



Trip Report

Batumi Raptors Special
From 16th to 23rd of September 2023



Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

Trip report complete by: Alexander Rukhaia

Outlined Itinerary

Date	Activities	Weather
16 Sep.	08:00 – 13:00 / Sakhalvasho Raptor Viewpoint 15:30 – 18:30 / Chorokhi River Delta	Sunny. Partly cloudy.
17 Sep.	09:00 – 14:00 / Shuamta Raptor Viewpoint 15:30 – 18:00 / Maltakva Beach	Sunny and partly cloudy. Partly cloudy, and a light breeze
18 Sep.	08:45 – 11:00 / Batumi Boulevard 11:30 – 18:00 / Sakhalvasho Raptor Viewpoint	Rainy. Partly cloudy and sunny.
19 Sep.	08:45 – 15:30 / Shuamta Raptor Viewpoint 16:00 – 18:10 / Sakhalvasho Raptor Viewpoint	Sunny and partly cloudy. Partly cloudy.
20 Sep.	08:15 – 09:00 / Batumi Botanical Garden 09:45 – 18:00 / Sakhalvasho Raptor Viewpoint	Partly cloudy. Partly cloudy.
21 Sep.	08:30 – 12:30 / Chorokhi River Delta 15:00 – 19:00 / Maltakva Beach	Sunny. Sunny.
22 Sep.	08:20 – 14:30 / Shuamta Raptor Viewpoint 15:00 – 18:30 / Sakhalvasho Raptor Viewpoint	Sunny. Cloudy.

Summary

This year, fate decided in such a way that out of the planned seven, only two people remained in the group - Julie Alikki from Greece and Ashley Field from the UK - both of our old friends and participants of the winter tour that took place on the eve of the pandemic explosion in March 2020. By the way, it turned out to be a great tour in spite of everything. The trip report can be seen [here](#).

The rest of the tour participants, since they were all friends from the same country, preferred to separate from the official tour, so that the company held a private tour only for them, on slightly modified dates. These logistical changes happened just a few weeks before the start of the tour, so it was a bit late to cancel it, so the tour had to be held even contrary to the laws of finance ☺

Instead of the planned 4-star hotel, we were placed in a family hotel called ‘Guesthouse Hospitality’ in the village of Sakhalvasho, where the first viewpoint is located, but on the contrary, it turned out very good. We had the perfect location. The terrace of the hotel had a beautiful view, facing towards the north, where migration flows come from. Delicious and healthy food was prepared for us. In the mornings and evenings we ate in the company of other birders from Denmark, the Netherlands and one overly loud and super enthusiastic guest from Northern Ireland ☺ and despite the fact that the guesthouse was full of guests these days, we got rooms with private bathrooms for the blat ☺ In short, we were completely delighted and happy with this hospitable atmosphere.

We weren't picky about food, but we were well fed in the morning and evening at our guesthouse, and at noon sometimes we had lunch at a local café on the Shuamta Viewpoint, or enjoyed Turkish cuisine at a restaurant near Chorokhi Delta, and sometimes even cooked ourselves a huge sandwich with avocado and other ingredients ☺ and the coffee was always good.

Not that it would make everyone better, but because there were only three of us, we could afford maximum flexibility. Instead of the planned minibus, we drove around in an SUV and could afford to drive into any depths and reach all the heights of all birding sites, which saved us a lot of time. Because of this, we never had to rush anywhere, and easily switched from one activity to another, if weather conditions or any other circumstances required it. This can be easily noticed if you look at the outlined itinerary, where we often change locations.

Another notable detail of this tour, making it different from others, is that we did not extend the tour to the Greater Caucasus Mountains. Usually, according to tradition, at the end of the Batumi tour, on the eighth day, we go to the historical region of Svaneti for a couple of days to see the Caucasian endemics and other mountain highlights, but this time there was no such need, since during the winter tour in March 2020, we were lucky enough to see everything, including Caucasian Snowcocks, Caucasian Grouse, Gldenstdt's Redstarts and Great Rosefinches.

