

THE CAUCASUS and ARMENIA

9 – 22 MAY 2006

TOUR REPORT

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This interesting tour to Georgia and Armenia is a recent addition to the Birdquest repertoire and encompasses the full range of altitudes and habitats of the Caucasian region. This year we achieved an impressive record total of 224 species in two weeks and managed to see Caucasian specialities such as Caucasian Snowcock, Caucasian Grouse, Green Warbler and Caucasian Chiffchaff. We also found several sought-after species whose ranges only just creep into the Western Palearctic, such as Great Rosefinch, Gldenstdt's Redstart, See-see Partridge, Rufous-tailed Wheatear, Pale Rockfinch and Grey-necked Bunting. A notable record was of a Sykes's Warbler. Other specialities included Pygmy Cormorant, Marbled and White-headed Ducks, Levant Sparrowhawk, Armenian Gull, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Radde's Accentor, White-throated Robin, Finsch's Wheatear, Paddyfield, Upcher's, Mntries's and Eastern Orphean Warblers, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Red-fronted Serin and Crimson-winged Finch. To top it all, some of us had a close encounter of the furred kind with three Brown Bears!

We arrived in Tbilisi in the early morning, had little trouble dealing with the usual entry formalities and soon found ourselves on a spacious coach being driven away from the capital of Georgia, ashamedly hardly registering this fine city that is surrounded by dramatic hills topped by ancient monasteries and churches. We turned northwards along the Georgian Military Highway and stopped briefly at Ananuri to admire the view and compare the Common Redstarts of the eastern *samamisticus* variety (that sports a white wing panel) with the rufous-bellied nominate race of Black Redstart. The winding road then took us high up over the icy Jvari Pass, previously known in Russian times as the Krestovyy Pass, where we put on warm clothing and stopped to do our first real birding. The weather was not so good with low cloud and rain on the way and it was immediately obvious that this had resulted in forcing migrants down as they also journeyed north. There were Red-backed Shrikes everywhere and we also found Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Blackcap, Spotted Flycatchers and Ortolan and Black-headed Buntings passing through over the snowy pass amongst a few resident Alpine Accentors, White-winged Snowfinches, Red-billed Chough, Horned Lark, Twite and numerous Water Pipits. We would have stayed but the weather was really closing in with squally rain and hail so we headed down to take shelter and a fine lunch at our very comfortable hotel in Kazbegi, now known as Stepantsminda. Kazbegi used to be a regular Birdquest destination in the 1980s and early 1990s, and inevitably there had been some changes in the wake of the political upheavals a decade ago, but the modern hotel was a welcome innovation. The bad weather continued into the afternoon and so

we decided to check out the bushes around the town that are well known to be a migrant trap at times like these. As soon as we entered the area it was quite obvious that the dirty weather had done its job of grounding migrants. Great Reed Warblers hopping low through the bushes seemed somewhat out of place and there were Caucasian Chiffchaffs and smaller numbers of Green Warblers fly catching and flicking in and out of the sodden vegetation. Other more familiar warblers included Caspian Reed Warbler, Lesser and Common Whitethroats, Common Chiffchaff, Garden Warbler and Blackcap. Two Barred Warblers were of a little more interest as were a couple of Common Nightingales, Lesser Grey Shrike, some female plumaged Red-breasted Flycatchers and a flock of Rosy Starlings and we even flushed a European Nightjar. Despite the weather a few raptors were in evidence. Eurasian Griffon Vultures soared over the town, a few Steppe (Common) Buzzards were around and a juvenile Peregrine dashed past.

We woke while it was still dark but it was a fine morning with clear skies and it wasn't long before the first rays of the still invisible sun were illuminating the impressive snowy peak of Mount Kazbek, although the other mountains of the High Caucasus, rising steeply and cradling the sleepy town were still in shadow. After a hearty breakfast we headed up the slopes at the edge of town. It was a relatively gentle climb at first and we soon spotted a couple of male Caucasian Grouse on a distant hillside. Despite being a long way away the clear mountain air and crisp morning light meant that we could see the red wattle and lyre-shaped tail well through the scopes. This had been an unexpectedly easy start to the day but soon our climb became more serious. The Kazbegi slopes must be some of the steepest around and it didn't help that we were still a little tired and it was our first full day away from the bus. However the shrill, haunting, curlew-like cries of Caucasian Snowcocks reached our ears and spurred us on with renewed vigour and energy.

As the sun rose higher so did we and fortunately, it did not take too long to find a pair of snowcocks on the snowfields high above us. The scopes were set up and thus enabled very satisfactory and prolonged views for all of us as the birds wandered over the rocks and through the dwarf azaleas. Two other special birds live on these high mountains namely Gldenstdt's Redstart and Great Rosefinch but up till now there had been no sign of either. There was very little snow left on these lower slopes and it was almost certain that they had retreated up to the snowline at about 2,500 metres. The very top at over 3,000 was still covered in snow and ice so we knew that they couldn't be there! With higher spirits if not renewed strength, we continued upwards over steep slopes of short tussock grass through which fragrant flowers were pushing up their colourful heads. More snowcocks were seen and then a pair of rosefinches was found feeding quietly on the edge of the snowmelt. Our party was by now rather strung out up the slope, but one by one the intrepid climbers struggled up to the scope, managed a breathless view only to collapse until they had acclimatised and then came back for more! Whilst the group made this dramatic climb more rosefinches accumulated and those present all finally managed to get some great views. One last species remained and once more we clambered onwards and upwards until the snow and ice made further progress too difficult. It was here that after a some scanning we finally picked up a pair of Gldenstdt's Redstarts flicking from rock to rock, the impressive male sitting up high and shivering its colourful tail. We had successfully attained our prizes and jubilantly we made our way down over the loose rocks, matted vegetation with tussocks of grass and the roots of dwarf azaleas that conspired to twist an unwary ankle! As we descended there were Ring Ouzels and pretty Red-fronted Serins to greet us but the latter were extremely flighty. After lunch we returned to the pass but the migrants had cleared out with the good weather and all was pretty quiet. However to make up for it we had excellent views of a Wallcreeper that was a delight to behold and we were treated to close and prolonged views of this avian gem as it flitted from rock to rock nervously opening and closing those magical wings. A White-throated Dipper was watched as it bobbed along the edges of a rushing stream, Lammergeiers and Golden Eagles sailed over the high ridges, Eurasian Crag Martins swirled around the dark dripping tunnels and a few Alpine Choughs were seen. The next day we returned to the pass and for those that hadn't managed the previous day's climb we got views of lekking Caucasian Black Grouse leaping up and down as they performed their flutter-jumping display flashing their bright white underwings across

the hillsides. We also managed to find a strutting Caucasian Snowcock high up on the snowy crags and a distant male *Güldenstädt's* Redstart was seen briefly. Common Rosefinches had now made an appearance but there was no sign of those elusive Great Rosefinches on this particular day. The bushes around the town still held a few migrants but the highlight of the afternoon was the amazing views of no less than three Corncrakes. Some nearby open land held large numbers of Water Pipits amongst which we found Blue-headed, Grey-headed and Sykes's Wagtails as well as Red-throated Pipits and Greater Short-toed Larks.

