

Roach's Redemption - Bulgaria



2nd – 7th June 2023

Introduction

I met Nedko while mammal surveying in Bosnia, he had recently discovered Europe's only population of Roach's mouse-tailed dormouse.

So I arranged to visit for April 2019 during a week's holiday, however COVID got in the way and it had taken a while to rearrange my visit. I flew with WIZZ from Luton to Sofia and back from Plovdiv, hired a car from Top Car stayed in the Parish hotel in Svilengrad. Everything went smoothly apart from the delayed departure from Luton.



Friday 2nd June

After the delayed flight from Luton with Wizz air I landed in Sofia, picked up my hire car and headed off south through the now rush hour traffic. Eventually breaking away from the suburbs I made it to the Kresna gorge, I put down some mammal traps, set up the bat detector and moth trap near a handy little shelter and took a look at the local plants before dusk fell enjoying a singing black headed bunting. Conditions were perfect and moths arrived but only 1 bat, a natterer's put in an appearance.



Spotted Sulphur

The Alchemist



Plum Lappet

As midnight came so did the lightning and thunder then suddenly a heavy thunderstorm made me relocate the trap to the shelter where I processed the contents. A nice selection of moths, approx. 35 species with spotted sulphur, alchemist, geometrician and spurge hawkmoth the highlights.

Saturday 3rd June



Violet limodore



**Northern White Bellied
hedgehog**

Nothing in the mammal traps, so I drove leisurely towards Uhlovitsa cave spending all morning stopping at random good looking sites spotting a nice selection of birds, butterflies and plants. One nice stop was a wall with some rubble ideal for lizards and I had Eastern green lizards and common wall lizards. A Red squirrel the only mammal was a very dark individual and flipping some bits of rubbish I found an Eastern slow worm. The plant highlight was a violet limodore just about flowering. Late afternoon the rain started and became very heavy so I had a quick siesta. Eventually the rain stopped and I set up the bat detector and moth trap as dusk fell, but so did the rain heavy once again and persistent. I packed up and decided to call it off and would drive overnight to my next destination. The rain was off and on as I drove through the night and I had plenty of mammal sightings. Brown hare, red fox, Northern White Bellied hedgehog during a break in the rain so I stopped for some photos. A couple of stone martens and a wildcat also seen.

Sunday 4th June

I arrived in Madzharovo early for a look round before my day tour. I found a pond of Marsh frogs, red rumped swallows collecting mud and a broomrape sp.

I met my tour guide Marin from <https://madzharovo.com/> for a day looking for wildlife.

We started looking for worm snake but had no luck, some nice griffon vultures, blue rock thrush, eastern subalpine warbler and a few others but no sign of Rock nuthatch. We continued with some herping but only found snake eyed skink and Balkan green lizards. But butterflies, interesting plants and daytime moths were abundant. We found a Spur-thighed tortoise and along the river one of my targets a Levant sparrowhawk being mobbed before flying off down the river.



Red Backed Shrike



Marsh Frog



Nemoptera sinuate



Spur-thighed tortoise

We stopped for some lunch then continued looking for wildlife, we were unlucky not finding any lizards but we did have another Spur-thighed tortoise along with a Hermann's tortoise, some fire bellied toads, Marsh frogs, a few dragonflies and the amazing *Nemoptera sinuate*.

A break for a cold drink before one last look for rock nuthatch brought the day to an end and I headed to Svelingrad my base for the rest of the trip. It was a nice day out. I had to stop for a Caspian whip snake and for some cold drinks before some well earned sleep.



Griffon Vulture



Small pincertail

Monday 5th June

I was out early and headed off south through the hills to an area south of Svirachi where I had the location of some Eastern Hooded helleborines I made a couple of stops for plants, butterflies etc. along the way some nice Southern white admirals of note. The helleborines were just past their best but some of the flowers were still in good condition, about 50 spikes in all. I did the return journey to Svelingrad at a leisurely pace making plenty of stops for things. I stopped at the river in Svelingrad and amongst the mallards was a coypu. I had some lunch then met up with Nedko and we headed off making a stop at the Lesser kestrel research station.



