and **House Martins** were nesting in the cliffs. **Black and Griffon Vultures** and **Short-toed and White-tailed Eagles** soared above. We came to a huge cliff which was home to at least 3 Griffon Vulture nests. Several Griffons and an **Egyptian Vulture** staged a flypast.



*Unfenced steppe looking towards Azerbaijan – this plain had high densities of larks of 4 species.*



Next, we came to a vast featureless plain with the border with Azerbaijan just visible on the far horizon and followed the track south-east across the short grass. **Calandra Larks** were nesting in incredible densities here, and one flew up every few tens of metres as we drove past. Some of them performed their bat-like display flights just in front of the vehicle, as big as Redshanks. **Crested Larks** were also everywhere, and a few **Short-toed and Lesser-short Toed Larks** were visible on or near the track. There were also many **Isabelline Wheatears**, standing to attention as they watched us pass. Away to our left was the line of bluffs over which an **Eastern Imperial Eagle** did a display flight.



*Dry valley in the extreme south-east of the Vashlovani Protected Area – habitat of Rose-coloured Starlings, Bee-eaters and Rollers.*

The track turned back north-east into a dry valley cutting through the bluffs where a flock of **Rose-coloured Starlings** hopped among the bushes and more **Rollers** appeared. At the end of the valley the track crossed a dried-up river bed in the bank of which a colony of **European Bee-eaters** had made their home. We parked just beneath the entrance holes and watched them come and go in the warm afternoon sun while we took photos. Some **European Starlings** were also nesting here but they did not mix with their Rosy cousins a few hundred metres away.



*Isabelline Wheatear and Rose-coloured Starling.*



*European Bee-eaters at 1/3,200s in the late afternoon sun.*

The shadows were lengthening, and we had a long drive back through the grasslands and fields, so we reluctantly kept moving back west. Along the way we picked up some **Little Ringed Plovers** nesting by the track, a **Black-eared Wheatear** singing from a tree, many **shrikes** (**Red-backed**, **Lesser Grey** and **Woodchat**), a **Marsh Harrier** quartering a reed bed and a surprise flock of **Yellow Wagtails**. Back in Dedoplistskaro we ravenously consumed a huge meal *al fresco*, serenaded by a **Scops Owl**.

## **Day 7 – Chachuna Reserve – Tuesday 2 May**



*Eastern Georgian steppe just after dawn as we drove south to the Taribana Reservoir.*



The following day started cloudy but again we set off with high hopes after another sweet, black, gritty coffee. Any water body is potentially interesting to birds in these dry grasslands and our first stop was the Taribana Reservoir, above a vast plain 15 km due south of Dedoplistskaro. Along the way we picked up **Little Owl**, **Corncrake**, a dark-phase **Long-legged Buzzard** and a male **Montagu's Harrier**.



*Taribana Reservoir, eastern Georgia – the reedbed was to the left of the road after the distant bend to the left.*

The reservoir held a **Ruddy Shelduck** and the surrounding grassland had hundreds of **Yellow Wagtails** and several singing **Lesser Short-toed Larks**. Walking over the hill revealed another small reservoir which had been drained and was now a tree-fringed reedbed. This held two **Penduline Tits**, a **Syrian Woodpecker**, a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** and two singing **Great Reed Warblers**. The latter confused us initially with their pale (not rusty-buff) undertail coverts. We concluded they must have been an eastern race we were not familiar with.



*Steppe near the Taribana Reservoir – derelict pylons just visible in the distance, Lesser Short-toed Larks singing above.*

The smaller reservoir had clearly been intended for the irrigation of crops on the plain below us. This had reverted to grassland and across it marched a series of huge pylons now shorn of their cables. At the top of one of them through the scope we could make out a nesting platform for **Imperial Eagles**, surrounded by a cloud of **Spanish Sparrows**. Brecht also told us that a few months previously he had

seen a flock of 5,000 Little Bustards flying over the plain. Turning back to the car a flock of **Rose-coloured Starlings** flew past.



*Rosy Starlings at an oil terminal near the Chachuna Managed Reserve .*

We headed further south into the Chachuna Managed Reserve through the depopulated landscape, passing an even bigger flock of several hundred **Rose-coloured Starlings** hanging around by an oil terminal. We also saw a flock of **Eurasian Jackdaws**, another **European Bee-eater** colony, another **Lesser Grey Shrike** and huge numbers of **Isabelline Wheatears**. An immense **Imperial Eagle** circled low over us and examined us closely before gaining height and flying off.



