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Observations on birds of the Bulgarian seaboard, with new breeding records for S. W. Bulgaria of Masked Shrike *(Lanius nubicus)*, Bonelli's Warbler *(Phylloscopus bonelli)*, and Blue Rock Thrush *(Monticola solitarius)*

by
JOHN LAWTON ROBERTS, Wrexham, England

Introduction

Both its situation, on two major migration routes, and its highly varied physical structure and climate, make Bulgaria a country of outstanding ornithological interest. Its Black Sea coastal strip has, however, received little detailed study. Only Kumerloeve (Burgas area, 1941–2), Petrov & Zlatanov (South Dobrogea, 1951–5), I. Peshev (Varna area, 1962–1967) and A. Prostov (Burgas county, 1948–1962) have published results of more protracted studies.

The observations set out below were made during a series of 2–7-day visits to Burgas and its surrounds between February 1975 and July 1976, and during weekly counts made on Atanasovsko Ezero (the saltings north of Burgas) between September 1976 and June 1977. During this latter period, when I lived in Burgas, I also visited other coastal wetlands, from Ropotamo to Durankulak, with some regularity. During spring 1976 I made several visits to the 'pseudo-macquis' region of the south Kresna Gorge, in SW Bulgaria.

The results of these studies indicate marked changes in the status of several, particularly coastal, species. The overall picture obtained contradicts in many cases that presented in the popular Field Guides to the Birds of Europe.

Data on migrations and wintering of Anseriformes, and on migrations of Raptors and other large soaring birds, are omitted, and included in separate papers.

Acknowledgements

I am much indebted to N. Boev and T. Michev of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for reading through this paper with me, and offering valuable advice; also, for their help, to the following members of the same Academy: S. Donchev, B. E. Iwanow, D. Nankinov, A. Prostov and Zh. Spiridonov; to S. Simeonov (University of Sofia, Zoological Faculty), to Ts. Petrov (Zoological Museum, Plovdiv) and to P. Simeonov and Dr. I. Vatev.

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Observations, by Species

Gavia arctica, Black-throated Diver

Fairly common on the Black Sea coast north of Sozopol in winter. There are, however, only scattered records of birds on passage inland, and scarcely any of inland wintering. D. Nankinov and I saw 5 birds on Isker Reservoir (south of Sofia) on 21 Dec. 1975, and 18 in the same site on 25 Jan. 1976.

Tachybaptus ruficollis, Little Grebe

In Prostov's time rare in the breeding season near Burgas.

From 25 March to 6 May 1977 7+ males held territory, and were presumably breeding, on the canal surrounding Atanasovsko. Similar behaviour was observed at Vaia (4+ males), Alepu and Arkutino.

Podiceps cristatus, Great Crested Grebe

Mountfort et al. (1961) saw 12 on Vaia during May/June 1960. They were mostly paired, but no nests were found. Prostov (1964) described the species as uncommon in the breeding season in his area, though Grössler (1967) cites an observation by Förster of 12 on Vaia on 29 May, 1962.

On 8 June, 1977 I counted 60+ birds on the fish-farm at Vaia. On one basin alone there were 6+ nests with eggs. Birds were also present in the breeding season at Ropotamo, Arkutino and Alepu.

Botaurus stellaris, Bittern

Prostov (1964) suggested that isolated individuals may winter in the Burgas area, and Johnson & Biber (1971) saw 1 on Vaia on 20 Dec. 1970.

On 9 Jan. 1976 I saw singles at Durankulak and Shabla; on 11 Jan. 1977 singles at the same sites; on 23 Jan. 1977 1 at Alepu; on 28 Jan. 1977 1 on Atanasovsko; on 6 Febr. 1977 1 (and a recently killed bird) at Ovcharitza (Yambol); and on 13 March 1977, 1 at Durankulak.

Casarca ferruginea, Ruddy Shelduck

Breeds in small numbers in the Bulgarian Dobrogea (Robel et al. 1977). Mountfort et al. (1961) recorded up to 8 on Atanasovsko from 1–3 June, 1960, while Prostov gives breeding records from 17 May, 1951, 3 June, 1953 and 27 May, 1957 (1964).

I saw birds on Atanasovsko on 23 May, 1975, 26 June, 1976, and 4 May, 1977, all single pairs; also a pair at Vaia on 9 June, 1977.

Tadorna tadorna, Shelduck

Prostov (1964) described this species as breeding in steadily declining numbers in his area; he gave 4 nesting records only. Mountfort et al. (1961)

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saw 1–18 on Atanasovsko during May/June 1960. Donchev (1967) saw pairs on Atanasovsko (20 and 22 June, 1962) and Vaia (6 May, 1960). Robel et al. (1977) saw c.30 adults on Atanasovsko on 15 June, 1972 and 5 adults on 26 June.

Late spring totals on Atanasovsko during 1977 were: 106 on 6 May, 77 on 13 May and 22+ on 19/20 June. Several pairs showed anxiety near suitable burrows in banks and dykes, and on 19 June I saw a pair with 5 1–2 day old ducklings.