The following day we were due to make the journey into Armenia and we had a long way to go. We packed up early and headed back towards Tbilisi and as this was still Georgia, a land where it is absolutely impossible to escape the legendary Georgian hospitality, we succumbed to a very fine and lengthy lunch, commencing at the early hour of 11.00 that included innumerable toasts to friends and relatives, past and present! After a quick guided tour of the city centre we headed east and as there generally now seemed to be less to see except perhaps a few European Rollers and the colonies of European Bee-eaters that were nesting in the sandy roadside banks we sped through the wide, open fields of the Georgian lowlands making no stops in order to arrive at the border in good time. The formalities did not take long and we continued our journey into Armenia with a new team of hosts. We continued on past our first Eastern Black-eared Wheatears to the delightful wooded hills surrounding Dilijan where we were to stay in the House of Cinematographers, a strange building that is wonderfully situated in a beautiful position overlooking the lush wooded Aghstev valley. However, although built as recently as 1984 the huge communal spaces, poky rooms, hanging balconies and kitsch interior décor gave the place a spooky feel! This was to be our base for exploring a very different habitat of mature, deciduous woodland. We woke to a cold and dull morning and managed to see Middle Spotted Woodpecker and dapper Semi-collared Flycatchers easily and quickly before a light but persistent drizzle started. Some of the group gave up quickly but the rest of us carried on. Although many of the species here were perhaps very familiar, there were Coal Tits, Eurasian Nuthatches and more and more *samamiscus* Common Redstarts nesting in the hotel walls and as we wandered through the dripping forests we found small numbers of Red-breasted Flycatchers that included some handsomely coloured males. We searched and searched but there was no sign or sound of the striking Black Woodpecker and we had to make do with numerous Great Spotted Woodpeckers. A brief reprieve from the rain at lunchtime surrendered a few raptors and we were lucky to pick up a Northern Goshawk and some Booted Eagles for our list. In the afternoon we braved the wet weather again and visited the suitably impressive Haghartsin Monastery nestled amongst the lush trees of a leafy valley. A walk took us through some beautiful forest that added little else new although the views that we had of a Hawfinch were noteworthy.

Leaving the cold, crumbling hotel behind us, we headed south to Lake Sevan and began our explorations of its shores. This large high altitude lake is situated some 1,900m above sea level and covers about five percent of the country. It has been designated as a national park and is home to a very large colony of the recently split Armenian Gulls and so of course we had absolutely no problems seeing this handsome gull! The shores of the lake are fairly open, though parts are wooded and patches of scrub and reeds occur in places. Good numbers of Wood Sandpipers and Garganey had gathered in the wet meadows at the end of the lake and smart Black-headed Wagtails were much admired. On the open waters we found a few Ruddy Shelducks and Great-crested and Black-necked Grebes. Mallard and Gadwall dabbled around the edges a Common Kingfisher haunted the shores and another breeding plumaged Red-throated Pipit was found. Amongst the poplars and willows on the shoreline we found a smattering of migrants and some very handsome Eurasian Penduline Tits busy building their nests. Small patches of scrub produced more Caucasian Chiffchaffs and skulking Cetti's Warblers. Leaving the lake behind us we then took the new road over the Sulema (or Selim) Pass to Yeghegnadzor. It was a fine day and we stopped to take in the ancient caravanserai (a sort of traveller's inn) built in 1332 on the Silk Road from Iran where our first Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin was seen. We reached Yeghegnadzor late that afternoon and went to meet the two local families that had

agreed to kindly be our hosts for the next two nights. Here we were treated to some very warm Armenian hospitality and were made to feel very much at home.

Yeghegnadzor was to be our base for exploring the neighbouring mountains in search of Caspian Snowcock. Our sturdy vehicle managed to get us up almost to the top of the mountain and we only had to walk a few kilometres to access a place where we could survey the crags. Unfortunately there was no sight or sound of the snowcocks but Chukars were common, a pair of Crimson-winged Finches showed well and our first Long-legged Buzzards put in an appearance. A few of us decided to trek further but still the snowcocks evaded us although those who climbed higher were rewarded by the sight of not one but three Brown Bears one of which surprised us more than we surprised it as it came tobogganing past us down a snow drift at very close quarters! It stared at us with a look of seemingly disdainful contempt and shuffled off slowly, snuffling along the ground looking for something good to eat. We ultimately admitted defeat and decided to continue birding at lower levels where we saw some welcome Siberian Stonechats and a bit of culture in the shape of another spectacular monastery known as Spitakavor. Lower still we found some marvellous White-throated Robins (or Irania), Woodlark and Woodchat Shrike.

The next morning we birded on the outskirts of town in the fertile Arpa Valley. Common Quail and Grasshopper Warbler were singing in the fields and with a small amount of persuasion we managed to see both species. Nearby some Eastern Olivaceous Warblers showed well and then it was time to move on. Continuing further south, we crossed a huge high altitude plateau, and our journey was punctuated by numerous stops. A desolate building in the middle of nowhere provided a suitable site for one of only two known Armenian colonies of Lesser Kestrels and other raptors en route included Egyptian Vulture and Short-toed Eagle. Some migrant Marsh Warblers were found, Common Stonechat was seen and in some wooded hills we enjoyed seeing a very showy Eurasian Wryneck. We stopped to wonder at the standing stones of Carahunge – an Armenian Stonehenge and we arrived at Kapan in the late afternoon where we found our ‘newly renovated’ hotel to be somewhat behind schedule! However we made the best of this building site and at least the rooms were reasonable and the by now customary feast washed down with wine, beer and vodka was good! A surprise find for us here was a European Nightjar that was sat snoozing on a telegraph pole in the afternoon sunlight completely oblivious to our attentions.

