

# Rumania 2009

Trip to Rumania – September 2009

In September 2009 we spent 10 days in Rumania. We were a party of four biologists including Fré, Albrecht, Tim and Stefi. We wanted to try our luck with the Rumanian wildlife (birds and mammals as well as any other interesting animal we could come across). It was one of our first self-organised trips which included that we didn't really organise a lot in advance except the rental car. We just threw ourselves into it, waiting for anything that was going to come our way. We had a great trip, but taking into account our more recent experiences with wildlife oriented trips, we might have been more successful if we had planned better in advance. Additionally, 10 days just wasn't enough to visit this great country. We did achieve our main goals for the trip: wallcreeper and brown bear. We first visited the mountainous region of the Retezat National Park. We hiked the park. As we were not successful with the bears there, we went on to Brasov. After seeing a bear, we went on to the Danube Delta to spend our last days trying for souslik and birds.

Trip list:

## Mammals

Chamois  
Roe deer  
Alpine marmot  
Eurasian red squirrel  
European souslik  
Rodent (mouse) sp.  
European hare  
Eurasian brown bear  
Raccoon or raccoon dog (road kill)

## Reptiles

European pond terrapin  
Dice snake

## Birds

	English name	latin name	Dutch name
1	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Fazant
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Knobbel zwaan
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Bergeend
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Wilde Eend
5	Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Wintertaling
6	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	Grote Zaagbek
7	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Dodaars
8	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Fuut
9	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Blauwe Reiger
10	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Grote Zilverreiger
11	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Kleine Zilverreiger
12	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	Roze Pelikaan
13	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	Kuifaalscholver
14	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Torenvalk
15	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	Roodpootvalk
16	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Boomvalk
17	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Slechtvalk
18	White-tailed Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	Zeearend
19	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Bruine Kiekendief
20	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Sperwer

21	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	Ruigpootbuizerd
22	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Steenarend
23	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Meerkoet
24	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	Kluut
25	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Kievit
26	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Kleine Plevier
27	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Watersnip
28	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Grutto
29	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Wulp
30	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	Zwarte Ruiter
31	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Tureluur
32	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	Poelruiter
33	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	Geelpootmeeuw
34	Common Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Kokmeeuw
35	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Houtduif
36	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Turkse Tortel
37	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Kerkuil
38	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Ijsvogel
39	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	Syrische Bonte Specht
40	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Grote Bonte Specht
41	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	Grauwe Klauwier
42	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Klapekster
43	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Vlaamse Gaai
44	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Ekster
45	Eurasian Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	Notenkraker
46	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Kauw
47	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Roek
48	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Zwarte Kraai
49	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Raaf
50	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Koolmees
51	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Pimpelmees
52	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	Zwarte Mees
53	Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>	Matkopmees
54	Collared Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Oeverzwaluw
55	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Boerenzwaluw
56	Northern House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Huiszwaluw
57	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Veldleeuwerik
58	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	Rietzanger
59	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Tijftjaf
60	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Braamsluiper
61	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	Baardmannetje
62	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	Baardmannetje
63	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	Rotskruiper
64	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Boomklever
65	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	Boomkruiper
66	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Spreeuw
67	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Roodborst
68	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	Blauwborstje
69	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Zwarte Roodstaart
70	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Paapje
71	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	Roodborsttapuit
72	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>	Kleine Vliegenvanger

73	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	Waterspreeuw
74	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Huismus
75	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Ringmus
76	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Heggemus
77	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grote Gele Kwikstaart
78	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Witte Kwikstaart
79	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Waterpieper
80	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Vink
81	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Kruisbek
82	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Rietgors

## Our trip

### Day one

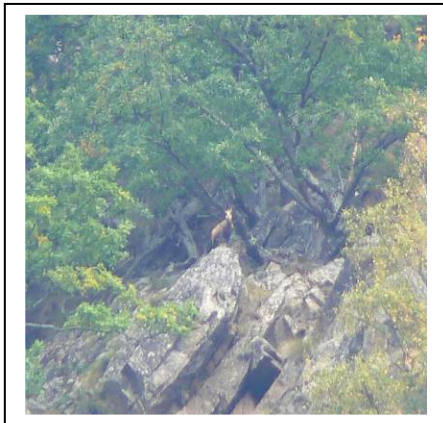
Flight Wizz Air (Brussels Charleroi – Bucharest, three hours late + our spotlight was taken away by airport security because they considered it might be used as a weapon).