Anas strepera, Gadwall

A relatively rare breeding species in Prostov's time in the Burgas area; Mountfort et al. (1961) saw 10, 12 and 8 on Atanasovsko, Vaia and Mandra respectively from 27 May to 4 June 1960, and Grössler (1967) saw 10 drakes and 5 ducks on Atanasovsko on 10 June, 1963, and 2 pairs on Vaia on 29 May, 1962.

30+ were present on Atanasovsko in late April/early May 1977, and 5 nests with eggs were found.

Anas acuta, Pintail

Christovich (1890) reported several pairs nesting on Dragoman Marsh, but since then breeding has been established only once, by Donchev (1977), who saw a female with 14 ducklings near Sokolitza (Karlovo) on 4 July, 1974. Robel et al. (1977) saw a female on Atanasovsko on 15 June, 1972.

On 1 May, 1975, I saw a pair of Pintail on Atanasovsko, and on 13 May, 1977 there were still 7 birds present on the same lake. On 16 May two competent observers flushed a female from 6 eggs on a dyke near which a pair had earlier shown anxiety. I later collected the down, and an infertile egg, after the young had left, and found both the down, and small feathers mixed in it, to match perfectly the illustrations in the Handbook of British Birds (Witherby et al.)

Anas clypeata, Shoveler

To date there are 3 breeding records only for the species: Reiser (1894) near Svishtov, and B. E. Iwanow (pers.comm.) 2 nests with eggs on the island of Belene in the Danube on 15 and 19 May, 1969.

Prostov (1964) saw a single bird as late as 27 April, 1953, and he cited Mountfort et al. (1961) who saw 3 males and a female on Vaia on 29 May, 1960, and 2 pairs on Atanasovsko on 3 June, 1960, birds which he supposed to be non-breeders. On 7 May, 1960 Donchev (1967) shot a female at Vaia with highly activated ovaries, while on May 18, 1973 Tanyu Michev saw a pair on Atanasovsko (pers.comm.)

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On Atanasovsko during 1977 I found 4 nests: on 25 April, 10 eggs; on 28 April, 11 eggs; on 29 April, 8 eggs; and on 15 April, an incomplete clutch of 6. In June, on a different part of the lake, I saw a female with 8 well-feathered young. From 6–8 June, from a hide at Vaia, I regularly heard a duck giving the calls used when returning to and leaving the eggs.

Netta rufina, Red-crested Pochard

Breeds at Sreburna Nature Reserve (Patev, 1950). Donchev (1967) saw a nesting pair on Shabla Lake on 7 June, 1965, and the same author (1977) saw a pair with 3 young at Sokolitza (Karlovo) on 4 July, 1974. Prostov (1964) saw a pair on Vaia on 7 and 9 June, 1956, but did not suspect breeding.

On 8 June, 1977, I saw 2 pairs on the fish-farm at Vaia, but could find no indication of breeding.

Aythya ferina, Pochard

Prostov (1964) gives only one summer record, a wounded bird on 31 July, 1950; Mountfort et al. (1961) saw 2 at Vaia on 17 May, 1960. Robel (1973) saw 6 on the coast near Kiten on 10 July, 1971, and Robel et al. (1977) saw 2 at Balchik on 30 June, 1973. Donchev (1974) saw a drake on a reservoir at Skala, (Burgas) on 8 July, 1972, and the same author (1977) saw a pair with 5 young at Sokolitza (Karlovo) during May/June 1974.

I saw c.15 drakes on Vaia on 8 June, 1977 and 30 drakes and a duck on 11 June.

Buteo rufinus, Long-legged Buzzard

In recent years recorded in many parts of Bulgaria, both breeding and on passage (Boev, 1962; Baumgart, 1971).

Not mentioned by Prostov (1964). Robel (1973) saw 1 over rocks at Ropotamo on 12 July, 1971. I saw single birds in the breeding season at Dragoman (14 April, 1976), near Atanasovsko (22 April, 1977) and at Atia and Alepu (6 June, 1977).

Aquila pomarina, Lesser Spotted Eagle

Mountfort et al. (1961) saw several during May/June 1960 between Ropotamo and Burgas. Prostov (1964) gives several breeding season observations, including a bird shot near a nest with an egg in its ovarium. Donchev (1974) saw a bird circling near Nos Emine on 20 April, 1968, and Robel (1973) has a similar observation from north of Sozopol on 9 July, 1971. These are the only breeding-season records to date from the Burgas area.

On 7 June, 1977, I found a nest with 2 eggs, 1 hatching, in woods near Ropotamo.

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Falco peregrinus, Peregrine Falcon

There are very few breeding records for the country. Reiser (1894) gives a sighting from Etropole on 31 May, 1893, and Patev (1950) cites a second, by Rensch, from Lakatnik, in the Isker Gorge, on 25 July, 1934. Baumgart (1971) proved breeding in the latter area in the early 1960s, while Donchev (1974) saw a bird carrying prey near Sinite Kameni (Sliven) on 31 May, 1962.