Eastern Hooded helleborines



Coypu



Black faced Bunting

Spanish sparrows were everywhere and of course some Lesser kestrels. We then headed to set up some mammal traps in the dormouse wood. Then we took a wander looked in some of the dormouse boxes and had a brief view of Roach's mouse-tailed dormouse. Eastern imperial eagle soared overhead and Eastern fescos flitted in the woodland rides. Mist nets were set up for some bat catching but the wind picked up and only one Kuhl's pipistrelle was caught. We headed back to Nedko's base to collect my car, a Bulgarian Bent-toed Gecko was hunting insects on the wall before I headed back to my hotel.

Tuesday 6th June

I was up early to meet Nedko and some researchers from Greece to check the mammal traps and also the dormice boxes. The mammal traps held mostly yellow necked mice and a couple of bicoloured white toothed shrews, but the next boxes had Roach's mouse-tailed dormice and we saw several of these incredibly rare mammals. The Greek researchers were after footprints as a reference to use survey tunnels in Greece to see if Roach's mouse-tailed dormouse is present there. Currently Roach's mouse-tailed dormouse is only known from this one hill in Bulgaria and nowhere else in Europe. There are a few in Turkey but the extent of their range is not known. I took a walk in the area as the others left to carry on their day, plenty of butterflies including more of the cracking Eastern festoons, bee-eaters and a Masked shrike.



Roach's mouse-tailed dormouse

I stopped nearby as I saw something, it was a small colony of Souslik's with many youngsters who were very photogenic. I headed to town for lunch and cold drinks and a break from the heat. I took a wander in the park some green woodpeckers of note. Sufficiently rested I headed back to the dormouse hill for another wander including putting out a clearwing moth lure, I had a *Pyropteron minianiformis* turn up. I flipped some stones and had a nice worm snake while bee-eaters called overhead made for a nice walk.