We arrived in the evening. It was much later than we had planned and it was already dark. The people from the car rental company were waiting at the airport to hand over our rental car, a simple old Renault, which was most importantly, not so expensive. After picking up the car, we immediately left for Retezat national park. We had a map and the people from the rental company showed us the way out of the city as they were heading towards the same direction. We drove until Pitesti where we stayed at a fancy but cheap motel.

### Day two

We drove all morning. In the afternoon, we arrived in the region of Retezat in a larger town called Petrosani. We planned to do a few days hike in the park and sleep in the tent. Therefore we needed a

map but we were completely unable to find one in any of the shops in any of the towns around the park. People tried to help us, but there simply was no map. In Hateg, a medium sized town, there was a tourist office, but it was closed. In the end we just decided to give it a go without a map as time was passing quickly. We took the north entrance, through “Rau de Mori”, which allows you to get into the park as far as possible by car. I seem to remember that Hateg was the last possibility for shopping and taking gas. First there was a tarred road through fields (birds included great grey shrike, red-backed shrike, rough-legged buzzard, Eurasian hobby). We stayed at a free camp spot along this road as it was soon getting dark.



### Day three

The next morning we spotted a **chamois** on a high hill overlooking the camp site (on the other side of the road). We also saw a golden eagle soaring overhead and in the stream on the right side of the road, we saw a grey wagtail. The road leads to some place with industrial activities and crosses an artificial lake. If I remember right, there was a cabana with sleeping facilities here. Later on, the road turned into a dirt road which was not too bad as long as you drove slowly (and kept in mind that it wasn't your car anyway). The dirt road went on for quite a long while, with bridges crossing a river



several times. We saw raven and white-throated dipper. We also passed a cabana with a restaurant called Rotunda. At the end of the road you could park your car. There was quite some activity as people were building a new campsite here. We locked the car and went off with our backpacks. The track was nice and we met some people now and then. By lunchtime we had reached the tree line and we cooked lunch. Here we saw black redstart, water pipit, nutcracker and our first **marmots**. A little while further there was a small lake with a camp site and an emergency refugio with one staff member who didn't speak English. The place was called Bacura I think. We met some hikers here. We decided to walk a but further to a place called Zanoaga, apparently a three hour walk, as we were told by the hikers from Czech Republic (these people do speak English). The walk was nice but hard, through alpine landscape, crossing rock boulders. We saw a very dark **marmot** here and sparrowhawk and golden eagle. After three hours we found a sign

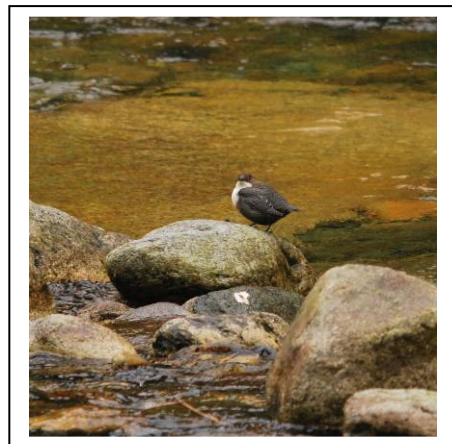


which said “Zanoaga– two hours”. This was a little depressing as it was getting windy, foggy and dark. We were walking on a ridge and there was no possibility to set up our tents in sight. It got more and more foggy but in the end we luckily found a spot to set up our tents just before we couldn’t see the track anymore.