*Eastern Imperial Eagle in the Chachuna Managed Reserve.*



The Chachuna Reserve includes long stretches of riverine gallery forest along the River Iori. After clearing a military checkpoint we drove slowly through the brush on the flood-plain and a male **Black Francolin** came to inspect us, running round the vehicle like a nervous chicken.



*Black Francolin in the Chachuna Managed Reserve.*

We stopped by the Iori for lunch in the shade of some tamarisk trees, their pink flowers hanging down around us. **Common Rosefinch, Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Nightingale** and **Penduline Tit** were all calling or singing. While we were eating our boiled eggs, bread and cheese, Brecht wandered by the river and found a tortoise. After we had finished our meal we tried to pin down two **Ménétries Warblers** which were duetting in the scrub near us but they proved frustratingly elusive.



*Lunch next to the River Iori surrounded by tamarisk trees.*

Our next stop was the huge Dalis Mta Reservoir, yet another deserted monument to the Soviet era. As we drove along the dam we could see to the right the silvery expanse of water. An adult **White-tailed Eagle** wheeled over the far side and a number of **Great Crested Grebes** and **Black-necked Grebes** dotted the surface. To the left we could survey the treetops of the riverine forest along the river below the dam, which echoed to the calls of **Black Francolin**. A pair of **Golden Orioles** and many **Stock Doves** flew from tree to tree and a **Pygmy Cormorant** shared the river with a beaver!



*Lesser Kestrel at the Dalis Mta Reservoir under heavy cloud.*

At the far end of the dam a pair of **Lesser Kestrels** had build their nest on the overflow tower. A colony of **Rollers** had taken residence in a nearby sandy gorge. Nineteen summer-plumaged **White-winged Terns** flew through accompanied by one winter-plumage **Red-necked Phalarope**. As we drove out the only two **Tree Sparrows** of the trip were chirping in a bush by the track.



*14 (of 19) White-winged Terns and one Red-necked Phalarope migrating past the Dalis Mta Reservoir.*



We spent the last hour or two searching for Ring-necked Pheasants in the riverine forest, as the cloud thickened and the light faded. This is the western-most limit of the wild Asian population. Despite a great deal of scanning from suitable vantage points and picking our way through thick vegetation we had neither sight nor sound. The consolation prize was a magnificent male **Citrine Wagtail** which flew in to feed on some mud next to us as the first rain drops fell – a great end to another fantastic day!



*Pistachio trees dotting the Chachuna steppe as the light faded – no fences or roads or habitation.*

## Day 8 – Davit Gareja Monastery and back to Tbilisi – Wednesday 3 May

It was overcast and raining when we set off the next morning, heading west towards Tbilisi. Our plan was to turn south *en route* and visit the rock-hewn Davit Gareja monastery, right on the border with Azerbaijan, looking for Rock Nuthatches. As we drove, Dachi sang along to *Mattie Groves* by Fairport Convention, which seemed quite surreal as we sped across the cultivated steppe.

After crossing the River Iori again, now canalised between agricultural fields, we stopped off at several isolated water bodies looking for migrants. The first two (Kapatadze Lake and Jikurebi Lake) were neighbouring salt lakes which held a few **Teal, Dunlin and Redshank** barely visible through the rain and mist. The third was near the mournful settlement of Udabno, which means ‘desert’ in Georgian, in the middle of a vast plain near the Azeri border. This bleak habitation was created from nothing to house members of the Svan village of Mulakhi, far away in the mountain valleys of the Greater Caucasus, which was destroyed by a landslide in 1987. As we drove slowly between the damp, impoverished houses, many virtually in ruins, it was easy to imagine the misery of the mountain-dwellers as they contemplated their new lives here.

Leaving Udabno, and feeling a little despondent ourselves, we left the surfaced roads and followed a rough track through some low hills to the final body of water, a lonely reservoir (which annoyingly I cannot now find on the map). As we got out of the Landrover to check for birds, we turned around to see three vicious-looking dogs sprinting towards us from a shepherd’s homestead about 500 metres away. We had plenty of time to get back into the vehicle, but it was a reminder of the need to be very careful around sheep. These dogs are bred to defend the flock from wolves, and it was clear that they would think nothing of having a go at us too. Fortunately, in a way, the reservoir held no birds at all.



*One of three fierce dogs between Udabno and Davit Gareja monastery.*

We carried on and, as the rain eased, we began to see more birds: **Black-eared and Finsch's Wheatears** and a singing **Eastern Orphean Warbler**. A **Western Rock Nuthatch** appeared on a large rock by the track and delighted us by flying up to sing from a nearby shrub, giving fantastic sustained views. As we stood there, we were astounded to see an **Eagle Owl** flying fast over us, as big as a buzzard. By the time we realised what it was it had gone behind a hill, so we took no photos.