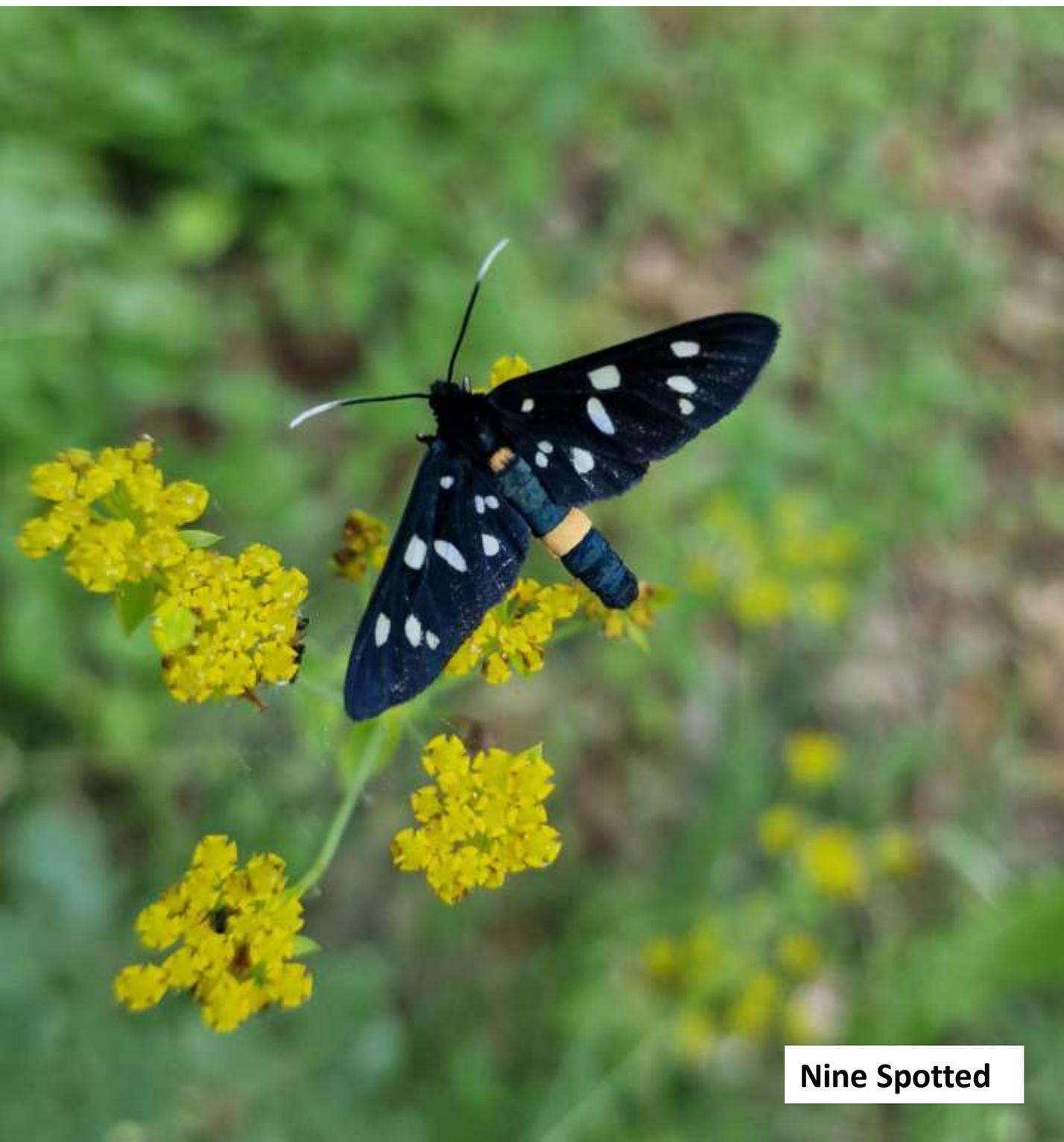
Worm Snake

I met Nedko again to check and add more bait to the traps and then headed to the village for some food then bat trapping. The weather became incredibly windy and we only had a few bats flypast catching nothing but it was nice watching glow worms and fireflies before we gave up for the night. A barn owl was active and I stopped on the way back to the hotel for a little owl.

Wednesday 7th June

My last day started with the mammal trap checking but only had yellow necked mice and of course one last look at the Roach's mouse-tailed dormouse. I bid Nedko goodbye and headed off. I headed to Mezek fortress an ancient ruined fortress with spectacular views, the attendant recommended the 8km drive to the top of the hill to the TV mast by the Greek border and I took his advice making many stops along the way the top had amazing views. Some nice wildlife along the way including scarce swallowtail and small tortoiseshell.

I took a leisurely drive to Plovdiv with a couple of ice creams, roller and Montagu's harriers on the way, the flight was roughly on time and flew back to Luton without any issues.



Nine Spotted

Lists



Birds - 68

Chaffinch	Goldfinch	House Sparrow
Spanish Sparrow	Grey Wagtail	White Wagtail
Yellowhammer	Turtle dove	Hooded Crow
Collared Dove	Red Rumped Swallow	Black headed bunting
Redstart	Blackbird	Kestrel
Buzard	Rock Dove	House Martin
Swallow	Mistle Thrush	Bee-eater
Crag Martin	Grey wagtail	Great tit
Jay	Magpie	Greater spotted woodpecker
White Stork	Tree Sparrow	Starling
Robin	Nightjar	Hoopoe
Nightingale	Cuckoo	Red Backed Shrike
Woodchat Shrike	Corn Bunting	Chukar
Bullfinch	Griffon Vulture	Rock Bunting
Eastern Black Eared Wheatear	Black Stork	Cormorant
Alpine Swift	Grey Tit	Pallid Swift
Blue Rock Thrush	Mallard	Tern sp?
Eastern Imperial Eagle	Honey Buzzard	Levant Sparrowhawk
Green Woodpecker	Golden Oriole	Masked Shrike
Whitethroat	Barn Owl	Tawny Owl
Little Owl	Stonechat	eastern subalpine warbler
Lesser kestrel	Roller	Montagu's Harrier
Cuckoo	Raven	