On 20 March, 1976 a pair called excitedly over the same cliffs near Lakatnik where Baumgart proved breeding before.

Porzana parva, Porzana pusilla, Little Crake, Baillon's Crake

Prostov (1964) recorded Little Crake only once, and Baillon's 3 times in his study period. I saw no Baillon's on Atanasovsko, but saw Little Crakes there on 1 May, 1975, 7 April, 1976, 22 April, 1977 and 3 May, 1977.

Haematopus ostralegus, Oystercatcher

A very uncommon nesting species, so far proved to breed only twice, both times inland.

Mountfort et al. (1961) saw 2 on Atanasovsko between 27 May and 3 June, 1960; on 1 June of the same year there were 6 on a marsh nearby. Boev (1962) saw birds both inland and on the coast: on 28 April, 1962 one at Harmanli, and on 17 July, 1962 a pair in the same place; on 13/14 July, 1949 he had seen a pair at Tyulenovo (Dobrogea coast) and 3 pairs on the shore at Burgas.

There were several records of small flocks during migration seasons.

The first nests were found by Ts. Petrov (1975) near Orizare, Plovdiv: the first had a full clutch on 12 May, 1974; a second was found nearby, later. Donchev (1977) then found 2 downy young on 30 May, 1974 near Sokolitza (Karlovo).

From the beginning of April 1977 two pairs held territory on Atanasovsko. One apparently did not try to breed, but on 14 May the other had laid 3 eggs. The nest was a shallow, shell-lined scrape in the loose soil on top of a rebuilt dyke. On June 5 1 chick hatched, the other two eggs proving infertile. On 14 May, 1977, an additional 22 non-breeding birds were present.

Pluvialis squatarola, Grey Plover

Mountfort et al. (1961) saw 2 on Atanasovsko on 27 May, 1960, and heard a further one on Vaia on 30 May. Prostov (1964) described the species as a regular autumn migrant, but gives only 1 spring and 1 winter record. Grössler (1967) saw 1 on Atanasovsko on 7 June, 1962.

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Birds were present on Atanasovsko throughout winter 1976/7 (maximum 29 on 17 Dec. and minimum 13 on 14 February) and in spring up to 14 May (maximum 29 on 13 May, minimum 1 on 29 April) and probably later.

Calidris temminckii, Temminck's Stint

Not recorded by Prostov (1964), though Heinrich (Jordans, 1940) saw 2 in the Plovdiv area on 7 Sept. 1935, and Mountfort et al. (1961) saw 1 on Mandra on 27 May, 1960 and 1 on Vaia on 30 May, 1960, while Grössler (1967) saw 12 and 6 on Atanasovsko (7 and 12 June, 1962, respectively).

I saw the species on Atanasovsko with some regularity, usually flushing birds from the same vegetated margins in successive years. I saw them on 30 March 1975 (1), 1 May, 1975 (10), 29 Aug. 1976 (8), 8 Sept. 1976 (4), 5 April, 1977 (1), 25 April 1977 (3) and 6 May, 1977 (2).

Crocethia alba, Sanderling

Described by Prostov (1964) as mainly an autumn migrant, with small groups wintering. Grössler (1967) however saw singles on Atanasovsko on 7 and 12 June, 1962.

In the second week of May, 1977, there was a small passage through Atanasovsko, with a maximum of 12 on 12 May.

Limosa limosa, Black-tailed Godwit

Petrov & Zlatanov (1955) saw 20–30 at Durankulak at the end of June and beginning of July, and supposed the species to breed. Prostov (1964) recorded the species regularly in his area up to around 10 May, with one observation on 3 June.

As with several *Tringa* and *Larus* species, there is now a considerable build-up in numbers on the coast in late spring. Robel et al. (1977) saw c. 200 on Atanasovsko on 15 June, 1972, and in late June 1976 I counted 140 on the same lake, while in 1977, after a May minimum of 2 on 13 May, I counted c. 90 on 5 and c. 480 on 19/20 June.

Limosa lapponica, Bar-tailed Godwit

Prostov (1964) gives one record, a bird near Mandra on 21 March, 1940, and Grössler (1967) saw 1 on 12 June, 1962 on Atanasovsko. Robel et al. (1972) mention a further record from Burgas, 22 Aug., 1969.

At Atanasovsko I saw 1 on 27–30 Sept., 3 on 1 Oct., and 1 from 14 to 21 Oct., 1976.

Numenius phaeopus, Whimbrel

Donchev (1963) mentions a museum specimen taken in the Sofia area on 16 Sept., 1912. The species was not recorded by Prostov. Robel et al. (1972)

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mention 3 "recent records from the coast", single birds, from August/September.

It is now apparently a regular visitor, both in spring and autumn. I saw it on 1 May, 1975 (3), 11 Sept. 1976 (1), on 1 and 17 Dec. 1976 (1), from 18 March to 29 April 1977 (1–2) and on 6 May, 1977 (5) – all on Atanasovsko.