*Western Rock Nuthatch near Davit Gareja monastery.*

In the crags above were several caves from one of which emerged an angry monk who loudly denounced us for not making straight to the church at Davit Gareja, a display of impiety which clearly offended him. He started to descend to our track, and we turned around to avoid having to discuss the matter with him. Our revised route forced us to cross a muddy valley, and the limitations of the road tyres on the Landrover were exposed as Sviad battled to get the vehicle up the steep slope.



Eventually he succeeded with the help of Brecht pushing and we were so distracted that we did not fully appreciate the **Pied Wheatear** which appeared during the commotion.



*The road tyres of the Landrover struggle with the mud.*

After this eventful start to the day, we were relieved to pull into the car park of the monastery. Paying our respects briefly at the church, we took the track upwards to the summit of Mount Gareja. Another **Eastern Orphean Warbler** sang almost like a Nightingale from an almond tree by the path. We stopped to taste the bitter unripe nuts with their soft, green furry skins.



*David Gareja Monastery, with the rock-cut cells for the monks to the right.*



At the top, our feet submerged in a carpet of blue flax flowers, our eyes were drawn north-westwards along the ridge separating Georgia and Azerbaijan. In the distance, a shower of rain partially obscured another ruined monastery sitting dramatically atop the rocky knife-edge. A **Honey Buzzard** flew past on its way to western Russia.



*Part of Davit Gareja monastery on Mount Gareja, Azerbaijan the left, Georgia to the right.*

Our final stop before Tbilisi was Lake Jandari, also on the border with Azerbaijan. Scanning the wide grassy margins, Brecht spotted ten **Demoiselle Cranes** marching across the sward feeding energetically for the next stage of their migration. Also on the grass was our only **Rook** of the trip.



*Demoiselle Cranes at Lake Jandari.*

On the lake itself were **Whiskered Terns**, **White-winged Terns**, **Great White Egrets** and **Great Crested Grebes**. Driving away we saw overhead two **Lesser Spotted Eagles** and two **Eastern Imperial Eagles**.





*Whiskered Tern and White-winged Tern at Lake Jandari.*

The drive into Tbilisi was very quick and before we knew it, we were saying goodbye with sadness to our companions for the Georgian part of our trip: Brecht, Dachi and Sviad. The last seven days had indeed been an epic birding adventure. Our huge thanks are due to the Georgian National Tourism Administration for their help and to Batumi Birding for guiding us!



*Dom, Dachi, Brecht and me in the Greater Caucasus mountains at the start of the trip (with thanks to Sviad).*

For the journey south to Yerevan we had booked the overnight sleeper train so Zviad dropped us at the Railway Station. The platform and train appeared to have had no cleaning or maintenance in the previous 50 years and the unsmiling attendant who issued our sheets seemed to be from the same era. Nevertheless, we bedded down and slept reasonably well apart from an hour spent at the border with the light on while an equally unsmiling border guard first took and then returned our passports.

## **Day 9 – Mount Aragats, Armenia – Thursday 4 May**

Armenia shares Georgia's remote monasteries but is even more mountainous – it is the 10<sup>th</sup> highest country in the world measured by average elevation. The tallest peak is the 4,090-metre-high Mount Aragats, an extinct volcano north of the capital Yerevan. Looking south from Aragats on a clear day, beyond Yerevan, the iconic cones of the not-to-be-confused and even higher Mount Ararat can be seen distantly across the border in Turkey.

I was jolted awake and, seeing that it was daylight, drew back the curtain and peered out of the dirty train window. There it was, the fabled Mount Ararat, the lower cone covered in snow and picked out

by the sunrise, the upper cone wreathed in cloud. **White Stork** nests were perched on some of the telegraph poles and rooftops (many Armenians encourage the birds, believing they bring good luck). I could not open any of the windows to 'taste' the air, but what a start to the day!



*Mount Ararat visible through a dirty train window approaching Yerevan.*

At 06:00 we were met at Yerevan Railway Station by Ani and Artem Sarkisyan, two knowledgeable and hospitable local birders who were to guide us in Armenia. They had already bought breakfast and lunch on our behalf and so we immediately headed for Mount Aragats, about 50 km to the north west of Yerevan. There was nowhere open to satisfy our coffee cravings, so they very kindly stopped at their house on the way to give us coffee, for which we were very grateful.