It can be seen from the program that we spent most of the week watching the migration of birds of prey. Of course, the first viewpoint was much closer to us, but very often, especially in the morning, we gave our preference to the second viewpoint, located 20 minutes away in the neighboring village of Shuamta. There were several good reasons and arguments for this, including the fact that they served a super lunch at a local café ☺ and yet, we spent two almost full days at first viewpoint in Sakhalvasho, including on September 20th. This is the day when we were lucky enough to see a couple of **Crested Honey Buzzards**. We picked one of them first, without assistance, among a group of ordinary **Honey Buzzards** flying at a fairly high distance, and the other flew almost parallel to the viewpoint from the sea a little earlier. I remember the one who spotted it first shouted - 'Short-toed Eagle is coming close'. As it turned out, it was an adult male **Crested Honey Buzzard**.

It should be noted that during the whole week it rained only once, at night and in the morning of the next day. It was so dry and warm that it is even difficult to recall a tour with weather conditions similar to this.

We had different days, but mostly the migration was excellent, despite the warm temperatures. **European Honey Buzzards**, as one of the most numerous species, were an endless multitude almost daily, but at the beginning of the tour, as expected, the numbers were relatively higher than by the end. For the first two days there were not so many **Steppe Buzzards**, just isolated observations, but after a rainy day, the numbers grew exponentially, and especially in the last days of the week they were the second most numerous species. The most numerous this week, however, were the **Black Kites**. On September 19th, another local record was even set, when the highest count of this species was made in one day - more than 44,000 individuals speaking of both viewpoints.

We've seen all the eagles except the **Eastern Imperial Eagle**. The most numerous were **Booted Eagles**, including many with a dark morph, but soon many **Short-toed** and **Lesser Spotted Eagles** also arrived. Especially after that only wet night, **Steppe** and **Greater Spotted Eagles** also began to appear, but very scattered, not to mention those that fell into the list under the name of large eagles, because they simply could not be identified. Compared to them, we saw **Pallid Harriers** much more often, including snow-white adult males.

September 18th was very exciting from the point of view of smaller falcons; it was the only time we were lucky enough to have a good look at several **Red-footed Falcons**, plus a few **Lesser Kestrels**, as well as a few **Eurasian Hobbies**, as on other days too. Although the **Levant Sparrowhawks** showed up every day in decent numbers, and they were the object of Ashley's special longing, for us personally, the best day remains the one when **Black Kites** flew by in record numbers.



European Honey Buzzard



European Honey Buzzard



European Honey Buzzard



Crested Honey Buzzard



Black Kite



Lesser Spotted Eagle



Booted Eagle

On that one rainy morning, we took a walk along the fashionable promenade known as Batumi Boulevard and, not without the help of another group that was also hunting for the same bird, we earned ourselves one **European Nightjar** sleeping in the canopy of a pine tree. Even before that, there were some small wet migrants on the beach, including a young **Rosy Starling** on the shower cabin, and a couple of times we unintentionally flushed **Common Quails** from wet meadows.

We even had time this week to look into the Botanical Garden, and we remembered the winter tour again when we promptly found a couple of **Krüper's Nuthatches**.

A couple of times we visited the famous Chorokhi River Delta near the border with Turkey. On our first visit, we were very lucky to find a super rare **Masked Shrike**. The last time this bird was seen here was about 10 years ago, and a few days ago, our colleagues were lucky to find it again. The discovery was reported both in the Whatsapp group and on social media, and thus this visit was planned, which resulted in a successful twitch. Whatever it is called, everyone was over the moon with happiness, even though each of us had seen this bird in other countries.