Gallinago media, Great Snipe

Regular, and fairly common during Prostov's study period, 1948–1963 (1964). Authors differ radically as to its more recent, and current status.

I have recorded only 1 on Atanasovsko (on 7 April, 1976), while during my study period I saw none at all. I suspect the species to have declined drastically.

Phalaropus lobatus, Red-necked Phalarope

First recorded for Bulgaria by Kumerloeve (1957), who saw up to 9 on Atanasovsko from 7 to 17 Sept., 1941. Boev (1957), however, mentioned 2 museum specimens, 1 taken from near Vidin during Sept. 1930, the other during spring 1945 from near Pleven. Donchev (1975) shot 1 at Durankulak on 26 Aug. 1972, and Ts. Petrov (pers. comm.) collected 1 from the Plovdiv district on 27 Sept. 1977.

Now it is apparently a regular visitor, in small numbers, mainly in autumn. I saw 3 on Atanasovsko on 3 Sept. 1975, and a flock of 5, diminishing to 1, from 2 to 19 Sept. 1976; also 1 at Pomorie saltings on 4 Sept. 1976. A bird seen on Atanasovsko during cold, windy weather on 22 Oct. 1976 may have been either Red-necked or Grey Phalarope *(Phalaropus fulicarius).*

My only spring record was of 1 bird on Atanasovsko on 5 May, 1977.

Glareola pratincola, Collared Pratincole

Mountfort et al. (1961) saw 4+ near Mandra on 27 and 31 May, 1960, 5 on Vaia on 30 May, and 4 on Atanasovsko from 1–3 June, but obtained no proof of breeding. Prostov (1964) gave the species as not breeding in his area, though he saw 1 on Atanasovsko on 31 May, 1956. Feriancz et al. (1965) do not mention the species.

It nested, and probably still nests, in the south Dobrogea coastal strip. It also now breeds on Atanasovsko and elsewhere near Burgas. (Atanasovsko, 1976: 8 nests; 1977: 3 nests. Vaia, 1976: bred in unknown numbers; 1977: 4+ nests. Mandra, 1977: 1+ nests.)

Stercorarius parasiticus, Arctic Skua

Boev saw a single bird attacking a Grey Heron *(Ardea cinerea)* near Mandra in 1955 (pers.comm.). Prostov (1964) reports a bird shot near Mandra

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on 18 May, 1940, and Donchev (1967) mentions a museum specimen taken near Burgas on 18 May, 1940, and himself saw 2 at Shabla on 8 Aug., 1964. I. Peshev (1967) mentions a dataless specimen in Varna Museum, presumably taken in his area. Zh. Spiridonov saw 1 in mid-August 1974 near Kamchiya (pers.comm.).

On 27 Sept. 1976 I saw 2 immatures resting on Atanasovsko, and, during a drive from Durankulak to Nos Kaliakra on 3 Oct. 1976 I saw single birds at each of 3 stopping places (Durankulak, Shabla and Tyulenovo). On 14 Oct. 1976 3 were harrying Terns (*Sterna* sp.) off Burgas beach.

Larus minutus, Little Gull

Mountfort et al. (1961) saw 350–500, mainly immatures, on Vaia from 30 May to 4 June, 1960. Prostov (1964) recorded the species throughout the year, but gives a largest flock of c.80. He observed heaviest passage between 17 August and 8 Sept.

Autumn passage during 1976 was particularly heavy, with maxima of 620 on 1 Sept., and c.3500 on 7–15 Oct. There was only a very light spring passage.

Larus genei, Slender-billed Gull

Prostov (1964) described the species as a regular autumn and spring migrant, with a few individuals wintering and some, perhaps, staying the summer without breeding.

My counts on Atanasovsko suggest an increase in numbers wintering. Maxima were 95 for December 1976, 77 for January 1977, and 79 for February. Maxima for March and April (32 and 31 respectively) indicate only very light spring passage. Groups of 5–10 birds were present throughout the summer, increasing from mid-June, when numbers of Black-headed Gull *(Larus ridibundus)* and Mediterranean Gull *(Larus melanocephalus)* also built up rapidly. Autumn maxima for the lake were 1400 on 30 Sept. 1976, and 1100 on 30/31 Oct.

Larus marinus, Great Black-backed Gull

A new species for Bulgaria. On 14 Oct. 1976 1, in full plumage, was standing amongst Herring Gulls *(Larus argentatus)* on the shore of the seaward part of Atanasovsko. Its considerably larger size, and pink legs were obvious when viewed with 8x binoculars at a distance of about 60 yards; a 20x telescope was used at the same range. The bird was seen at c.1500 hrs, in poor light.

Larus canus, Common Gull

Prostov (1964) recorded only 3 in his area, all in mid-winter. Donchev (1966) reported a Norwegian-ringed bird found at Pazardjik on 6 Nov.

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1959, and the same author (1967) saw 4 birds at Zlatni Pyassutzi on 11 Sept. 1963, and 5 at Durankulak on 18 Oct. 1963. I. Peshev (1967) mentions a specimen in Sofia Museum taken at Balchik on 26 Nov. 1902.

