Ornithological observations in Romania during April 1990

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The Danube Delta in Romania and the lagoons to the south of it form one of the few, at least partly, natural regions within Europe. This is one reason for its popularity as a spring and summer destination for ornithologists from Europe, especially from eastern European countries.

Thus the international importance of the region for breeding waterbirds is well known. However, few papers have been published on the distribution and population trends of birds in the Danube Delta. Hardly any systematic species surveys or long term studies have been carried out, since, probably for political reasons, studies such as these were not desired in Romania in recent decades.

In their paper on population estimates of waterfowl in the Western Palaearctic, Pirot *et al.* (1989) therefore had to mention that "the lack of recent data from Romania....still restricts our knowledge of the numbers of waterfowl using the Eastern European/East African flyway". In comparison with the knowledge about distribution of ducks and geese, still less information is available about numbers of waders staging on spring and autumn migration in the Delta and the more southerly shallow water lagoons (see Cramp & Simmons 1983).

Data from the area around Histria presented by Weber & Szabo (1985) suggest the importance of the region as a stop-over site for waders on their migration up the Eastern Mediterranean and Central/Eastern European Flyway from African winter quarters to northern breeding grounds (*e.g.* Summers *et al.* 1987). But there are no data on migrating waders from regular complete surveys of the whole area.

Due to the vast extent of potentially suitable sites for passage waders, some of which are inaccessable, there are a lot of practical and methodological problems in counting. Single volunteers cannot possibly count all birds present at any one time. Presumably more or less accurate data for the region are only attainable by aerial survey. In spite of all these problems we planned to visit the area (Figure 1) in the beginning of April 1990 and aimed to count the birds as well as possible. Of course early springtime is not the best date for many wader species but for our favourite waders - Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax* and Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* - we thought it possible to get an idea of numbers migrating through this region.

Colleagues from the Dutch Sitchting Werkgroep International Wad- en Watervogelonderzoek (WIWO) organized a wader colour-marking project in spring 1990. The aim of this project was to study the migration routes of waders through the eastern Mediterranean and central/eastern European region. As part of the project WIWO intended to colour-dye waders in Egypt and Tunisia. As the sites along the Black Sea coast and the Danube Delta could be a stop-over for these birds we also checked waders for colour marks.

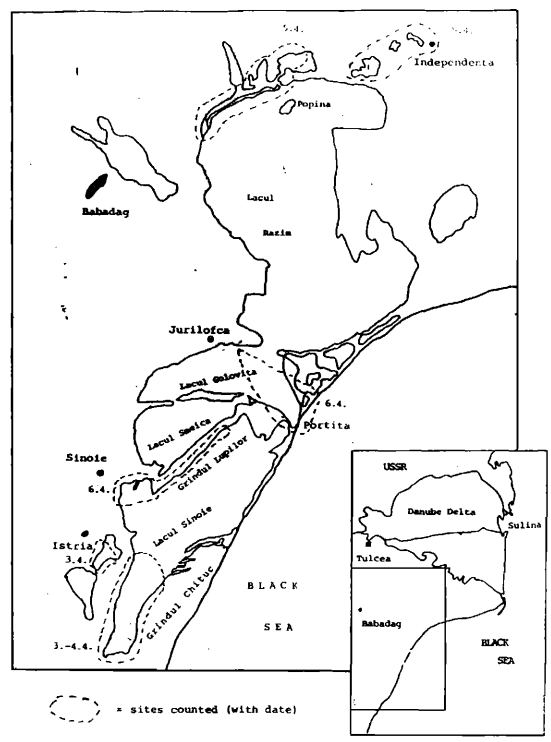

Figure 1. Areas visited

We know that our data (Table 1) cannot claim completeness. Indeed, we are sure to have overlooked many birds even in sites we controlled. However, we here list our data in order to give an impression of the importance of the region for migrating waders.

Even though we failed to see any colour-marked birds among thousands of waders observed perhaps our data can supply some useful information for the WIWO project. As the typical coastal waders mainly migrate later in the season than our visit we asked Romanian ornithologists to keep an eye on these birds.

Romania signed the Ramsar Convention for the conservation of wetlands of international importance in December 1990. The Danube Delta was the first Romanian wetland to be listed as a Ramsar Site together with the lagoons to the south. It is also a Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere programme. However, many of the best sites for waders in Romania are still without any status of national or international protection. With the political changes in Romania the plans of the old regime for some utopian agricultural projects have been stopped so now there is the opportunity for reconstructive conservation of important sites within and to the south of the Danube Delta. We wish to encourage the recently founded Societatea Ornitologica Romana to take conservation initiatives. Of course Romanian naturalists need the urgent support of international organisations.

Last but not least we thank P. Weber and his family for their friendly hospitality and hints for observation.

Table 1.

Date	A 03/04	B 03/04	C 03/04	D 05/04	E 05/04	F 06/04	G 06/04
Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*			90	120		350	
White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*			2				
Greylag Goose *Anser anser*			25	20	40	9	20
Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*	20	8	105	35			100
Wigeon *Anas penelope*	8	300		20			
Gadwall *Anas streprea* 2		26					
Teal *Anas crecca*	4	24	525	10			
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*			70	25			
Pintail *Anas acuta*			425				
Garganey *Anas querquedula*	2	60	770	100	50	950	
Shoveler *Anas chypeata* 4	50	1400	50				
Pochard *Aythya ferina*				40	50		
Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*					10	2	
Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*		16					
Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*						250	
Anas spp.						1000	2500
Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*			16		50		
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*			1			18	
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*		9	200	15		17	730
Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*		9	200	15		17	730
Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*		2					
Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*		10					
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*	50	1	580				
Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*			15				
Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*	12	40	15			20	
Sanderling *Calidris alba*			110				
Little Stint *Calidris minuta*	20						
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*	30	65	16700				
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*	300	870	5700		50	320	1850
Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*			10				50
Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*	160	15	2200			55	1500
Curlew *Numenius arquata*		2	62			40	
Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*			210		10	30	75
Redshank *Tringa totanus* 20	42	300		10	130	90	
Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*	3	110	330			10	110
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*	1	1	14				10
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*	2	1	20			3	2
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*					1	1	5
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleuca*			1				

A = Pond near Navodari, B = Lacul Istria (S-E part), C = Lacul Sinoie (S part), D = Lacul Sarinasuf, Plopul, Beibugeac, E = Lacul Razim (N-W part), F = Lacul Razimul-Portita, G = Lacul Sinoie (Grindul Lupilor).

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