There is a steep, narrow tarmac road up the mountain which gives access, in the right weather conditions, to all the main habitats. Leaving the main highway, we drove up through altitudinal bands of vegetation, under low cloud and showers. The first vegetation type was rock-strewn moorland with bushes and stands of pines. In this zone we saw from the road a couple of **White-throated Robins**, **Red-backed Shrikes**, **Common Rosefinch**, **Rock Sparrows** and many **Northern Wheatears**. After leaving the tree line behind us we encountered **Tree Pipits**, **Woodlarks**, **Mistle Thrushes** and another ***dukhensis* White Wagtail**. A few kilometres later, we stopped at a picnic area amongst some isolated pines (presumably planted) to eat our breakfast, with a few **Ortolans** for company.



*Orange and red – Rock Thrush and Linnet on the slopes of Mount Aragats.*



The next layer was dwarf juniper, again liberally strewn with rocks of all sizes. **Rock Thrushes** and **Linnets** appeared, and we had a poor view of a **Radde's Accentor**, perched on a roadside wall through the mist. We turned off on a side road to the Amberd Fortress, a gloomy ruin and ancient church perched on a spur overlooking a deep valley. Two **Red-billed Choughs** and some **Ring Ouzels** accompanied us as we walked around the buildings. The sun came out and some raptors appeared – a **Merlin**, a **Montagu's Harrier** and a kettle of **Honey Buzzards**. Driving back to the 'main' road, we stopped to search some ruined buildings, and a Radde's Accentor popped up on a wall to sing for us!



*One of my birds of the trip – Radde's Accentor singing on Mount Aragats.*

Continuing our ascent, we passed more White-throated Robins and Radde's Accentors. Then we stumbled upon 250 **Waxwings** feeding on rose-hips and dwarf juniper berries by the road and flying up to perch on the nearby telegraph wires. We knew they had been there two weeks earlier but even so they were the least expected birds of our whole trip.



*One of 250 Waxwings on Mount Aragats, Armenia.*

We reached the snow line and many **Water Pipits** and *brevisostris* **Twite** appeared, as did a distant **Eurasian Cuckoo** perched bizarrely on a rock surrounded by snow. Above 3,000 metres the snow patches coalesced and there were many **Horned Larks** visible picking their way through the rocks. It

was not easy to stop on the narrow road with deep snow lying on either side, and we took advantage of a pull-off by a hut where we scanned the sides of a steep rocky valley. Other than Horned Larks and Water Pipits the main birds were four **Alpine Accentors** chasing each other and two **Alpine Choughs**. Unfortunately, snow started falling and the failing light and cold forced us to turn around. The Crimson-winged and Snow Finches would have to wait for another visit!



*Water Pipit and Horned Lark high on Mount Aragats.*

## Day 10 – Vedi Gorge and Urtz Ridge – Friday 5 May

According to Google Maps it is 380 km by road from Yerevan to the Iranian border. The southern part of this route switch-backs through high mountains, and it easy to see why the drive takes 7.5 hours at an average speed of 50 km/h. This wild region is the western or north-western limit of several Asian species, including Grey-necked Bunting, Persian Wheatear, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Caspian Snowcock and even Mongolian Finch in good years. We had just one day available and so we settled for the dry gorges running into the hills outside Vedi, a small town just 30 km from Yerevan on the road to Iran.

The sunshine as we set off from our guest house with Ani and Artem was a welcome contrast with the gloom on Aragats, though high clouds soon covered the sun. We turned off the main road in Vedi, left the settlement behind and parked a short way into the gorge.



*Artem, Dom and Ani preparing for our walk into Vedi Gorge, with 'sheep-stripes' in the grass.*



Proceeding on foot we noticed many birds singing around us – **Finsch's, Black-eared and Isabelline Wheatears, Rock Sparrows** and lots of **Rock, Black-headed and Grey-necked Buntings**. It was clear from the stripes in the grass that sheep or goats frequently passed this way, and it wasn't long before a flock overtook us accompanied by three savage-looking dogs. As a precaution we ascended some way up the valley side to let them pass but they were with the shepherd and kept their heads down. According to Artem, if dogs are accompanied by their owner then they are unlikely to be a problem.



*Finsch's Wheatear with strand of sheep's wool at Vedi Gorge.*

Deeper into the gorge we encountered a high cliff, and after careful scanning we found an **Eastern Rock Nuthatch** perched on the top, obviously longer-billed and heavier-headed than the Western version. A **Black Vulture** appeared a few times over the hills at either side. We wanted good photos of Grey-necked Bunting, but they were all quite flighty until, on our way back, we came upon one which sang confidently on the ground almost at our feet while we gratefully filled our memory cards.