On 15 Sept. 1976 I identified a bird in full plumage on Atanasovsko, and saw another, at the same site, in sub-adult plumage on 11 March, 1977. On 21 Feb. 1977, I picked up a dead bird on Durankulak beach.

Hydroprogne caspia, Caspian Tern

First recorded for Bulgaria by Donchev, Prostov & Georgiev (1961) on a fish-farm near Pazardjik. Donchev (1967) mentions a Finnish-ringed bird recorded by Paspaleva-Antonova (1962) from Velingrad, 29 May, 1961, and records another Finnish-ringed individual from the Pazardjik site, 17 Sept. 1962, and an observation of 2 birds near Durankulak on 18 Oct. 1963. T. Michev (1962) reports birds from the Sreburna area: 2 on 8 and 15 August, 1961, and 1 on 17 Sept. 1961. The same author (1968) records a series of observations from 1962–1964 from the same site, involving 40 birds, all seen during August/September, with the exception of 4 seen from 7 to 15 April, 1966.

Similar regularity was apparent in the Burgas area, where I saw 4 near Mandra on 2 May, 1975; on Atanasovosko 1 on 23 May, 1975, 2 on 9 Sept. 1975, 1 on 7 Sept. 1976; 3 on Mandra on 11 Sept. 1976; again on Atanasovsko, 1 on 26 Sept. 1976, 1–2 from 10 April to 6 May, 1977, 2 on 20 May, 1977; and 2 near Vaia on 3 June, 1977.

Sterna sandvicensis, Sandwich Tern

Pasapaleva (1961) gives records of rings from the species found near Tolbukhin (20 Oct. 1959) and at Balchik (29 Dec. 1959). Donchev (1967) saw a bird near Varna on 3 Sept. 1963, 2 at Durankulak on 20 Nov. 1963, and 4 and 3 near Zlatni Pyassutzi (Varna) on 27 Aug. and 11 Sept. 1964. Robel (1973) saw 2 young birds at Kaliakra and 3 at Balchik on 19 July, 1971.

Prostov (1964) had no observations, but expected the bird to appear in the near future, a prediction confirmed by my observations. It is now a regular passage migrant on the coast, commonest September/October, when a largish flock roosted in 1976 on Atanasovsko. Nothing to suggest breeding was seen, though on 25 June, 1976, 21 birds were present near the main Tern colony. On 3 Oct. 1976 parties of up to 15 were seen over the sea at Shabla, Tyulenovo and Kaliakra. For Atanasovsko autumn peaks of birds present in daytime were 286 (16 Sept.) and 226 (21 Oct.). On 8 Oct., at least 594 moved into the roost on the "north saltings" of the lake at dusk. The latest record was of 32 on 4 Nov., and the first spring sighting in 1977 was of 6 on 14 April (spring maximum, 54 on 21/22 April). Small numbers were present in May (2 on 14 May), while in June there was a marked increase, with 7 on 2 June and 18 on 24 June.

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Chlidonias hybrida, Whiskered Tern

Prostov (1964) saw the species only rarely, on spring passage, and gives 2 July records of non-breeding groups. Donchev (1967) reports 3 on 26 April, 1961 from Mirovo (Stara Zagora), 1 on Atanasovsko on 20 May, 1962 and 4 at Kavarna on 7 Aug. 1964.

Birds were present on Atanasovsko from 4 May, 1977 to my departure in late June (maximum c.50 on 6 May). 21 were present on Vaia fish-farm on 10 June, 1977.

Apus apus, Swift

Mountfort et al. (1961) saw c.400 flying north at Baltata on 18 June, 1960; Thiollay (1968) saw c.700 over Ropotamo on 7 May, 1967, and Donchev (1974) watched "many" at Obzor on 18 June, 1971, and c.40 near Emona, Burgas on 11 July, 1972.

On 3 June 1977 the sky above the west end of Vaia was full of Swifts; I estimated at least 1000 birds.

Anthus cervinus, Red-throated Pipit

Prostov (1964) gives as a regular, even abundant autumn migrant, but has only 1 spring record (Reiser, 1894). On 8 May, 1960 Donchev (1963) saw 1 on Atanasovsko.

My only autumn record was of 3 on 9 Sept. 1975 on Atanasovsko, while on 1 May 1975 I saw 50+ on the same lake, and 10 on 2 May on Mandra pools; from 8 April to 13 May 1977 the species was present on Atanasovsko, with a maximum of 31 on 29 April. On 9 May a male was singing in display flight.

Motacilla cinerea, Grey Wagtail

Seen by Prostov (1964) only 3 times in his area (in the Strandja foothills), and once by Grössler (1967) near Sarafovo. I. Peshev, however, described the bird as fairly common in autumn and winter in his region (1967). He gives extreme dates of 18 Sept. 1966 and 6 March 1967.

I recorded the species 4 times on Atanasovsko during 1976: on 17 Sept. (1), on 26 Sept. (3), on 10 Oct. (2) and on 12 Nov. (1).