The following day we travelled to Meghri, the southernmost point of Armenia and situated on the Iranian border. It was a hot, dry area, and the scorched hills all around supported only low, scrubby vegetation. Our first destination was a gorge adjacent to the border, a sensitive area where we were accompanied by a local escort as a precaution and were warned to keep our eyes and cameras focussed purely on the birds. Virtually the first species to greet us on arrival was a very fine Pale Rockfinch and we had some excellent close looks. However the reason for our visit was that this is the site for Rufous-tailed Wheatear, a species that just creeps into Armenia here. This is almost the only place in the Western Palearctic that this newly elevated species can be seen, its main range being Iran and Afghanistan. We quickly found several birds (noting that the sexes are almost identical, unlike Kurdish Wheatear). This now also appears to be a regular site for See-see Partridge and once again this year we weren't disappointed. It wasn't long before we heard their distinctive cry and someone spotted a pair up on top of a large boulder. The scopes were quickly trained on the birds and we all enjoyed some great views. We spent the morning in this attractive location where Blue Rock Thrushes parachuted overhead, Eastern Rock Nuthatches worked their way across the crags and Upcher's Warblers and Eastern Orphean Warblers were easy to observe amongst the bushes and brightly coloured flowers where a smart Barred Warbler was also found. A popular ‘Western Palearctic tick’ for some of the group was an immature Steppe Eagle that sailed overhead. After yet another fine picnic lunch, we moved our attentions to a pretty, scrubby valley in search of Sombre Tits. They proved elusive and unfortunately not a single bird was located. Much better views of Red-fronted Serins did something to compensate before we moved onto an area of orchards and gardens where we hoped to see Levant Sparrowhawk. We waited for a long time and eventually a

pair came flying over in an undulating display flight and then promptly disappeared. By now it was getting late so we headed back to Kapan.

The following day we undertook the long drive to Yerevan. The journey was fairly uneventful bird wise but we had some fantastic views of Bimaculated Larks, some European Honey Buzzards were seen and a lunchtime stop gave us a pair of Western Rock Nuthatch. As we neared our destination we stopped to admire a colony of White Storks nesting in a village where the local people even invited us into their homes and gardens so that we could get a better view! Here also large flocks of Rosy Starlings were watched stuffing themselves with mulberries and dodging the pellets fired by a boy's catapult. As we neared the city a wetland area produced our first Pygmy Cormorants and some Lesser Short-toed Larks. We ultimately reached Yerevan, the capital of Armenia in good time to settle into our comfortable hotel located conveniently near Republic Square, right in the heart of the city centre. Here the grandeur of the imposing public buildings in the centre was in stark contrast to the rather dilapidated, architecturally dreary, Soviet structures surrounding them. Those so inclined had a little time and welcomed the chance to explore the surrounding area.

The next day we paid a visit to the Armash fishponds located in the Araks valley under the looming double cones of "Little" and Mount Ararat. This extensive area of ponds and reedbeds must rate as one of the finest wetlands in the Western Palearctic and it was just teeming with birds. Glorious Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters perched on some wires greeted us on arrival and we admired their glowing colours. At the pools themselves flocks of Pygmy Cormorants were constantly flying over, together with smaller groups of herons, egrets and Glossy Ibis. In the reedbeds, Little Bitterns and Squacco Herons were seen regularly, and on the water twelve species of duck included several pairs of Marbled Ducks, at least five White-headed Ducks and a number of Ferruginous Ducks, while Red-crested Pochard was by far the commonest species. Common Cuckoos constantly patrolled the reedbeds and the air was full of Sand Martins. Many White-winged Terns performed a spectacular flypast and small numbers of White-tailed Lapwings, a recent colonist to Armash were popular birds. Another recent addition to the Armenian avifauna is Savi's Warbler and two birds were picked out reeling away from the tops of reeds. Numerous Paddyfield Warblers were seen and the whole area reverberated with the sound of Great Reed, Caspian Reed and Sedge Warblers. There were also a number of migrant shorebirds and we were pleased to see Kentish Plovers and large numbers of Little Ringed Plovers mixed with Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Little Stints. Good numbers of Slender-billed Gulls foraged amongst the many Black-headed Gulls and an adult and a first winter Mediterranean Gull were also surprise visitors as were three breeding plumaged Great White Pelicans and two Caspian Terns. A pair of Collared Pratincoles hawked over the drier areas, a fine male Ménétries's Warbler was a most welcome find, but perhaps more surprising was the discovery of a warbler that appeared to be a Sykes's Warbler. It had been a fantastic morning birding and after one of the fabulous field lunches prepared by the drivers, we tore ourselves away from Armash and headed into the nearby hills to Vedi Gorge. This small, dry, rocky gorge, with a trickle of a stream running through it, provided a home for Rock Sparrows and Isabelline and Finsch's Wheatears and Grey-necked Buntings put on a great show. We were also lucky with catching sight of a lone Black Vulture that soared overhead.

Our final morning found us driving up Mt Aragats, on a paved road this time, and with no climbing required. We found our target species, Radde's Accentor, almost immediately and superb views were had of a pair. Indeed they proved to be quite easy to see here. We then found a pair of Bluethroats in the area, of the local race *magna*. This race usually lacks the white (or red in other races) spot on the throat. We also had another chance here to see the exquisite White-throated Robin and then we retraced our steps back into Yerevan where in the city itself we had wonderful views of Common Nightingale, Syrian Woodpecker and a marvellous male Levant Sparrowhawk. Our final picnic feast was in fact a grand barbecue in the depths of Azat Gorge. This beautiful place was remarkable for its stunning rock formations and breathtaking views, and Alpine Swifts dashed past us, Eurasian Golden Orioles flew across the gorge and White-throated Dippers followed the rushing river. Once again

superb food and the usual bottles of wine and vodka appeared, conjured miraculously from nowhere. On the surrounding rocky slopes and hills that were ablaze with wild flowers, spring was in full flow. Here the Bimaculated Larks performed their song flights high overhead and as we approached some cliffs we found both Eastern and Western Rock Nuthatches occurring side-by-side, and it seemed as if there were Black-headed Buntings everywhere. Unfortunately an ominous dark cloud gathered and lightening crackled and as the first large drops of rain fell we beat a hasty retreat back to the bus and returned to Yerevan where we celebrated the end of a most eventful tour at the superb Dolmama's restaurant and soaked in the ambience of Hanrapetutyán Hraparak (Republic Square). Although we had not seen it all there had surely been some fantastic encounters with some rare and difficult Western Palearctic birds and with the amazing hospitality and a superb range of habitats, Georgia and Armenia is surely going to be a big destination for birders in the future.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

PODICIPEDIDAE

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: Seen easily on Lake Sevan with smaller numbers at Armash.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: Small numbers on Lake Sevan and common at Armash.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*: A flock of eight were seen on Lake Sevan.

PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Two were seen on Lake Sevan.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: Hundreds and hundreds at Armash, and easily the most numerous waterbird species there – flocks were continually flying backwards and forwards.

PELECANIDAE

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*: Three in breeding plumage were seen at Armash. The pink colour that stains the plumage and has lent the species the name Rosy Pelican is no more than a secretion of the uropygial gland.

ARDEIDAE

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: At least twelve of these summer migrants were seen exceptionally well at Armash. This often-elusive species was conspicuous and easy to see here and at all times of day.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: At least twenty of these mainly summer migrants were seen at Armash. A small number overwinter every year in the Araks Valley.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: This summer migrant was common and easily seen at Armash. The name 'squacco' is derived from a purely local Italian name. In the absence of a native name, Willughby noted c1672 "*Ardea quam Sguacco vocant in Vallibus dictis Malalbergi*"; this he had from the Renaissance encyclopaedist Ulisse Androvandi ('Ornithologia' 1599-1603). Ray ('The Ornithology of Francis Willughby' Translated into English, and enlarged by J. Ray, 1678) and translated it as "the Heron which they call Sguacco in the Valleys of Malalbergo". Hill ('A General Natural History' 1748-52) erroneously spelt the name 'squacco'. Latham ('General Synopsis of Birds' 1781-5) took over this misspelling and added 'Heron'. The original name 'sguacco' supposedly imitates the husky call.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: Three of these summer visitors were seen north of Armash and another at the ponds themselves. The eastern (Asian) form *coromandus* of this species has been split as Eastern Cattle Egret.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: Small numbers of this mainly summer migrant at Armash and one at Lake Sevan. A small number overwinter every year in the Araks Valley.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: A few widespread sightings in Georgia and Armenia – this summer migrant was perhaps surprisingly scarce here.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: This summer migrant was rather more frequent than the previous species, with up to 15 seen at Armash.

CICONIIDAE

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*: Many pairs with young were seen on nests in the Armash area. This species is mainly a summer migrant to the country although good numbers overwinter each year in the Araks Valley.

THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*: This summer migrant was rather scarce at Armash this year with only one flock of ten seen.

ANATIDAE

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*: This mainly summer migrant was most numerous on Lake Sevan area with a few more at Armash. A small number overwinter each year in the Araks Valley and at Lake Sevan.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: Six were counted at Armash.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: At least 20 at Lake Sevan with smaller numbers at Armash.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: Fair numbers of this familiar species were seen at Lake Sevan and Armash.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*: Good numbers of this summer migrant were seen at Lake Sevan and Armash.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: A couple of pairs were seen at Armash.

Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*: About ten of these rare and localized ducks were seen at Armash. Also known as Marbled Teal the species is classified as "Vulnerable" in *Threatened Birds of the World*. Destruction and pollution of habitat is a major threat to the species whose population is thought to number between 9,000 – 19,000 birds.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*: This attractive duck was common at Armash.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*: This familiar species was common at Armash.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*: At least 15 at Armash. This species is classified as "Near-threatened" in *Threatened Birds of the World*. Although still common in Asia declines have been noted in Europe where the population is now estimated to be some 13,000 – 24,000 pairs. Habitat destruction appears to be the main threat.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*: About eight were seen at Armash. This species mainly breeds further north.

White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*: Good views of at least three males and two females of these 'stiff-tails' at Armash. This species is classified as "Endangered" in *Threatened Birds of the World*. The world population probably numbers less than 10,000 individuals. About 50% of its habitat was drained during the 20th century and further habitat destruction and pollution is a major threat.

ACCIPITRIDAE

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: Just a few sightings of this summer migrant in Armenia.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*: Just one of these summer migrants was seen at Jvari Pass.

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*: A good number of widespread sightings and first seen above Kazbegi. The name is based on the German meaning 'lamb vulture' and the misconception that it killed lambs. Some now consider the name Bearded Vulture preferable.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*: A single bird in Georgia, but most sightings were on the plateau between Yeghegnadzor and Goris.

Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*: First seen in the Kazbegi area, and again in Armenia, especially near Goris.

Eurasian Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus*: One was seen flying over Vedi Gorge. Also known as Cinereous Vulture, this species is classified as "Near-threatened" in *Threatened Birds of the World*. The world population is probably no more than 10,000 birds and declining. This is a species threatened by habitat loss, poisoning and persecution.

Short-toed Eagle *Circus gallicus*: A few of these summer migrants were seen during our journeys through the Yeghegnadzor to Goris region.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: Small numbers were seen in the Lake Sevan area but rather more commonly at Armash.

- Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*: An individual was watched carrying off prey as it flew over the wooded valley at Dilijan.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: Just four widespread sightings with the best views obtained at Dilijan.
- Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*: It took some time but we finally had poor views of a displaying pair of these summer migrants at Meghri. We later bettered this with fantastic views of superb male in Yerevan itself! Levant is a collective noun for the countries bordering the eastern Mediterranean Sea from Greece to Egypt and especially Syria, Lebanon and Israel.
- Steppe (Common) Buzzard *Buteo (buteo) vulpinus*: Frequently seen in small numbers throughout the tour. The local resident birds are of the darker, redder race *menetriesi*, which is part of the *vulpinus* group known as Steppe Buzzard that is considered to be a separate species by some authors. It is possible that some of our sightings were attributable to migrants of the race *vulpinus* on their way further north.
- Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*: Somewhat less numerous than the previous species and generally in more open, arid areas in the highlands and mountains (with none seen in Georgia). Several dark morph birds were noted.
- Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*: A juvenile was seen flying over Meghri.
- Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: Good views were obtained of several birds at the Jvari Pass and a few were seen in Armenia with particularly good views at Mt Teke.
- Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*: Widespread sightings of this summer migrant but only in Armenia. All were pale morph birds.