*A very confident Grey-necked Bunting in Vedi Gorge.*

We drove further south and, turning left opposite the entrance to Armash Fish Ponds in Surenavan village, took a track up to the Urtz Ridge. Lunch was eaten amongst the apricot groves looking west over to Mount Ararat, where an almost biblical storm enfolded the mountain.



*Storm over Mount Ararat, on the far side of the Armash Fishponds, seen from the base of the Urtz Ridge.*



*Woodchat Shrike at Surenavan Village.*

Visible movement overhead included many **Barn Swallows**, **Common Swifts**, 2 **Sand Martins**, **European Bee-eaters**, **Goldfinches** and a **Levant Sparrowhawk**. Hopping in the bushes near us were several **Ménétries Warblers**, two **Common Rosefinches**, a **Golden Oriole**, a **Nightingale** and an **Olivaceous Warbler**.

Bumping further up the track, leaving the fields and orchards behind, there were countless **Red-backed Shrikes**, one **Lesser Grey Shrike**, 2 **Woodchat Shrikes**, 3 **Rufous Bush Robins**, a **Barred Warbler** and a pair of **Short-toed Larks**. The track entered a rough valley which wound up towards the ridge. We saw 4 **White-throated Robins**, 2 **Eastern Rock Nuthatches**, many **Rock Sparrows** and **Chukars** as we climbed, and finally two **Lammergeiers** slid along the crest of the ridge above us.



Unfortunately, the Red-tailed Wheatears usually at this site were not co-operating. As we drove back out Artem stopped to point out two **Bimaculated Larks** crouching 3 metres from the track. Stupidly, I gestured at them through the open window with my arm, which promptly flushed them. They would have yielded superb photos if they had stayed still!

### Day 11 – Armash Fishponds – Saturday 6 May



*Ménétries Warbler at the gate of the Armash Fishponds.*

Next morning, we were back for an all-too-brief end-of-trip visit to the legendary Armash Fishponds, right on the Turkish border. An inquisitive and obliging **Ménétries Warbler** perching on the boundary fence kept us amused while Ani and Artem obtained permits at the entrance gate. As soon as we were inside, the first birds we saw were **White-tailed Lapwings** in the marshy fields by the entrance. What a brilliant start! We started driving along the banks between the nearest ponds, and it was immediately clear that we could easily have spent two days here.



*White-tailed Lapwing just inside the entrance to Armash Fishponds.*

**Great Reed, Paddyfield and Savi's Warblers** grunted, chattered and reeled in the reed beds, which also contained **Bearded Reedlings** and the large-billed *caspia* **Reed Bunting**. **Lesser Short-toed Larks** sang over the adjacent fields. **Collared Pratincoles** hawked over distant pools and **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** perched on wires or bushes. A drained pond had many terns and waders, including a **Broad-billed Sandpiper**. Pools with deeper water held **Ferruginous and White-headed Ducks**, **Red-crested Pochards** and **Pygmy Cormorants**. All the while there was a constant swirl of swifts, hirundines, gulls, terns, ducks, herons, egrets and waders. At times it was hard to know where to look!



*Black-headed Wagtail and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater at Armash Fishponds.*

Sadly, after two short hours, we had to tear ourselves away for the journey home. Ani and Artem had kindly booked a taxi for us from Yerevan to Tbilisi. We listened to Radio Sputnik playing 'Give me back my man' as our driver propelled us in his Mercedes along empty roads through the Lesser Caucasus at speeds which made the *Le Mans* rally seem positively stately. After the border he abruptly changed his driving style to stick rigidly to the Georgian speed limit. Presumably there is or has been strict enforcement. When we weren't holding on for dear life, Dom and I agreed that the last ten days had been some of the best birding we ever had. As well as an astounding number and variety of birds, we had seen a feast of long-desired eastern species, even the almost-mythical Great Rosefinch!

## Day 12 – Tbilisi – Sunday 7 May

Dom left early for his flight to Tel Aviv and I spent my last morning by myself at the Botanic Gardens seeing very little apart from great views of the Black-bellied Dippers at their nest behind the waterfall.



*Black-bellied Dipper behind the waterfall in the Botanic Gardens.*

In the afternoon, with the generous help of Zviad, I tried unsuccessfully for Kruper's Nuthatches in the pine-covered hills above Tbilisi (about 4 km west of Kojori, 41.666421, 44.664395 in Google Maps), again without success. It felt a little anticlimactic after the birding splendours of the previous days, but it was nice just relaxing for a few hours in the historic city of Tbilisi in beautiful spring weather and reflecting on our amazing adventure.