Lanius excubitor, Great Grey Shrike

Given by Prostov (1964) as a rare winter visitor to his region, and by I. Peshev (1967) as very rare in his area.

During both January IWRB counts (1976 and 1977), and from late October to March, I saw the species fairly commonly along the coast north and south of Burgas.

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Troglodytes troglodytes, Wren

Prostov (1964) recorded Wrens only on autumn migration (late October and early November) but during 1976/7 they were present on Atanasovsko from 22 Oct. to 1 April, with maxima of 18 (4/5 Nov.) and 11 (10/11 March).

Cettia cetti, Cetti's Warbler

Recorded only once by Prostov, at Vaia on 21 March, 1959 (1964). The species is now fairly common from Burgas southwards, throughout the year. I recorded it on 25 May, 1975 (1, near Burgas), on 8 Jan. 1977 (1 at Alepu, 2 at Ropotamo), on 30 Jan. 1977 (2 near Vaia), on 11 Feb. 1977 (2 at Ropotamo, 2 at Alepu) and on 30 April and all subsequent visits to the end of June (several singing between Alepu and Ropotamo).

Locustella luscinioides, Savi's Warbler

According to Patev (1950) breeds only near the Danube and in NE Bulgaria. It was recorded by Reiser (1894) near Varna in June, but is not mentioned in Prostov's work (1964). Paspaleva-Antonova (1965) saw. c.50 on a one kilometer stretch of the River Michurin (south of Sozopol) on 8 April, 1964. Feriancz et al. (1965) gave the species as probably nesting, though rarely, near Burgas.

In my study period, the species was present on Atanasovsko from late March (my earliest record was 25 March, 1977) to September/October. A sighting on 17 Dec. suggests that some individuals may winter.

Acrocephalus melanopogon, Moustached Warbler

Patev (1950) gave only one record for Bulgaria. Mountfort et al. (1961) then heard one at Baltata (near Varna) on 28 May, 1960, Paspaleva-Antonova (1965) saw singles south of Achtopol and near Michurin on 5 April, 1964, and Donchev (1977) saw one on 22 March, 1972 near Koprinka (Kazanluk).

The first winter record of the species was of 10 birds near Tridovtzi (Plovdiv) on 21 Jan. 1976 (Donchev & Darakchiev, 1971).

The species now apparently winters in the Burgas area, where, in 1976/7 it remained till mid-May at least. I first identified it (a single) in rushes beside the fresh-water peripheral canal of Atanasovsko on 17 Dec. 1976, and saw a bird there again on 7 Jan. 1977. On 11 March, 8 were singing from reed-beds nearby, and birds remained till at least mid-May (maximum 11 singing males on 18 March). In late April 3 paired males showed no anxiety at my wading through their "territories". Birds collected by Prostov during April showed no enlargement of the testes (pers. comm.). The latest record was of 1 on 14 May.

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Phoenicurus phoenicurus, Redstart

Petrov & Zlatanov (1955) described the species as fairly common in the south Dobrogea on migration, but I. Peshev (1967) gave it as relatively uncommon in the Varna area. He gives the late date of 11 Nov. 1966. Prostov (1964) gives only 2 records, both for early October.

Small numbers were present on Atanasovsko from 16 Sept. to 8 Nov. 1976 (maximum 4 on 21 Oct.).

Erithacus rubecula, Robin

Prostov (1964) described this as a relatively uncommon breeding species that descends from the wooded hills to winter in more open areas. My Atanasovsko records suggest a distinct migration pattern: in autumn from 21 Oct. to 25 Nov. (maximum 38 on 4 Nov.) and in spring from 25 Feb. to 1 April (maximum 4 on 1 April) with 3 winter records from mid-December and early January.

Luscinia svecica, Bluethroat

First recorded for Bulgaria by Prostov (1964) near Burgas on 18 May, 1956. Paspaleva-Antonova (1965) then saw 1 near Michurin on 10 April, 1964, and T. Michev (1968) netted 1 at Sreburna on 16 Oct. 1966. Robel et al. (1972) report a last record from Durankulak on 31 Aug. 1968.

On 8 April, 1976 I saw a female on the peripheral dyke of Atanasovsko.

Turdus philomelos, Song Thrush

Though Petrov & Zlatanov (1955) give this as common on passage in Dobrogea in April and mid-October, Prostov (1964) described it as a rare migrant and breeding species in his area; he gave 2 nesting records only.

I saw the bird commonly in the woods above Alepu, and found a nest with 4 young on 6 June 1977, and a second, with eggs, on 12 June, 1977. Migrants were present on the peripheral dyke of Atanasovsko from 7 Oct. to 25 Nov. (maximum 18 on 21 Oct.) and from 10 Feb. to 2 April, 1977 (maximum 10 on 31 March). In addition, one was seen on 6 Jan.