FALCONIDAE

- Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*: Good views between Yeghegnadzor and Goris in the vicinity of one of only two known colonies in Armenia. This species is classified as "Vulnerable" in *Threatened Birds of the World*. The world population is thought to be less than 60,000 with up to 21,000 pairs in Europe and North Africa. Habitat loss is considered to be the major threat but use of pesticides depleting prey is also a contributable factor.
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Widespread sightings in small numbers and frequently seen.
- Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: Three widespread sightings of this summer migrant in Armenia only.
- Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*: A juvenile was seen at Kazbegi and an adult on Mt Teke. The resident form in Armenia is the race *brookei*.

TETRAONIDAE

- Caucasian Grouse *Tetrao mlokosiewiczi*: Two distant males on the grassy slopes above Kazbegi were followed by more at Jvari Pass where males were watched lekking and performing their flutter-jumping display and at least twelve individuals were counted. This species is classified as "Data Deficient" in *Threatened Birds of the World*. The world population probably numbers no more than 70,500 birds with perhaps less than 6,000 in Georgia and at least 300 in Armenia. Over-intensive sheep grazing and hunting are the greatest threats.

PHASIANIDAE

- Caucasian Snowcock *Tetraogallus caucasicus*: At least six birds were seen (with others heard) and some well through the scopes on the steep slopes above Kazbegi and two more distant birds were at the Jvari Pass. Poorly illustrated in most books as the vermiculations are apparently invisible at a distance and the reddish patch sometimes seems to be confined to a small area on the nape making the bird look much more like illustrations of Caspian Snowcock.
- Chukar *Alectoris chukar*: Widespread sightings but most common on Mt Teke. The name is an onomatopoeic rendering of the call.

See-see Partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis*: Great scope views of a pair at Meghri. This species had never been seen in Armenia until 2003, and this sighting represents the fourth consecutive year that the species has been recorded for the country. The name refers to the noise of the wings made in flight.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*: Some of the group stumbled across one on Mt Teke.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*: Two of these summer migrants were seen in flight at Yeghegnadzor.

RALLIDAE

Corncrake *Crex crex*: A real highlight of the tour was the excellent sightings of no less than three individuals in response to playback at Kazbegi. This summer migrant is classified as "Vulnerable" in *Threatened Birds of the World*. The world population is estimated as less than 6,000,000 with up to 1,822,000 in Europe. Changes to land-use and agricultural practises are the main threats.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: Good numbers at Lake Sevan and a few at Armash.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: Very common at Lake Sevan and hundreds at Armash.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: This summer migrant was easy to see in the Armash area.

GLAREOLIDAE

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: At least one pair of these summer migrants was seen at Armash.

CHARADRIIDAE

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: This summer migrant was first seen at Kazbegi, with more around Lake Sevan and a flock of about 40 at Armash.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*: About six of these summer migrants were seen at Armash. This species is known as Snowy Plover in the New World.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: Two of these passage migrants were seen at Armash.

White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*: Great views of this recent colonist to Armenia with at least eight seen well at Armash.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: A few were seen at Lake Sevan and in the Armash area.

SCOLOPACIDAE

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: A singleton was seen at Lake Sevan and about 25 of these passage migrants were seen at Armash.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: About twelve of these passage migrants were seen at Armash with most in their attractive breeding plumage.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: At least twenty of these passage migrants were seen at Armash.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*: Three of these passage migrants were seen at Armash.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: Two of these passage migrants were seen at Lake Sevan and four at Armash.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*: One of these passage migrants in breeding plumage was seen at Armash.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*: One of these passage migrants in breeding plumage was seen at Armash.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*: Singletons were seen at Armash, Lake Sevan and Spandarian Reservoir where it is a summer migrant.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: Good numbers of these passage migrants were seen around Lake Sevan and a couple were in the Armash area.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: Widespread sightings of this summer migrant throughout the tour.

LARIDAE

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*: A breeding plumaged bird and a first winter plumaged individual were scoped resting on the mud at Armash.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*: Common and easy to see at Lake Sevan and Armash.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*: At least twenty individuals were seen well at Armash. The status of this species in Armenia is not fully understood.

Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus*: Small flocks commonly encountered, mainly around Lake Sevan and at Armash. The visit to the main colony at Bird Island was particularly impressive with hundreds of birds present. This species was previously treated as a race of Herring Gull *L. argentatus*. However there are morphological, biometric and genetic differences and this now seems to be a valid species.

STERNIDAE

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*: Two of these passage migrants were seen at Armash. The species is sometimes placed in the genus *Hydroprogne*.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Two of these summer migrants were seen en route to Kazbegi and a singleton was sighted on Lake Sevan.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*: At least eight of these summer migrants were seen at Armash. Recent genetic evidence suggests that the 'little' terns are better placed in a separate genus, *Sternula*.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*: About six of these summer migrants were seen at Armash.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*: At least 150 of these summer migrants were seen at Armash, many of which were in summer plumage.

COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: Presumably wild ones in rocky gorges and villages around Kazbegi and the usual scabby feral ones in towns elsewhere.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*: A pair as we climbed Mt Aragats was our only sighting.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*: Widespread sightings in small numbers in Armenia.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*: A few were seen in Kazbegi.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Widespread sightings in small numbers of this summer migrant.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*: A few were seen in Yerevan.

CUCULIDAE

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: This summer migrant was commonly seen and heard throughout, but especially numerous at Armash where they were very showy sitting out in the open on telegraph wires and constantly flying back and forth. Over 100 different host species have been recorded for the Common Cuckoo but the most common are Meadow Pipit, Dunnock and Reed Warbler.

STRIGIDAE

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* (H): No one was particularly keen to make the effort to see them and so this species remained a heard only at Kapan.

CAPRIMULGIDAE

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*: One of these summer migrants was flushed at Kazbegi and another was spotted by Rainer sitting on a telegraph pole in broad daylight so that we were all treated to the most fantastic views.

APODIDAE

Common Swift *Apus apus*: This summer migrant was very common, with sightings throughout the tour.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: First seen on Mt Teke, we had a number of chances to get looks at this summer migrant.

ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: This brightly coloured bird was seen well at Lake Sevan.

MEROPIDAE

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*: Four of these glorious summer migrants were seen sitting on telegraph wires at Armash.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: Widespread sightings of this summer migrant throughout the tour.

CORACIIDAE

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: Widespread sightings of this summer migrant throughout the tour.

UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: This attractive summer migrant was a familiar sight throughout Armenia. Indeed it seemed hardly possible to leave the vehicle without seeing or hearing one.