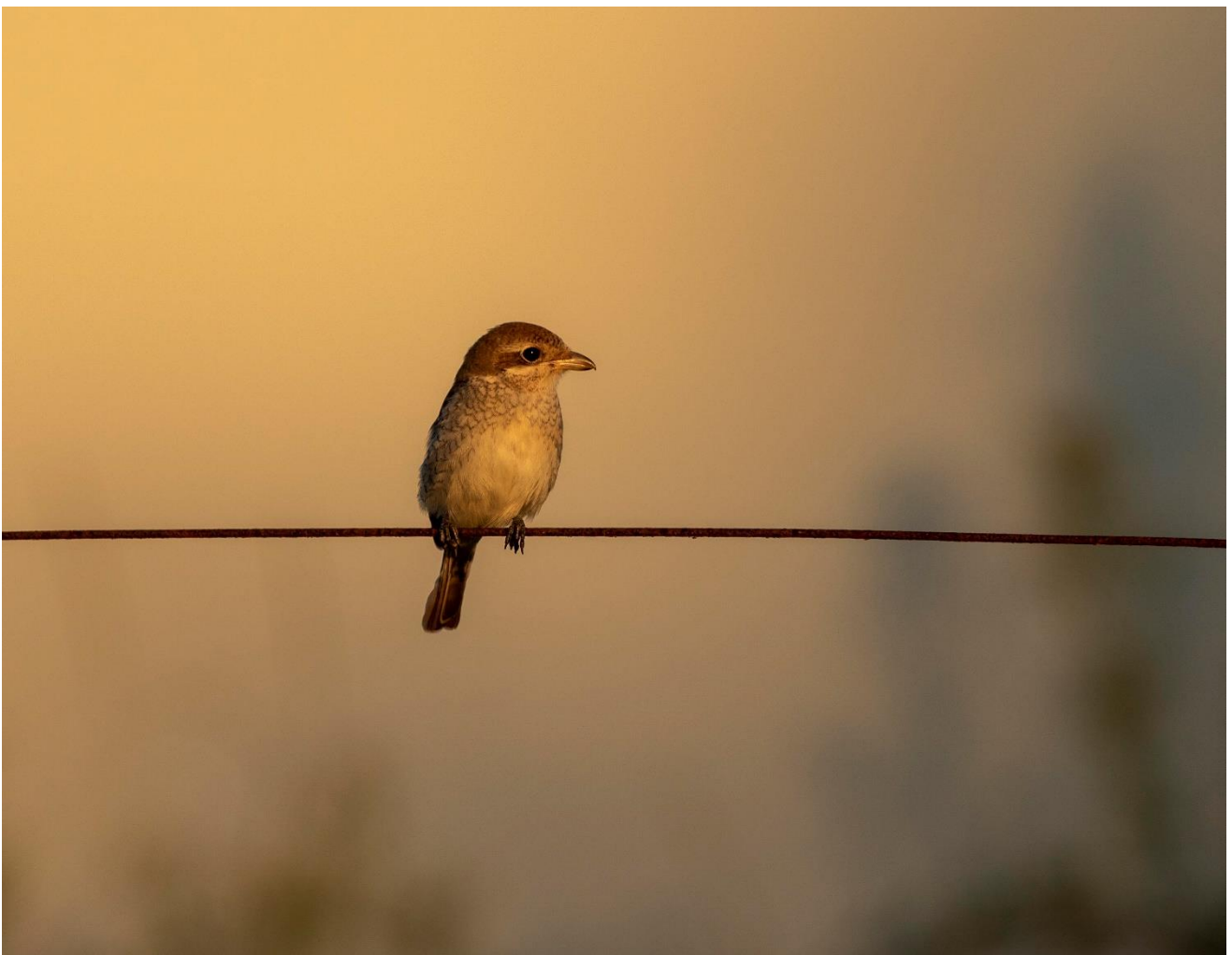
Our second visit to the delta cannot be called as successful, unfortunately. Of course, there were many interesting species on this day, including **Glossy Ibises**, **Little Crake**, etc., but just imagine; our visit was on September 21st, and on September 23rd someone makes a stunning find - the first **Three-banded Plover** for Georgia. Well, how can we not scream with anger 😊 Damn, we trampled that particular spot for three hours 😊 By the way, and this someone is Patrick Veale from Dublin, Ireland. Our sincere congratulations to him!



