

The Birds of Macedonia



Hawk

Being a country with diverse geography and a few climate zones, including Mediterranean, continental and mountainous, Macedonia is famous for its birds. Birds of different types populate the skies over this country. According to the official count, Macedonia is home to 335 species. Some of them are resident in the country throughout the year, while others only during one season. Some of the latter raise their young here and then migrate to warmer regions during the winter. There are also wintering birds which stay a good part of the winter in Macedonia to escape the colder climate up north. There are further 16 extirpated species, which used to live in Macedonia, but have found home somewhere else.

Birds are prominent in Macedonian folklore and heritage. "The hawk drinks water on the River Vardar" goes a famous

Macedonian folk song. Collecting and domesticating wild nightingales is still a hobby of many passionate people from the towns' suburbs. The breeding of pigeons is considered almost a sport. In the past it was widespread. Now, it looks like a queer phenomenon, and the breeders always attract attention of the media. Each keeps a few dozen birds in small wooden huts and trains them for flying. At regional competitions a few champions in sky diving and speed flying come from the vicinity of Skopje. The hawks and eagle of Demir Kapija are known to hunt their prey in the plateau of Sveti Nikole, few dozen kilometres north.

Macedonia attracts the interest of many bird watchers. This sort of tourism is starting to grow. Macedonia is advertised as a country in which one can find waterfowl and wading birds, a large number of song birds, raptors,



Dalmatian pelicans

game birds, swifts and nighthawks, many of which occupy several ecosystems as they fly to and from forests, meadows, shorelines, cities and urban green spaces. Bird watchers are particularly keen to spot a rare bird or a so-called vagrant, a bird that does not belong to the Macedonian fauna but has somehow lost way in its travels or got displaced due to weather conditions.

Among the most fabulous regions for birdwatchers is the Lake Prespa, one of the best freshwater sites for birds in the whole of Europe. White and Dalmatian pelicans, pygmy cormorant, glossy ibis and all of Europe's breeding heron species can be found here. Bird watching tourists also admire the Prespa rugged countryside full of scenic mountains, large lakes and extensive lowlands, which they consider ideal for a superb variety of raptors and passerines. The watchers have a chance of seeing the elusive rock partridge and many regional passerines - from masked and lesser grey shrikes to sombre tit, rock nuthatch and black-headed bunting, and barred and

eastern orphean warblers amongst a fine variety of warblers.

Macedonia's Vulture Conservation Project supports ornithological research in the effort to increase knowledge about the bird's life. Local guides involved in this project help to organize fascinating bird watching trips. Levant sparrowhawk, long-legged buzzard, eastern imperial eagle and lanner are among the many raptor attractions. The tours may include a visit to the vulture feeding station, where the conservation project is based.



Pygmy Cormorant