#### Day four

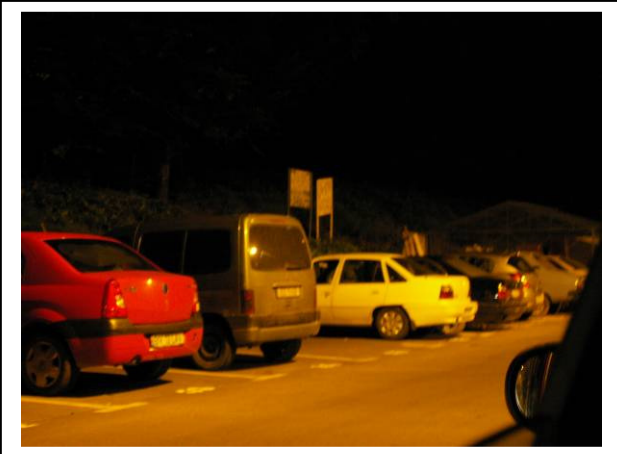
When we got out of our tents, after a windy night, we saw two **chamois** in the fog far away. The fog quickly cleared and we went on with our walk. We arrived at Zanoaga, another refugio. Here we met two German hikers who stayed at a cabana near the park. At this cabana they had managed to buy a map which they kindly sold us for the same price. Very happy with our new map we managed to navigate our way through the park more easily, being also able to estimate distances. From the refugio we went back in the direction of the dirt road. It had started to rain a bit and we felt that you would have to get very lucky to see a bear this way (as all you seem to see when carrying a heavy bag are your own feet). The track went through some nice habitat with conifers and grassland. We saw a **bear track**, some major droppings and more nutcrackers. The rest of the walk was still beautiful but all wet it was a bit difficult to enjoy the scenery all the time. Rumanians do like to go straight from one point to the other, even if that includes crazy steep tracks up and down the hills. By the time we arrived at the dirt road, we decided to walk further to the cabana Rotunda which was not the direction of the car, but seemed a much nicer place to stay for the night compared to a tent. We stayed the night there in nice warm beds. The restaurant offered a fried meal that was much better than camping food and afterwards we played some pool in the bar.





### Day five

The next day we walked along the dirt track (not so steep) back to our car and on the way out of the park, we picked up our backpacks. We then decided that, as time was limited, we would no longer try for bears in Retezat. Hence, instead of trying to enter the park from another entrance point, we drove all night towards Brasov. We arrived in Brasov at around midnight. In Brasov there is a road next to the forests surrounding the city. The bears are known to come out of the forest here, so sneak around the garbage bins. Wolves apparently also come every now and then, but only during winter time. We drove around the city, hoping to find the place. We saw some people walking on the street and just asked. Pure luck, as the first guy we asked spoke perfectly English and knew the spot from a TV documentary on the bears he had cooperated with. We weren't too far away from the place and we found it easily. The street is called Jepor Street. We saw signs warning you not to feed the bears and some promising pictures of bears at close range. We stayed there for a couple of hours. We drove up



and down the street, hoping to see a bear. Apparently local authorities don't really like tourists doing this, so you might get questions if you walk around too much. We drove around and walked around but we saw no bears. At around 3am we met a bunch of young people and we asked them about the bears. Again we were lucky as one of them spoke perfect English. They went with us up to the same trash bins we had been earlier and when we (of course) saw no bears, they told us that it was already quite late and that the bears were more active at around 10pm. We then set off to look for a motel which we found on the road from Brasov to Sinaia.

### Day six

South of Brasov there is a town called Sinaia where Rumanians go for skiing. The town borders the



Bucegi national park. We went to this town as there was supposedly a dirt road that went all the way up into the park to a spot that is very reliable for wallcreeper. From the main road that goes through Sinaia, we took the tarred road DN71. Here a track leads to a hotel called Cuibul Dorului and further up into the mountains. We managed to get to the hotel, but from there on, unfortunately, the road was amazingly bad and as it was quite far and it was raining non stop, we didn't really feel like walking up. Instead we went into the village of Sinaia and we found a ski lift up. We took the ride up (which we could also have done by car, at least partly, but we only noticed when we were already in the lift). It stopped raining and we walked back down, seeing no spectacular birds (robin and woodpecker). Back in town, we

bought a map of the park. On the map we found a second ski-lift in the town Busteni, which went up quite close to the wallcreeper spot and we decided to try this option the next day. We then quickly drove to Bran to see the castle of Count Dracula. We had some tourist pictures but didn't visit the castle (no time, a bit expensive and it was almost closing time anyway). After dinner we went back to Brasov and we parked in Jepor Street, overlooking a few garbage bins. At around 9.50pm we heard some noise in the bushes. A medium sized **Eurasian brown bear** came out, walked to the garbage bin, took out a bag and went back into the bushes. All of this maybe took 10 seconds and it was pretty dark so we only got a good look as the bear was actually lightened by the street lights in the garbage bin, but all of us saw him very well. The dogs around were going crazy. They literally jumped on the roofs of cars parked in the street. It was a bit surrealistic, the whole scenery, knowing that bears could come from one side of the street, while a mum and child were waking on the walkway on the other side of the street. A few