Masked Shrike



Masked Shrike

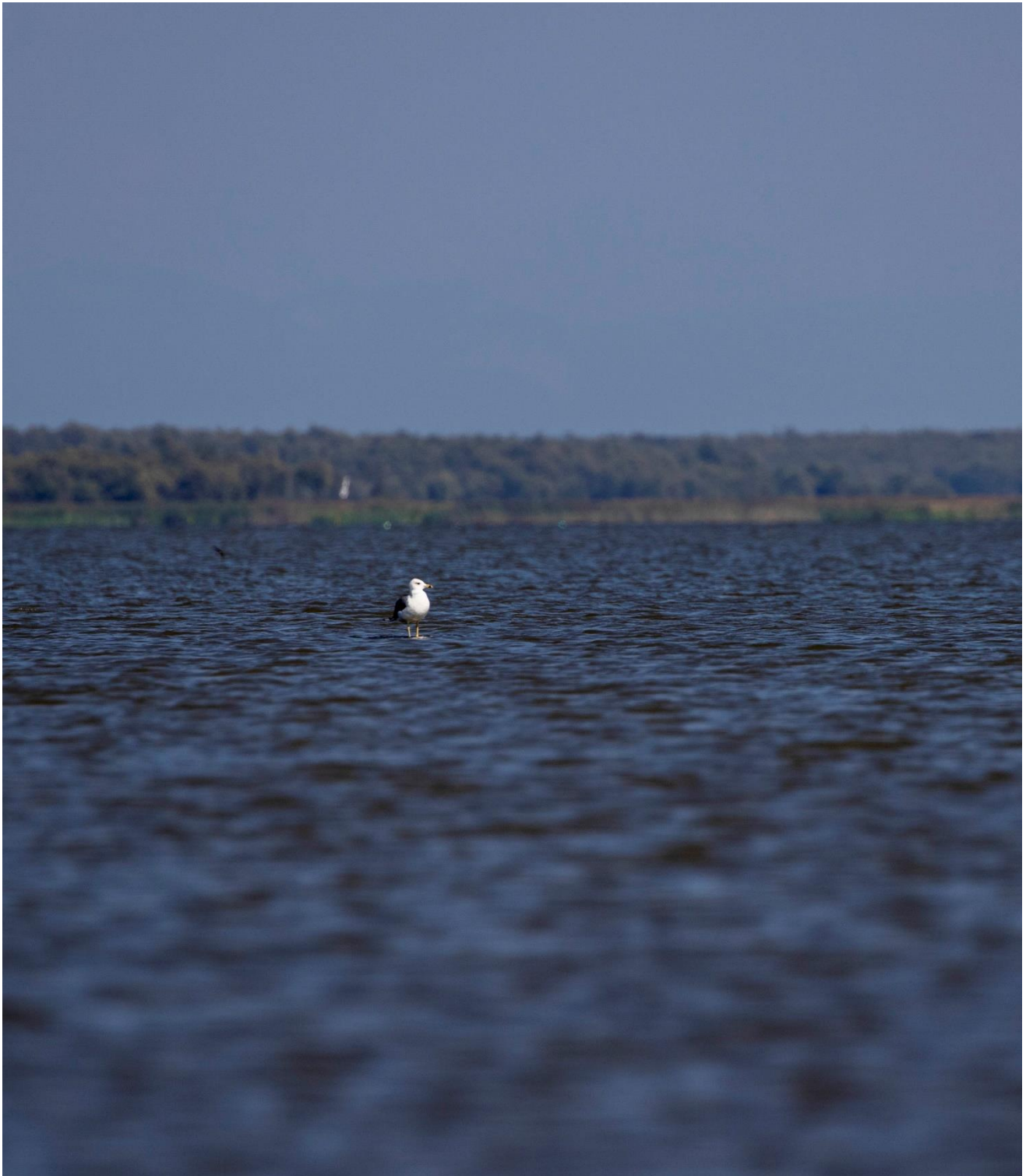


Red-backed Shrike

A couple of times we visited the sandy beach of Maltakva near Paliastomi Lake and both times we met a beautiful sunset here. God, how romantic it sounds ☺ No kidding, but it's always very interesting here. Various waders fell to our lot, including **European Golden Plovers**, **Ruddy Turnstones**, **Curlew Sandpipers**, **Red Knots**, which are not so common in Georgia, more than a hundred **Sanderlings** and many others.

A cloud of about two hundred **Sandwich Terns** floating in the sky is certainly still a sight, but if you have not yet seen how **Parasitic Jaegers** conduct a surprise attack on calmly resting gulls and terns, then the cloud of terns definitely does not compare to these scenes.

That's all. To view the complete bird checklist, scroll down, however, to see the daily migration totals for different days and both platforms, we strongly recommend visiting the project website. <https://www.batimiraptorcount.org/>



Caspian Gull



Little Stint



Red Knot

Annotated List of Birds

Developed on the basis of the IOC World Bird List (v 12.1) 2022

Observation status code:

- Number = quantity seen and counted
 Number + = more than mentioned quantity seen (roughly counted)
 X = high numbers, often several thousand. Used only for the 4 flagship species; European Honey Buzzard, Black Kite, Steppe Buzzard, and European Bee-eater.
 n/f = numerous or frequently observed (uncounted)
 H number = heard a certain amount, but not seen
 Hs = heard several, but not seen
 (m) = male
 (f) = female
 (j) = juvenile