Turdus viscivorus, Mistle Thrush

Prostov (1964) recorded the species only once, on 14 Feb. 1960, and Grössler (1967) found one dead on 5 June, 1962. Peshev (1967) gives 4 winter records for the Varna area: 14 Dec. 1966, and 10 Jan., 20 Feb., and 28 March, 1967. I saw 4+ at Kamchiya on 8 Jan. 1976, and similar numbers again on 10 Jan. 1977. 2+ were at Ropotamo during Feb. 1977. I watched 3 birds migrating south at Kaliakra on 9 Nov. 1975 and 13 flying over Atanasovsko on 2 Nov. 1976. On the latter date there was also 1 in the bushes beside Atanasovsko.

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Panurus biarmicus, Bearded Tit

Prostov (1964) recorded the species only once (28 Sept. 1959). It now occurs near Burgas throughout the year. Winter counts on Atanasovsko gave maxima of 14+ (31 Oct. 1976) and 13+ (28 Jan. 1977). On 21 May, 1977 I found a nest with 5 eggs at Poda, where there were at least 3 more pairs. On 22 June, 1977 a pair was feeding a brood of fledged young on Atanasovsko.

Emberiza cirlus, Cirl Bunting

Prostov (1964) saw the species only twice south of Burgas. During April-June 1977 I saw several pairs at Ropotamo, Arkutino and near Alepu.

Emberiza schoeniclus, Reed Bunting

Prostov (1964) described as a rare breeding species in his area. In summer 1977 3 pairs were present on Atanasovsko, 5+ at Mandra (where a pair repeatedly carried food into a dense tuft of rushes) and several at Vaia.

Plectrophenax nivalis, Snow Bunting

Patev (1950) reports 3 museum specimens – from Sofia, and from Plovdiv (February). Subsequent records are apparently lacking.

On 7 and 14 February 1978 I watched an adult, winter-plumage cock Snow Bunting on a low dyke on Atanasovsko Lake, Burgas. It fed at c.25 metres from me, with 2 Reed Buntings *Emberiza schoeniclus.*

In addition, observations were made on the following 3 species in SW Bulgaria (on *Phylloscopus bonelli* also in the Black Sea coastal strip):

Lanius nubicus, Masked Shrike

First recorded for the country by Mauersberger & Stübbs (1963), who saw a singing male near Gorna Kula (Krumovgrad) on 28 May, 1963. Paspaleva-Antonova (1965) saw a second male on 10 May, 1964 near Petrich, while Simeonov (dissert. unpub. 1971) gives 2 more sightings, both from Pirin: 7 June, 1960, Melnik, and 5 Aug. 1968, Novo Lyaski. To date there are no published breeding records.

On 8 May, 1976 P. Simeonov, B. E. Iwanov and I found 2 singing males on a dry thorn- and juniper-clad slope above the river Struma, just south of the Kresna Gorge. In the same area, 3 nests were found subsequently by Dr. I. Vatev, P. Simeonov and myself: on 24 May, 1976 with 5 eggs, 5 feet up in a Christ's thorn *(Paliurus aculeatus)*; on 28 May, with 5 eggs, 9 feet up in a Juniper *(Juniperus excelsa)*; and on 10 June, 8 feet up in a *Pistacia terebinthus,* with 6 eggs.

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It was interesting to note that the species was absent from the area in 1975 and 1977 (P. Simeonov, Dr. I. Vatev, pers. comm.).

Phylloscopus bonelli, Bonelli's Warbler

Patev (1950) gave 2 records only for the country: 1 at Zemen (Kyustendil) on 7 May, 1933, and 4, 2 adults and 2 young, at Gyulovitza, north of Burgas, collected by Heinrich on 7/8 July, 1934 (Jordans, 1940). From the early 1960s followed a succession of records: Balat (1962) 1 near Primorsko on 8 June, 1957, and I singing the next day near Ropotamo; Donchev (1963) 1 near Bachkovski Monastery (Plovdiv) on 3rd May, 1960; Boev et al. (1964) 1 on 21 April, 1960 at Malo Konare (Pazardjik) and 1 west of Pazardjik on 27 April, 1960; Donchev (1964) 1 at Podkova (Kurdjali) on 3 May, 1963; Prostov (1964) a nest with young on 14 May, 1956, in woods south of Burgas, where the birds was „irregularly" distributed; Feriancz et al. (1965) report 1 near Banderitza (Pirin) seen by Hanzak on 13 April, 1957, and found a nest without eggs, and altogether 3 pairs near Iskra (Plovdiv), 18 April to 3 May, 1960; Grössler (1967) saw the species in some numbers in woods north of Slunchev Bryag in June 1962.

S. Simeonov (dissert. unpub. 1971) included the species in his list of birds breeding in Pirin Mountains on the strength of a female shot at Karlanovo on 8 June, 1968, containing a well-formed egg in the ovarium, and a male shot at Breznitza on 9 May, 1967 with activated seminaries.