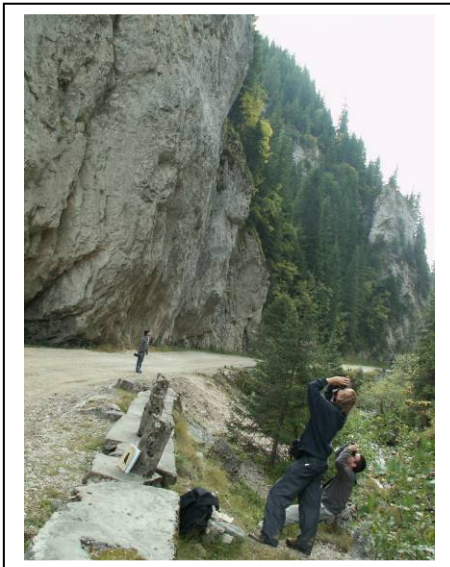
minutes later, a garbage collector came by and we decided that we had been successful enough and we set off for cocktails. I recently read somewhere that the garbage bins are now removed, so bears are no longer attracted.

### Day seven

The next day we went back to the ski-lift. Apparently you had to buy two tickets, one to go up to the middle station and one more to go all the way up. It was pretty expensive (about 20euro pp). We had just missed the first lift of the morning and as we were waiting for the next, we started to talk to a guy that looked a bit like Vin Diesel. He told us he did tourist trips with his 4WD. He showed us on a map the road he drove, and it was exactly the same road we had attempted to drive the day before. As hiring the 4WD for a day for 4 people turned out cheaper than taking the lift, we had quickly made an arrangement. The drive up was really memorable. The car was shaking like crazy and the guy had some funny gipsy music on. The road was indeed really bad but somehow we did meet normal



cars further way up. How they managed to get there was really a mystery to us. We also saw a car with a broken axis, this then was less of a mystery. On the way up, we didn't see the wallcreeper spot until we already passed it. The guy also seemed pretty determined to get us to some specific place. We arrived at an orthodox monastery. The guy wanted us to get out of the car here and pushed a lamp into our hands \*hop hop\* and we had to go towards the monastery while



he would wait for us for two hours. We weren't really into sightseeing churches but we went anyway. There was indeed a small chapel, all build into the rocks and it was very



nice to see, with nice wall paintings. On the rocks outside, we couldn't believe our luck, as a wallcreeper showed really well and stayed for a couple of minutes. We were really happy and now we could do some sightseeing. Behind the chapel there was a cave. You could walk right into it (hence the lamp). It was a nice cave but safety measures were not as for example in the south of France. After a while we got back to the car and we went to the other wallcreeper spot. They guy had some problems understanding what we planned to do there, but he stopped anyway and waited for us. After about 10min we saw the wallcreepers also on this rocky wall. In the surrounding forests, we also saw **Eurasian red squirrel**.

After this trip we drove towards de Danube Delta. It was a long drive passing the cities of Ploiesti, Bazau and Braila. In Braila,

we had to take a ferry, which took us a while to figure out (and to find, as it was already dark). In Tulcea we found a hotel and we went to bed.



## Day eight

The first day we drove around near the village of Murighiol. At this time of the year, the landscape was very dusty and steppe-like. Driving around Murighiol and stopping at places that seemed interesting – where there was water – we saw a.o. marsh sandpiper. Many of the lakes (called lacul here) were dry or almost



dry. Apparently the surroundings of Hotel Pelican offer good possibilities for seeing European souslik. However, we found this area locked off by a high fence. A bit further on the main dirt road, passing the crossing of the Pelican Hotel, we



saw a red-footed falcon sitting on a wire.

Next to a road (tarred, with a lot of bends and not very wide) from Murighiol direction Tulcea, we saw a **European souslik** which showed for a few minutes before disappearing into its burrow. Further to the south is a place called Enisala. We made a few stops on our way there that were really great. On a straight part of the road, there is a private land on the left side when coming from Tulcea. The owner lives in a farm on the right side of the road. There is a gate upon entering this place to stop cars from passing, but it's no problem to go in on foot. The owner didn't mind us walking around on his land, but



I think we asked for his permission first. We walked around on the tracks between the reeds. Upon entering, there were a few concrete reservoirs. In these reservoirs we saw large frogs and a European terrapin. Fré caught the terrapin and released it into the water at a concrete slope of a few meters long. Upon walking down to the water, we saw a dice snake which Fré also tried to catch, but it



managed to get away. While walking further into the reeds we had nice views of bearded reedling and we saw common shag and great white pelicans flying by. The owner told us he releases wild boars on his property for hunting. We didn't see any. Driving further on the main road, we saw a birdwatching tower, but it was closed. On the left side of the road there was a bee-eater colony but the birds had already left. The colony is very close to the road and if it is still occupied in the summer, it must be the perfect place to observe and photograph these beautiful birds. Yet a bit further away there are some water



basins on the left side of the road and on the right side there is a track which goes up a hill. We left our car on this road (it was in quite bad condition for our low clearance car) and we walked up. Here we saw Eurasian hobby and we had a white-tailed eagle flying by very close. The view was also very nice. Fré saw a **European hare** on his way up to the hill. It also seems like a good place for snakes, especially on the left side of the track.