## Logistics

Our itinerary focused only on the ‘hotspots’ – Kazbegi, Kakheti and the three sites around Yerevan. If you want to cover either country in more detail or want more flexibility in the face of adverse weather you would need more time, especially if you want to go to the south of Armenia. The widest variety of species is to be found in late April and early May, when the Georgian high mountain breeders may still be found in the valleys, most summer visitors have returned, and migrants are passing through. If you want more certainty regarding the Georgian mountain birds, then a week or two earlier may be better. If you prefer a chance of seeing late arriving summer visitors like Upcher’s Warbler or Pale Rock Sparrow, then going later in May or in June is best. However, you will have fabulous birding at any time of year. In winter, huge flocks of Little Bustards can be found in the east of Georgia, while in spring and autumn there is also the spectacular migration of raptors at Batumi on the Black Sea coast.

For birding in these two countries, I recommend hiring a guide and 4x4 with driver. The roads and driving standards vary from good to insane, some of the best birding is only accessible via off-road tracks and if you are self-driving it is easy to waste time getting lost. Dogs in this region can be dangerous and local expertise helps to avoid getting into a bad situation. Most importantly, the right guide will know where the birds you want can be found and will be able to identify their calls and song. We went with [www.batumbirding.com](http://www.batumbirding.com) who did a great job (and their profits are used for bird conservation). For general information visit [www.georgia.travel](http://www.georgia.travel) and [www.armenia.travel](http://www.armenia.travel).

## Acknowledgments

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A shorter version of this trip report appeared on [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com) on 20 April 2019.

## Species List

Species	Comments
Shelduck	5 Kochebi Lake, Dedoplistskaro 1 May
Ruddy Shelduck	1 Taribana Reservoir 2 May
Gadwall	2 Armash 6 May
Teal	2 salt lakes 2 May; 1 Armash 6 May
Garganey	4 Kochebi Lake, Dedoplistskaro 1 May; 1 Armash 6 May
Pochard	10+ Armash 6 May
Red-crested Pochard	10+ Armash 6 May
Ferruginous Duck	4 Armash 6 May
Tufted Duck	2 Armash 6 May
White-headed Duck	3 Armash, 6 May
Caucasian Black Grouse	13+ Kazbegi 29 April
Caucasian Snowcock	4 Kazbegi 29 April
Black Francolin	1 Chachuna 2 May
Chukar	Seen most days
Quail	Commonly heard in eastern Georgia
Corncrake	1 flushed from roadside near Dedoplistskaro 2 May

Species	Comments
Black-necked Grebe	5 Dalis Mta Reservoir 2 May
Little Grebe	1 Armash 6 May
Great Crested Grebe	Seen on most large lakes
Pygmy Cormorant	1 Dalis Mta Reservoir 2 May; abundant Armash 6 May
Night Heron	3 Armash 6 May
Little Egret	10 Lake Jandari 3 May; 3 Armash 6 May
Great White Egret	2 Lake Jandari 3 May
Grey Heron	2 Lake Jandari 3 May; 20+ Armash 6 May
Purple Heron	1 Kazbegi 28 April
White Stork	Common in Armenia nesting on telegraph poles
Glossy Ibis	10 Armash 6 May
Lammergeier	3 Kazbegi 28-29 April; 2 Urtz Ridge 5 May
Griffon Vulture	Common in mountains and steppe
Black Vulture	Seen most days
Egyptian Vulture	Adult Vashlovani 1 May
White-tailed Eagle	1 Dalis Mta Reservoir 2 May
Imperial Eagle	3 eastern Georgia 1-3 May
Lesser-spotted Eagle	3 in all
Steppe Eagle	1 near Gudauri 27 April
Short-toed Eagle	2 eastern Georgia 2-3 May
Booted Eagle	1 Mount Aragats 4 May
Black Kite	Seen most days
Marsh Harrier	1 Vashlovani 1 May; 6 Armash 6 May
Montagu's Harrier	2 eastern Georgia 1-2 May, 1 Mount Aragats 4 May
Pallid Harrier	3 eastern Georgia 1-2 May
Long-legged Buzzard	3 eastern Georgia 1-3 May
Steppe Buzzard	Several, not counted
Common Buzzard	Seen most days
Honey Buzzard	1 Mount Gareja 2 May, ~50 Mount Aragats 4 May
Sparrowhawk	Seen most days
Levant Sparrowhawk	1 Urtz Ridge 5 May
Kestrel	Seen most days
Lesser Kestrel	2 Dalis Mta Reservoir 2 May
Hobby	1 Vashlovani 1 May
Peregrine	1 Kazbegi 29 April
Merlin	1 Mount Aragats 4 May
Moorhen	Widespread
Coot	Widespread
Demoiselle Crane	9 Lake Jandari 3 May
Avocet	1 Armash 6 May
Black-winged Stilt	Abundant Armash 6 May
Collared Pratincole	1 Armash 6 May
Ringed Plover	Numerous Armash 6 May
White-tailed Plover	6-7 Armash 6 May
Dunlin	4 salt lakes 3 May; numerous Armash 6 May
Broad-billed Sandpiper	1 Armash 6 May
Little Stint	Abundant Armash 6 May
Common Sandpiper	Numerous Armash 6 May
Wood Sandpiper	Numerous Armash 6 May
Redshank	10 salt lakes 3 May; 2 Armash 6 May
Black-tailed Godwit	Abundant Armash 6 May
Red-necked Phalarope	10 Kochebi Lake 1 May; 1 Dalis Mta Reservoir 2 May
Ruff	4-5 Armash 6 May