Total = **111 species**; 101 seen and 10 heard

N	Family Scientific Name	English Name	16 th	17 th	18 th	19 th	20 th	21 st	22 nd
			D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7
	Anatidae	Swans, Geese & Ducks							
1	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	Garganey						1	
	Phasianidae	Pheasants & Allies							
2	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Common Quail			1				
	Caprimulgidae	Nightjars							
3	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	European Nightjar			1				
	Apodidae	Swifts							
4	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	Alpine Swift			3				
	Columbidae	Pigeons & Doves							
5	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Stock Dove					2		
6	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	European Turtle Dove	1						
	Rallidae	Rails, Crakes & Coots							
7	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Water Rail						H2	
8	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Common Moorhen						3	
9	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Eurasian Coot						2	
10	<i>Zapornia parva</i>	Little Crake						1	
	Podicipedidae	Grebes							
11	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Little Grebe						1	
12	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	Red-necked Grebe						2	
13	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Great Crested Grebe	n/f	7				5+	
	Recurvirostridae	Stilts & Avocets							
14	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Black-winged Stilt						1	
	Charadriidae	Plovers							
15	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Grey Plover		1				5	
16	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Common Ringed Plover		2				n/f	
17	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Little Ringed Plover		n/f				n/f	
	Scolopacidae	Sandpipers &							

N	Family Scientific Name	English Name	16 th	17 th	18 th	19 th	20 th	21 st	22 nd
			D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7
		Snipes							
18	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Ruddy Turnstone		5				2	
19	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Red Knot		6				1	
20	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	Ruff						4	
21	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Curlew Sandpiper		5				1	
22	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Sanderling		100+				15+	
23	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Dunlin		n/f				n/f	
24	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Little Stint		5+				25+	
25	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Common Snipe						2	
26	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Wood Sandpiper						1	
27	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common Redshank		2				2	
28	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Common Greenshank						H1	
	Laridae	Gulls, Terns & Skimmers							
29	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull						6	
30	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	Little Gull		2				10+	
31	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	Caspian Gull						2	
32	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	Yellow-legged Gull	n/f	n/f	n/f			n/f	
33	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	Gull-billed Tern						1	
34	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	Sandwich Tern		1				200+	
35	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern		1	1			3	
36	<i>Chlidonias hybrid</i>	Whiskered Tern						1	
37	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	White-winged Tern						2	
	Stercorariidae	Skuas							
38	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Parasitic Jaeger						2	
	Ciconiidae	Storks							
39	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Black Stork	6	7	26	9			14
40	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	White Stork			1				20
	Phalacrocoracidae	Cormorants & Shags							
41	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Great Cormorant	n/f	3				n/f	
	Threskiornithidae	Ibises & Spoonbills							
42	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Glossy Ibis						6	
	Ardeidae	Hérons & Bitterns							
43	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	Little Bittern			1				
44	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	Squacco Heron						3	
45	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Western Cattle Egret						2	
46	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Grey Heron	n/f	n/f	2			n/f	
47	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Purple Heron			7				
48	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Great Egret	9						
49	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Little Egret	4	n/f				n/f	
	Pandionidae	Ospreys							
50	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Western Osprey			1		1		1
	Accipitridae	Kites, Hawks & Eagles							
51	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Egyptian Vulture		1					