PICIDAE

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: Superb views of an apparently strongly territorial bird between Goris and Kapan. This status of this summer or perhaps passage migrant in Armenia is not fully understood. The species is named as such because of its strange habit of twisting its head round over its back when alarmed.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: One was seen flying through the Jvari Pass and others were heard at Dilijan.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* (H,NL): Really elusive this year and we tried so hard! Chris heard one early one morning at Kapan.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: The most commonly encountered woodpecker with a few seen at Dilijan, around Lake Sevan and elsewhere.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*: Our first was as we neared Yeghegnadzor but the best views we obtained were of one in Yerevan.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*: A pair was seen exceedingly well at Dilijan.

ALAUDIDAE

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*: We had excellent views of this summer migrant in the dry hills near Carahunge. Bimaculated means 'two spots' and refers to the black marks on the side of the breast.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*: A couple were found at Kazbegi and some of the group saw more at Vedi Gorge.

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*: Good views were had near Armash.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: This spiky topped lark was most numerous in the Yerevan area.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*: We had several opportunities to see this summer migrant well. Its sweet liquid song was always a joy to hear.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: Locally very common particularly on Mount Teke and on the drives between Yeghegnadzor and Goris.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*: Also known as Shore Lark we had numerous opportunities to see this species well on the Jvari Pass in Georgia, and on Mounts Teke and Aragats in Armenia. The local race is *penicillata*.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*: Also known as Bank Swallow, this summer migrant was incredibly abundant at Armash.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*: Regularly seen in small numbers throughout the tour. The species is sometimes placed in the genus *Ptyonoprogne*.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: This summer migrant was commonly seen throughout the tour.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*: This summer migrant was commonly seen throughout the tour.

MOTACILLIDAE

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: Several sightings of this summer migrant, all in Armenia.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: Small numbers of this summer migrant were seen in suitable habitat throughout the tour.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*: Commonly seen at high altitudes in Armenia.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*: Three of these passage migrants in breeding plumage were seen at Kazbegi and another was well watched at Lake Sevan.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*: Very common if not abundant at high altitudes in Georgia and Armenia. Its parachuting display flights were fun to watch.

Blue-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] flava*: Small numbers were seen at Kazbegi and around Lake Sevan. The various forms that make up the 'Yellow Wagtail complex' have always been the subjects of much debate. Latest taxonomic decisions based on the phylogenetic species concept suggest that some races should be re-split into full species.

Sykes's Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] beema*: A male was identified at Kazbegi. Colonel William Henry Sykes (1790-1872) was a British soldier and fought in the Bombay army and later became a director of the East India Company.

Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] thunbergi*: A fine breeding plumaged male was identified at Kazbegi.

Black-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] feldegg*: Small numbers seen at several sites and particularly at Lake Sevan and Armash. This distinctive race is a very smart looking summer migrant indeed.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: A few widespread sightings in Georgia and Armenia.

White Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] alba*: Common and widespread and a familiar sight throughout the tour.

CINCLIDAE

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: Best views were obtained at Jvari Pass and in Azat Gorge.

TROGLODYTIDAE

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: Seen well at Dilijan.

PRUNELLIDAE

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: Also known as Hedge Accentor we saw several in the Kazbegi area, and a few others at Dilijan and elsewhere in Armenia.

Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis*: Very easy to see with a total of four birds on our final morning on Mount Aragats. All birds seen well showed a distinctive chocolate-brown cap, rather than the black cap as illustrated in the field guides. Gustav Ferdinand Richard Radde (1831-1903) was a Prussian naturalist and explorer and founder of the Caucasian Museum in Georgia.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*: This attractive bird was most common and easiest to see on the Jvari Pass.

TURDIDAE

[The chats including the genera *Cercotrichas*, *Erithacus*, *Luscinia*, *Irania*, *Phoenicurus*, *Saxicola*, *Oenanthe* and *Monticola* are often placed in the family Muscicapidae.]

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*: This summer migrant was first seen well on the Sulema Pass and then later at Vedi and Azat. The birds in Armenia belong to the race *familiaris*, which is one of the greyish, eastern group of races.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: Easily seen at Dilijan.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*: This summer migrant was seen well on Mount Aragats on our final morning. Displaying males, males feeding juveniles and females – we had it all! The birds were of the large race *magna*, where the throat is usually entirely blue; however, some birds can show a small white spot on the throat.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: This summer migrant was frequently heard in lower areas, especially in riverside scrub. Our first views were at Kazbegi but we all finally saw it well in Yerevan.

White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis*: Also known as Irania this stunning summer migrant performed well for us. We had several chances to get good views of some fine males (and a few drabber females) of this regional speciality in appropriate habitat in Armenia.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: Common at higher altitudes in Georgia and Armenia. The local race is the nominate *ochruros*, which shows rufous on the belly and no white in the wing although there seemed to be much variation between individuals.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: Widespread sightings of this summer migrant were seen in various wooded areas throughout the tour, but it was particularly common at Dilijan where it was even nesting in the hotel walls. All birds were of the local race *samamiscus* that shows a prominent white wing-patch although there seemed to be much variation between individuals.

Güldenstädt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster*: It was one heck of a climb but all agreed it was worth it. We had to scramble all the way to the snowline and after a bit of scanning we finally picked up a pair chasing each other around the high rocky slopes. Nik later saw another male high above the Jvari Pass. Professor Johann Anton Güldenstädt (1745-1781) was a Latvian physician and natural scientist. He possibly collected the redstart during his travels to the Caucasus. He is also responsible for describing the Ferruginous Duck.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: Small numbers of this summer migrant were seen at several sites, especially in the high plateau areas throughout the tour.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*: Just a few of these summer migrants were seen at widespread locations in Georgia and Armenia.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*: Several males were seen on Mt Teke. The race concerned, *armenicus* is a summer migrant to Armenia and has previously been treated as a race of Common Stonechat *S. rubicola*.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*: This summer migrant was seen well in the drier areas at Vedi Gorge and in the Azat area.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: This summer migrant was common and easy to see in the higher altitude areas throughout the tour.

Eastern Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe melanoleuca*: This summer migrant was commonly seen in a variety of habitats in Armenia. Most birds were of the black-throated morph '*stapazina*', but one or two birds of the white-throated morph '*aurita*' were also seen. This eastern form is usually lumped in the Western Black-eared Wheatear *O. hispanica* with the name Black-eared Wheatear being used for the enlarged species.

Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii*: This summer migrant was fairly common and easy to see in Vedi Gorge. Friedrich Hermann Otto Finsch (1839-1917) was a German ethnographer and naturalist who travelled widely including the Balkans and Turkestan.