Species	Comments
Black-headed Gull	Numerous Armash 6 May
Slender-billed Gull	3 Armash 6 May
Armenian Gull	Several Armash 6 May
Little Tern	6 Armash 6 May
Gull-billed Tern	1 Armash 6 May
White-winged Tern	19 Dalis Mta Reservoir 2 May; 10 Lake Jandari 3 May; numerous Armash 6 May
Black Tern	1 Armash 6 May
Whiskered Tern	2 Lake Jandari 3 May; 2 Armash 6 May
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Widespread
Stock Dove	1 Kochebi Lake 1 May
Woodpigeon	A few in Georgian lowlands
Collared Dove	Widespread
Turtle Dove	2 Vashlovani 1 May
Laughing Dove	1 Tbilisi 26 April
Eurasian Cuckoo	2 Mount Aragats 4 May; 1 Armash 6 May
Eagle Owl	1 near David Gareja Monastery 3 May
Little Owl	1 Vashlovani 1 May; 1 near Chachuna Managed Reserve 2 May
Scops Owl	Heard in Dedoplistskaro
Common Swift	Widespread
Alpine Swift	2 colonies Vashlovani 1 May
Hoopoe	Widespread
Bee-eater	Widespread; 2 colonies Vashlovani 1 May
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	5 Armash 6 May
Roller	4-5 Vashlovani 1-2 May
Green Woodpecker	Recorded
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Recorded
Syrian Woodpecker	1 Vashlovani 1 May; 1 Taribana Reservoir 2 May
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	2 Chachuna Managed Reserve 2 May
Skylark	Widespread
Crested Lark	Widespread
Woodlark	Numerous Mount Aragats 4 May
Short-toed Lark	Widespread in small numbers in lowlands
Lesser Short-toed Lark	2 Vashlovani 1 May; 4 Taribana Reservoir 2 May; 2 Armash 6 May
Calandra Lark	Numerous Vashlovani 1 May
Bimaculated Lark	2 Urtz Ridge 5 May
Horned Lark	1 Jvari Pass 30 April; numerous Mount Aragats 4 May
Sand Martin	Widespread migrating
Crag Martin	1 Vedi Gorge 5 May
House Martin	2 colonies Vashlovani 1 May
Barn Swallow	Widespread migrating
Tawny Pipit	Numerous Vashlovani 1 May
Water Pipit	Abundant in mountains
Meadow Pipit	Widespread
Tree Pipit	Widespread
Red-throated Pipit	Numerous Kochebi Lake 1 May
White Wagtail	Widespread; singles of <i>dukensis</i> Kazbegi 27 April and Mount Aragats 4 May
Yellow Wagtail	Widespread; several <i>feldegg</i> Armash 6 May
Citrine Wagtail	Male Chachuna Managed Reserve 2 May
Grey Wagtail	Widespread by streams in Georgia
Black-bellied Dipper	Pair Tbilisi Botanic Gardens 16 April and 7 May
Waxwing	250 Mount Aragats 4 May
Dunnock	Widespread in Georgia
Alpine Accentor	4 Mount Aragats 4 May