On 23 May, 1976 P. Simeonov, Dr. I. Vatev and I found a nest with 5 young just south of the Kresna Gorge (SW Bulgaria). At least 2 other pairs appeared to be breeding in the same steeply sloping woods of stunted oak *(Quercus* sp.) and hornbeam *(Carpinus* sp.). In the same site in 1977 Dr. I. Vatev and P. Simeonov found another nest whose clutch of 5 eggs was completed on 23 May. An additional 5 males were singing in the same area (pers. comm.).

On 4 June, 1977, I found a nest with 1 egg in woods near Alepu; the species was extremely common there, occurring chiefly along fringes of pure oak stands, where the trees were taller and more widely spaced than at Kresna.

In both sites the calls characteristic of the subspecies *orientalis* were used: a short, fast song, reminiscent of that of Cirl Bunting *(Emberiza cirlus)* and a dull, monosyllabic call, not unlike some calls of Sparrows *(Passer* sp.). These observations coincide with those of Geroudet (1973), who saw 1 bird and heard several more at the Ropotamo site on 25 May, 1972.

Monticola solitarius, Blue Rock Thrush

First recorded for Bulgaria by Mauersberger & Stübbs (1963), at Studen Kladenetz Reservoir, Kurdjali, on 2 June, 1963 (1 male and 4 fledged young). Robel (1973) saw a pair and 2 fledged young at the same site on 3 July, 1971.

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The first record from SW Bulgaria was a sighting of a single bird in the Kresna Gorge on 4 May, 1968 by S. Simeonov (dissert. unpub. 1971). The same author found a nest in the vicinity on 22 May, 1969, and on 9 Aug. 1968 saw an adult and 3 fledged young there.

On 8 May, 1976, P. Simeonov, B. E. Iwanov and I saw 2 on rocks at the southern end of the Kresna Gorge. Nearby, on 22 May, 1977, Dr. I. Vatev and P. Simeonov found a nest with 4 young, c.5 days old, in a horizontal crack 2 metres up on a vertical rock face. The nest was built of grass and moss. The adults were photographed carrying lizards *(Lacerta muralis),* a water snake *(Natrix natrix)* and beetles *(Cetonia aurata)* to the young.

Conclusions

The following points should perhaps be emphasised:

1) an apparent increase in several species, either overall, or at particular seasons. Slender-billed and Little Gull occur now in larger numbers than were recorded in the past; the former is now fairly numerous in summer, and may even breed in the future. A comparable, probably recent trend towards large summer accumulations of Black-tailed Godwit may be a result of the earlier return of unsuccessful or non-breeding birds from northern nesting-grounds; Petrov & Zlatanov's supposition that these breed in the south Dobrogea is highly questionable. The apparently new frequency of *Anthus cervinus* on spring passage may indicate a change in the species' migration routes; that it should have been overlooked in spring in the past is unlikely, as it is more conspicuous at this season than in autumn.

2) expansion in the breeding range of species such as Cetti's Warbler, where the "advance guard" consisted of scattered summer records, but where now the species is a common resident over the same area. Most published records to date are from SW Bulgaria. Collared Pratincole is a more doubtful case, as its exact breeding status in the past is not known. Oystercatchers have been seen with increasing frequency on the coast, both on passage and in summer; their breeding on Atanasovsko was almost inevitable. Colonisation by Sandwich Tern (a particularly volatile species) and Caspian Tern are both possible in the future, as the two species are recorded now with regularity (Sandwich Tern in abundance in autumn), and both show interest in suitable (?) breeding sites on Atanasovsko in spring.

3) sporadic breeding of species at the extremes of their range. Pintail and Shoveler have probably bred on and off in the past. The present "colonisation" of Atanasovsko by Shoveler may be associated with a recent succession of wet springs, as may be the tendency of flocks of these two

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species and Wigeon *(Anas penelope)* to remain later into the spring. Masked Shrike, a Mediterranean species, occurred and bred in only one of three years – the site, Kresna, is an interestingly isolated northern instance of pseudo-macquis type vegetation.

4) the apparent regularity, though in very small numbers, of species previously considered as vagrants. Amongst those probably overlooked in the past through lack of on-the-spot observers, are Bar-tailed Godwit, Red-necked Phalarope, Temminck's Stint, Whimbrel, Grey Plover, Common Gull and Arctic Skua. The predominance of Charadriiformes in the list is not accidental – they have received very little attention in the past.

The highly successful Great Black-backed Gull was a predictable addition to the Bulgarian species list.

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Address of the author: John L. Roberts, 5 Tref y Nant Park, Acrefair, Wrexham, Clwyd, N. Wales, Great Britain.

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Zoologisch-Botanische Datenbank/Zoological-Botanical Database

Digitale Literatur/Digital Literature

Zeitschrift/Journal: Bonn zoological Bulletin - früher Bonner Zoologische Beiträge.

Jahr/Year: 1980

Band/Volume: 31

Autor(en)/Author(s): Roberts John Lawton

Artikel/Article: Observations on birds of the Bulgarian seaboard, with new breeding records for S. W. Bulgaria of Masked Shrike (Lanius nubicus), Bonelli's Warbler (Phylloscopus bonelli), and Blue Rock Thrush (Monticola solitarius) 20-37