### Day nine

Close to a place called Histria or Istria, there is an old ruin and there are also some nice reeds. We drove there and bought our entrance ticket (I don't remember the price, but it was not outrageous, something like 2€ or so, students got a reduction). At the entrance we saw lesser whitethroat, wood warbler, red-breasted flycatcher and probably wryneck. We searched the ruins for quite a while, looking for snakes, but we only saw a lizard. In the reeds we saw bearded reedling, bluethroat and pelicans flying by. Later on we drove past some smaller villages (here we encountered our only bad roads, with holes, that you read about in travel guides). We saw a Syrian woodpecker in a tree in a garden. People of the village thought we were really crazy, running around with our binoculars and telescope, but a sticker of a bird on the telescope apparently made things clear to them. In the late afternoon we went back to the hill where we had seen the white-tailed eagle the day before, but we didn't see any new birds. Shortly before dark, we started our long drive back to Bucharest. We took a shortcut via Harsova. I don't remember if it was a good idea or whether it would have been better to go via Constanta. On the smaller roads in the forests around Babadag, we saw numerous small **mouse-like rodents** crossing the road, but we don't know which species they were.



### Day ten

We arrived in Bucharest at around 2pm. Hotels were less cheap than we had hoped and we felt it wasn't really worthwhile to sleep in a hotel anyway. Hence, we went into city, but failed to find the city centre. We took a taxi and asked to bring us to the bars of the city centre. Unfortunately the taxi driver didn't really understand English and he brought us to a mega fancy casino. Although we were dressed horribly, they did let us in after they had our pictures taken (for safety measures or so, not because we looked sloppy). We drank cocktails with our last money and we waited for the sun to rise before we walked back to our car and drove to the airport.

## **General info:**

Our little booklet with sentences in Rumanian did come in handy as we tried to communicate with the locals as they spoke only Rumanian. Throughout the trip we met few people who spoke any other language. We met one guy who spoke French, many people who claimed to speak German but in the end only knew the word "Deutsch" and now and then someone who spoke a little English. The people were however very keen on trying to communicate and we never really encountered any problems.

I don't remember the name of the car rental company. They were the cheapest we found on the internet. Although all communication through email went smoothly in English, they didn't actually speak a lot of English (just "good car" and - when comparing two cars - "same price"). We had no problems with them in terms of payment (VISA). On the last day, however, while driving back to Bucharest, we were stopped by the police. The police were very friendly and spoke English but they noticed that our "vehicle inspection documents" had expired a few days before. Luckily they didn't make too much of a fuzz, but it might be worth checking this before accepting a car.

Larger shops in Rumania are quite western and modern and they have most of the products we are familiar with. Smaller shops are very interesting but not so western.

The roads are not as bad as is always said. Europe has invested a lot into Rumania and it really shows. The roads were all very modern. In the Danube delta, some tarred roads in the smaller villages, were in very bad condition. We drove a lot at night to get from one place to another. Driving was however a bit dangerous. Cars tended to pass one another without checking the space available to them and a couple of times we just avoided a frontal collision by moving to the side with our own car (thanks to the skills of our drivers Fré and Albrecht!). We also saw a few very bad looking accidents between cars and cyclists or horse carriages.

There were many restaurants, also in the small towns. The food was basic but quite good and not expensive.

We got most of our information on the sites to visit in the Danube Delta from "Finding birds in Romania" by Dave Gosney. It had explanations and rough, but correct, drawings on many birding places with notes on species that can be seen in various locations. We were already pretty late in the season and hence we decided not to take one of the rather expensive boat trips. Apparently there is a public ferry that would allow you to travel through a part of the Delta towards Sulina, but we did not further investigate this possibility. We spent two days in the Delta and we didn't have time to get bored at all.

We used "Romania – A bird watching and wildlife guide" by James Roberts to get information on other places. This book had good but basic information on many species that can be seen in the country and very interesting tips on where to go to see wildlife. Drawings of maps are also included in this book.