- Rufous-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia*: We had good views of at least four rather volatile birds at Meghri, close to the Iranian border. This summer migrant that was formerly regarded as the eastern race of Persian (Red-tailed) Wheatear *O. xanthopyrna*, only reaches extreme southern parts of Armenia, its only outpost in the Western Palearctic. Although it has recently been found breeding in central Armenia thus extending its range slightly. The western form, *O. xanthopyrna*, is now known as Kurdish Wheatear.
- Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: Small numbers of this summer migrant were seen in the higher parts of Armenia. It was particularly common on Mt Teke.
- Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*: Small numbers of this summer migrant were seen in rocky areas, notably at Vedi and Azat Gorges and Meghri.
- Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*: Small numbers of this resident were seen in the Kazbegi area and, in Armenia, on Mounts Teke and Aragats. The distinctive local race is *amicorum*, with a broader white breast-band and more extensive white fringes on the wings.
- Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*: A common and familiar bird throughout the tour.
- Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: Often heard but at least one was seen around Dilijan.
- Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: Just one sighting at Kazbegi.

SYLVIIDAE

- Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*: This mainly summer migrant was heard at several sites but only seen at Lake Sevan and in the Arpa Valley. Small numbers also winter in the Araks valley. Fr Francesco Cetti (1726-1778) was an Italian Jesuit priest with an interest in zoology and mathematics. He had a specialist interest in the birds of Sardinia.
- Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*: This summer migrant was heard singing and was eventually seen in crops on the outskirts of Yeghegnadzor.
- Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: This summer migrant is a recent colonist to Armenia and two were seen at Armash. Paolo Savi (1798-1871) was an Italian naturalist, mineralogist and eventual Senator of the Kingdom.
- Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*: This summer migrant was seen or heard at several localities, but most easy to get to grips with at Lake Sevan and Armash.
- Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*: Presumably newly arrived or migrating birds were seen at Yeghegnadzor, Spandarian Reservoir and at Kapan.
- Caspian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus fuscus*: Many of these summer migrants were at Armash and a few were seen elsewhere. This slightly greyer, Middle Eastern form is usually lumped in European Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus* and there seems to be no valid reason for them to be treated as separate species.
- Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*: These summer migrants were in full song and very easy to see well at Armash.
- Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: This summer migrant was particularly common and easy to see at Armash. We also found a few migrants at Kazbegi.
- Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*: Only a few of these summer migrants were seen in full song around Yeghegnadzor and we saw what was presumably a migrant at Armash. This eastern form (here of the race *elaeica*) is sometimes separated from Western Olivaceous Warbler *H. opaca* and the name Olivaceous Warbler used for the enlarged species. There is some DNA evidence to suggest that this species is in fact an *Acrocephalus* and should be better placed in that genus or else the name *Iduna* might be used. If the former would be adopted then the scientific name then becomes *Acrocephalus pallidus*.

Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama*: A bird seen well at Armash on 20/5 appeared to fit the bill for this species. It was singing a soft scratchy song that was almost drowned out by the deafening chorus of *Acrocephalus* warblers. The tail was frequently nervously bobbed or flicked. The cold grey brown plumage of this smallish warbler was unremarkable except for the short supercilium ending above the eye, slightly darker lores and a longish bill with dark culmen and tip. The legs were fleshy grey with very grey feet. Several photos were taken but none very clear.

Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*: Small numbers of these summer migrants were seen typically on dry rocky slopes, at Vedi Gorge, the Azat area and Meghri. Sir Henry Morris Upcher JP (1839-1921) was Deputy-Lieutenant of the County of Norfolk, England. He was a friend of Tristram who redescribed the warbler after the original 'rather vague' description by Ehrenberg.

Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*: This summer migrant was only seen at Armash where a fine male was seen. Edouard P. Ménétries (1802-1861) was a French zoologist who collected in Russia between 1829-30.

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*: This summer migrant was easy to see in the rocky vegetated valleys at Meghri. This eastern form was previously lumped in Western Orphean Warbler *S. hortensis*. However Vasil Ananian informed us last year that these eastern birds react aggressively to playback of western forms.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*: Great views of two of these summer migrants at Kazbegi but both were not in full breeding plumage. We had to wait until Meghri for a fully barred warbler to show up.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*: A commonly seen and widespread bird throughout the tour.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: This summer migrant was common and widespread and a familiar sight and sound in the Georgian and Armenian countryside. The local form, *icterops*, is somewhat darker and greyer than nominate *communis*.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*: This summer migrant was seen well at Kazbegi and by Lake Sevan.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: This summer migrant was passing through Kazbegi but settled birds were seen at Dilijan and other Armenian locations.

Green Warbler *Phylloscopus nitidus*: A cheerful summer migrant that was passing through the Kazbegi area and was easy to see in appropriate wooded habitat throughout the tour. The form concerned is often lumped in Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides*.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: This summer migrant was seen at Dilijan and presumably migrating birds at other widespread locations both in Georgia and Armenia. Although occurring fairly close to Caucasian Chiffchaff at Dilijan, this species generally prefers more mature deciduous woodland at lower altitudes.

Caucasian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus lorenzii*: This summer migrant was first seen in good numbers at Kazbegi in Georgia and later around Lake Sevan. Generally found in light woodland or scrub, often close to the tree line. The birds in Georgia were much browner than those in Armenia the latter showing more olive tones in their plumage making identification on plumage characters alone difficult although the voice remains distinct. This species is sometimes lumped in Chiffchaff *P. collybita* or alternatively Mountain Chiffchaff *P. sindianus* when that form is treated as a separate species or indeed as in the present taxonomy as a species in its own right. There are differences in song, plumage and mitochondrial DNA that suggests that the Mountain Chiffchaff complex should be treated as specifically distinct from Common Chiffchaff.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*: Widespread sightings of these passage migrants on their way further north throughout Armenia.

MUSCICAPIDAE

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: A number of widespread sightings of these summer migrants in Georgia and Armenia.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*: At least five female plumaged birds were seen in the Kazbegi area but later we found several brightly coloured males of these summer migrants at Dilijan.

Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*: No problems tracking this summer migrant down at Dilijan this year. In fact we found two pairs and managed to get some excellent views of this dapper bird.

TIMALIIDAE

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*: This attractive bird was a common and conspicuous species at Armash. The local birds are distinctly paler than nominate western ones, especially females that normally lack any dark streaking on the upperparts; these birds are presumably of the race *russicus*. This species is sometimes called Bearded Tit but in fact is not a tit at all but instead closely related to the parrotbills and placed in the babbler family.