Species	Comments
Radde's Accentor	4-5 Mount Aragats 4 May
European Robin	Widespread in Georgia
Nightingale	Widespread in lowlands
Rufous Bush Robin	3 Urtz Ridge 5 May
White-throated Robin	4 Mount Aragats 4 May; 4 Urtz Ridge 4 May
Common Redstart	Seen most days
Black Redstart	Widespread and common in mountains; small numbers <i>semirufus</i>
Güldenstadt's Redstart	Small numbers in blackthorn around Kazbegi 27-30 April
Northern Wheatear	Abundant in mountains
Isabelline Wheatear	Numerous in eastern Georgia and Armenia
Black-eared Wheatear	Widespread in eastern Georgia and Armenia
Pied Wheatear	Small numbers in eastern Georgia
Finsch's Wheatear	Small numbers in eastern Georgia and Armenia
Whinchat	Seen most days
Stonechat	Seen most days
Mistle Thrush	2 Mount Aragats 4 May
Blackbird	Widespread in lowlands
Ring Ouzel	Widespread in mountains
Blue Rock Thrush	Widespread in suitable habitat
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush	Several Mount Aragats 4 May
Barred Warbler	1 Armash Village 5 May
Blackcap	Widespread
Common Whitethroat	Recorded
Lesser Whitethroat	Singing Vashlovani 1 May
Eastern Orphean Warbler	Widespread eastern Georgia
Ménétries Warbler	Widespread eastern Georgia and Armenia lowlands
Sedge Warbler	1 Armash 6 May
Reed Warbler	Numerous at Armash 6 May
Paddyfield Warbler	A few at Armash 6 May
Great Reed Warbler	2 Taribana Reservoir 2 May; a few Armash 6 May
Savi's Warbler	Numerous at Armash 6 May
Cetti's Warbler	Recorded
Olivaceous Warbler	1 Armash Village 5 May
Willow warbler	Widespread
Chiffchaff	Widespread
Mountain Chiffchaff	1 singing near Gergeti Trinity Church 29 April
Wren	A few in Tbilisi Botanic Gardens
Spotted Flycatcher	1 near Ananuri 30 April
Red-breasted Flycatcher	Numerous in lowland woodlands in Georgia
Great Tit	Numerous in lowland woodlands in Georgia
Blue Tit	Numerous in lowland woodlands in Georgia
Coal Tit	Numerous in lowland woodlands in Georgia
Long-tailed Tit	Numerous in lowland woodlands in Georgia
Bearded Tit	A few at Armash 6 May
Penduline Tit	2 Taribana Reservoir 2 May
Nuthatch	Common in lowland woodlands in Georgia
Western Rock Nuthatch	Near David Gareja Monastery 3 May
Eastern Rock Nuthatch	Vedi Gorge 5 May
Wallcreeper	1 Kazbegi 28 May
Treecreeper	Tbilisi Botanic Gardens
Red-backed Shrike	Numerous eastern Georgia; abundant lowland Armenia
Lesser Grey Shrike	Widespread eastern Georgia and lowland Armenia
Woodchat Shrike	Widespread eastern Georgia and lowland Armenia



Species	Comments
Magpie	Recorded
Jay	1 <i>atricapillus</i> Tbilisi Botanic Gardens 26 April
Eurasian Jackdaw	Widespread
Red-billed Chough	Numerous in mountains
Alpine Chough	Numerous in mountains
Rook	Recorded
Hooded Crow	Numerous and widespread
Raven	Numerous in mountains
Starling	Widespread
Rose-coloured Starling	Numerous in eastern Georgia
Golden Oriole	Pair at Dalis Mta Reservoir 2 May
House Sparrow	Widespread
Spanish Sparrow	Widespread in eastern Georgia
Tree	2 Dalis Mta Reservoir 2 May
Rock	Common in mountains
Chaffinch	Widespread in lowlands in Georgia
Linnet	Widespread
Twite	2 <i>brevirostris</i> Jvari Pass 30 April; several on Mount Aragats 4 May
Goldfinch	Recorded
Greenfinch	Recorded
Red-fronted Serin	3+ near Gergeti 29 April
Bullfinch	Pair near Gergeti 29 April
Common Rosefinch	1 Chachuna Reserve 2 May; 1 Mount Aragats 4 May; 1 Armash Village 5 May
Great Rosefinch	Pair Kazbegi 30 April
Reed Bunting	2 <i>caspia</i> Armash 6 May
Ortolan Bunting	Widespread in small numbers
Grey-necked Bunting	8+ Vedi Gorge 5 May
Black-headed Bunting	Widespread; abundant eastern Georgia and Armenia
Rock Bunting	Common in mountains
Corn Bunting	Numerous eastern Georgia