White Stork

Mammals - 13

Stone Marten	Northern white-breasted hedgehog	Wildcat
Red Fox	Brown Hare	Souslik
Bicoloured white toothed shrew	Yellow Necked Mouse	Roach's mouse-tailed dormouse
Kuhl's Pipistrelle	Natterer's Bat	Coypu
Red Squirrel		



Bi Coloured White Toothed Shrew



Kuhl's Pipistrelle

Herps - 14

Caspian Whipsnake	Balkan Green Lizard	Yellow Bellied Toad
Common toad	snake eyed skink	Spur-thighed tortoise
Hermann's tortoise	Worm Snake	Eastern Slow Worm
Marsh Frog	Common Wall Lizard	Bulgarian Bent-toed Gecko
Caspian Whip Snake	Eastern Green Lizard	



Eastern Green Lizard

Dragonflies - 8

Emperor	Lesser Emperor	Banded Demoiselle
Black Tailed Skimmer	Dainty Damselfly	Small Pincertail
White Legged Damselfly	Variable Damselfly	



White Legged Damselfly

Butterflies - 36

Painted Lady	Southern Red Admiral	Green Hairstreak
Eastern Festoon	Amanda's Blue	Black veined White
Brown Argus	Cardinal	Clouded Yellow
Common Blue	Dusky meadow Brown	Eastern Festoon
Escher's Blue	Glanville Fritillary	Green Hairstreak
Green Veined White	Grizzled Skipper	High Brown Fritillary
Ilex Hairstreak	Large Skipper	Lattice Brown
Large White	Small White	Meadow Brown
Queen of Spain Fritillary	Scarce Swallowtail	Silver Studded Blue
Small Heath	Small Skipper	Small Tortoiseshell
Southern White Admiral	Speckled Wood	Lesser Spotted Fritillary
Tufted Marbled Skipper	Woodland Ringlet	Small tortoiseshell



Southern White Admiral



Ilex Hairstreak

Misc.

Bishop's Mitre Shieldbug	Striped Shieldbug	<i>Cerambyx scopolii</i>
Mammoth Wasp	Mediterranean Banded Centipede	<i>Nemoptera sinuata</i>
Small Velvet Ant	Violet Carpenter Bee	White Spotted Rose Chafer



Cerambyx scopolii

Selected Plants.

Eastern Hooded helleborine	Broad Leaved Marsh orchid	Early Marsh Orchid
Green Winged Orchid	Lizard Orchid	Loose Flowered Orchid
Naked Man Orchid	Pyramidal Orchid	Violet Limodore
Bearded Iris	Birthwort	Broom leaved Toadflax
Carthusian Pink	Childing Pink	Eastern Larkspur
Forked Larkspur	Grecian foxglove	<i>Iris sintenisii</i>
Large Venus looking glass	Mediterranean limeseed	Tassel Hyacinth
Tunic Flower	Wall Germander	Yellow Woundwort



Iris sintenisii

Moths - 42



Portland Riband wave



Geometrician

9 Spotted	Alchemist	Spotted Sulphur
Geometrician	Spurge hawkmoth	Black Veined Moth
Burnet Companion	Common Heath	Fanfoot
Four Spotted	Grass Rivulet	Green oak Tortrix
Hummingbird hawkmoth	Latticed Heath	Pyropteron minianiformis
Sharp Angled Peacock	Silver Y	Sitochroa verticalis
Six Spot Burnet	Yellow Shell	Barred Red
Beautiful Marbled	Bordered Pug	Ethmia bipunctella
Festoon	Green Oak Tortrix	Handmaid
Lime Hawkmoth	Idaea filicata	Plum Lappet
Portland Riband wave	Yellow Belle	Willow Beauty
Chequered wave	Garlic mottled	Synaphe moldavica
Diceratura rhodograpt	Phyllophila obliterata	Hyperlais dulcinalis
Pyrausta sanguinalis	Aphelia ferugana	Evergestis aenealis