N	Family Scientific Name		English Name	16 th	17 th	18 th	19 th	20 th	21 st	22 nd
				D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7
52	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		European Honey Buzzard	X	n/f	X	X	X		X
53	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>		Crested Honey Buzzard					2		
54	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		Short-toed Snake Eagle		3	6+	15+	n/f		7+
55	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>		Lesser Spotted Eagle	1	15+	10+	40+	n/f		50+
56	<i>Clanga clanga</i>		Greater Spotted Eagle				1	2	1	2
57	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		Booted Eagle	8	n/f	n/f	200+	n/f		n/f
58	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>		Steppe Eagle		1 (j)		1	2		2
			Large Eagle – unidentified		5+	6	12+	6		4
59	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>		Levant Sparrowhawk	1	1	3	7+	2+		3
60	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		Eurasian Sparrowhawk	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	8+	3	n/f
61	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		Western Marsh Harrier	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	4	n/f
62	<i>Circus macrourus</i>		Pallid Harrier	2	1	3+	1 (m)			1
63	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		Montagu's Harrier	2	1		1			
			Mon/Pall Harrier – unidentified	2	1	4	1	3	2	2
64	<i>Milvus migrans</i>		Black Kite	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
65	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		Common Buzzard	1						
	65.1	<i>B. b. vulpinus</i>	Steppe Buzzard	1	n/f	X	X	X		X
	Strigidae		Owls							
66	<i>Otus scops</i>		Eurasian Scops Owl			H1				
	Upupidae		Hoopoes							
67	<i>Upupa epops</i>		Eurasian Hoopoe						1	1
	Coraciidae		Rollers							
68	<i>Coracias garrulous</i>		European Roller	8	1					
	Alcedinidae		Kingfishers							
69	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		Common Kingfisher						4	
	Meropidae		Bee-eaters							
70	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		European Bee-eater	X	X	X	X	X	Hs	X
	Picidae		Woodpeckers							
71	<i>Dryobates minor</i>		Lesser Spotted Woodpecker				H1			
72	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		Great Spotted Woodpecker	1						
	Falconidae		Falcons							
73	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		Lesser Kestrel			3				
74	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		Common Kestrel			n/f	2	3		1
75	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>		Red-footed Falcon			9+				
76	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		Eurasian Hobby	3		8+	1	2		1
	Laniidae		Shrikes							
77	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		Red-backed Shrike	12+		2			4+	
78	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>		Masked Shrike	1 (j)						
	Oriolidae		Orioles							

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			D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7
79	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	Eurasian Golden Oriole	1 (f)						
	Corvidae	Crows & Jays							
80	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Eurasian Jay		Hs		H1			
81	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Hooded Crow	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f
82	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Northern Raven		2		2	1		2
	Paridae	Tits							
83	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Eurasian Blue Tit	3	Hs	Hs	n/f	4	Hs	n/f
84	<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit	Hs				1	Hs	n/f
	Alaudidae	Larks							
85	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	Greater Short-toed Lark	8						
	Hirundinidae	Swallows & Martins							
86	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Sand Martin	40+	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f
87	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f	n/f
88	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Common Chiffchaff	Hs		2+			1	1
89	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>	Green Warbler				H1			
	Acrocephalidae	Reed Warblers & Allies							
90	<i>Iduna caligata</i>	Booted Warbler						?	
	Sylviidae	Sylviid Babblers							
91	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Eurasian Blackcap	n/f	Hs	n/f	1	Hs	Hs	Hs
92	<i>Curruca communis</i>	Common Whitethroat	10+					5+	
	Sittidae	Nuthatches							
93	<i>Sitta krueperi</i>	Krüper's Nuthatch					2		
	Sturnidae	Starlings							
94	<i>Pastor roseus</i>	Rosy Starling			1 (j)				
	Turdidae	Thrushes							
95	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Common Blackbird							1
	Muscicapidae	Chats & Old World Flycatchers							
96	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Spotted Flycatcher	1		n/f	1	1		
97	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	European Robin			H1		H1		
98	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Common Nightingale						1	
99	<i>Ficedula parva</i>	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Hs				Hs		
100	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	Common Redstart	1		4+			1	
101	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Whinchat	2		2			15+	
102	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	European Stonechat						2	
103	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Northern Wheatear	1	1	5			n/f	
104	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	Isabelline Wheatear			2			2	
	Passeridae	Old World Sparrows							
105	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	3	n/f	40+			n/f	
	Motacillidae	Wagtails & Pipits							
106	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Western Yellow Wagtail	30+					8	

N	Family Scientific Name	English Name	16 th	17 th	18 th	19 th	20 th	21 st	22 nd
			D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7
107	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	White Wagtail	n/f	n/f	n/f		3	n/f	
108	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Tree Pipit			1				
109	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	European Greenfinch			H1				
110	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	European Goldfinch	6						
	<i>Emberizidae</i>	Buntings							
111	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Rock Bunting		H1					

Thanks for reading.

If you are interested in making a similar tour, keep in mind that it is held annually in mid-September. For more information, visit our website and find a tour called Batumi Raptors Special, or just contact us by email.

www.birdingcaucasus.com | info@birdingcaucasus.com

Or find us on social media as @BirdingCaucasus
[Facebook page](#) | [Twitter page](#)