AEGITHALIDAE

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: Family groups of these charming birds were seen well at Kazbegi and Kapan. The local race is *major*, which has a pale grey mantle and blackish-brown lateral crown-stripes. However one bird at Kapan had a pale greyish head.

PARIDAE

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Small numbers seen at several sites, most notably at Dilijan. The species is sometimes placed in the genus *Periparus*.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: Apparently less common than the other two woodland tits but seen at several sites, most notably at Dilijan. The species is sometimes placed in the genus *Cyanistes*.

Great Tit *Parus major*: Common and frequently seen throughout the tour.

SITTIDAE

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: Common and easy to see at Dilijan.

Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota*: Rather more obvious than the next species and apparently common in dry rocky areas in Armenia.

Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer*: First seen in the Arpa Valley and similar to Eastern Rock Nuthatch, and the two species often occurred side-by-side in the Azat area.

TICHODROMADIDAE

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*: Normally a much-wanted bird but this year's group were rather blasé as we saw four or five different individuals in the Kazbegi area.

CERTHIIDAE

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*: Chris saw one in Kazbegi but the rest of us had to wait until Dilijan.

REMIZIDAE

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*: We found two obliging pairs busy nest building around the shores of Lake Sevan. Another pair was glimpsed in Azat Gorge. The local race is *menzbieri* that is similar to nominate *pendulinus*.

ORIOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: Small numbers of this summer migrant were frequently encountered throughout Armenia.

LANIIDAE

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*: This summer migrant was a most familiar and beautiful bird and common and widespread during our travels through the two countries.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*: This summer migrant was far less common than the Red-backed Shrike, but we still managed to see good numbers throughout the tour.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*: A male was seen after we had descended Mt Teke and two more of these summer migrants were seen in Vedi Gorge.

CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: Small numbers seen quite frequently throughout Armenia. The local race, *krynickyi* has a distinctive black crown.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: Abundant throughout the tour.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*: Also known as Yellow-billed Chough this species was only seen in small numbers in the Kazbegi area in Georgia.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*: Small numbers were seen at high altitudes in both Georgia and Armenia.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Frequently seen in Armenia.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: Several colonies noted on various journeys in Armenia.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*: A very common and widespread species throughout the tour.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: Small numbers but frequently encountered throughout the tour.

STURNIDAE

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: Fairly commonly seen throughout the tour.

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*: Also known as Rose-coloured Starling we had excellent views most notably in Kazbegi and at Armash where they were wreaking havoc on some mulberry trees in the gardens there. Elsewhere we regularly saw small to large flocks in flight hurtling through the skies on missions to destinations unknown.

PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Common and widespread throughout the tour.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: Just a few sightings in Armenia.

Pale Rockfinch *Carospiza brachydactyla*: Excellent views were obtained at Meghri this year. Normally a late migrant we must have been fortunate to squeeze this one in.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*: Small numbers seen at Carahunge and Vedi Gorge.

White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*: Excellent views of small numbers including birds holding territory on the Jvari Pass in Georgia. In Armenia, small numbers were seen on the Sulema Pass.

FRINGILLIDAE

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: Seen at many widespread localities throughout the tour and very common at Dilijan.

Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*: This attractive little finch was frequently encountered around Kazbegi but very volatile and it took a while for everyone to get good looks. In Armenia we had excellent views at Meghri.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*: Small numbers were noted in Georgia and at Dilijan and elsewhere in Armenia.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: An attractive and common and widespread species during the tour.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: Small numbers seen frequently throughout Armenia.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: Common above the tree line at Kazbegi. A few were also seen in the higher parts of Armenia. The distinctive pale local race is *brevirostris*.

Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguinea*: Often a difficult bird to get to grips with but we had fantastic scope views of a pair displaying on Mount Teke.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*: Common and widespread with some obvious migration going on. There appeared to be a fall of rosefinches at the Jvari Pass and also at Dilijan where there were large flocks feeding on the seed heads of flowers on the 'lawn'.

Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla*: We staggered, spluttered, puffed and panted up the steep slopes above Kazbegi and eventually a cry came from Roger that he could see a male. Indeed there was actually a pair feeding quietly around the edge of the snowmelt. In no time the scope was trained on them but it took quite a while for the rest of the group that had braved the climb to catch up. As one by one they hauled themselves up the slope a quick look was taken before collapsing in a breathless heap at the base of the tripod. Fortunately the birds stayed throughout this lengthy procedure and were even joined by a number more so that we saw at least ten birds of both sexes. It has been suggested that this, the nominate form may be worthy of splitting from eastern populations as a separate species in which case it would be renamed Caucasian Rosefinch.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: Rather common at Dilijan.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: We had great views of this striking species at Dilijan.

EMBERIZIDAE

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*: Small numbers at several widespread sites throughout the tour.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: Small numbers seen at a number of widely scattered localities throughout the tour.

Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*: Good numbers were seen exceptionally well at Vedi Gorge. This attractive species is a specialist of arid rocky highland slopes.

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*: This striking bird was commonly encountered throughout the tour. It would have been time to hang the binoculars up if we'd missed this one!

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: Common and widespread and a familiar roadside species. The species is sometimes placed in the genus *Emberiza*.

MAMMALS

Persian Squirrel *Sciurus anomalus*: Just one individual was seen in the woods at Dilijan – a distinctive and beautiful species.

Common Vole *Microtus arvalis*: Seen on Mt Teke and at Carahunge.

Brown Bear *Ursos arctos*: A real surprise was our close encounter with not one but three of these huge creatures on Mt Teke. Some of us continued to the peak scanning for snowcocks when Roger initially saw a subliminal flash of a 'grey animal' and some moments later a bear bounded into view. It was seemingly in a playful mood running around up ahead of us and away. A little further on we discovered another asleep on a slab of rock. We disturbed its slumbers and it warily slunk away. Then the first animal reappeared only to promptly vanish again and as we were wondering where it had gone the sound of a third bear tobogganing down the snow field beside us at about 30 metres distance caused us to freeze, wondering what to do next. As it happened this magnificent beast eyed us with disdain and snorted contemptuously and shambled off.

Least Weasel *Mustela nivalis* (NL): Richard saw one at Armash.

Wild Goat *Capra aegagrus*: Eight, some sporting some marvellous horns, were seen on Mt Teke.

Chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra*: Two were seen at the Jvari Pass.