

**Birds in the Chorokhi delta in spring 2015**



## Colofon

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Laan van Meerdervoort 1540

2555 CN The Hague

e-mail: [rinsev@hotmail.com](mailto:rinsev@hotmail.com)

Cover illustration: Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Chorokhi delta, photo: Otto Plantema.

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## Preface

In November 2012 the Dutch Avifaunistic Circle (AKN<sup>1</sup>) was established as a new section of the Netherlands Ornithologists' Union. After its existence of three years, the main focus now is on two projects: Dutch Ornithological Heritage and a contribution to the knowledge of the birds of Georgia. Arguments for the latter project are, firstly, that apart from raptors, status information on the various bird species in Georgia is scarce, and secondly, that Georgia is one of the hotspot areas for birds in the world. Georgia is famous for its biodiversity and is an important location for the monitoring of long-distance migrant birds.

Together with SABUKO, which is the Society for Nature Conservation in Georgia, and BirdLife International, we made a plan for collaboration in the coming years. Of course, also other countries already support Georgia and the Caucasus program of BirdLife International. We are happy to join them.

In September 2013 Frank de Miranda, Martin Lok and Kees Scharringa (AKN) made an orientation in Georgia and they visited the Chorokhi delta then. The need for additional data seemed evident, especially on groups of birds other than raptors. We decided to stimulate ornithological fieldwork. The result of the first step is this report by Rinse van der Vliet. His survey in May 2015 underlines the importance of the Chorokhi delta as a future Important Bird Area.

Let this be the start of a fruitful collaboration!

November 2015,

Frank de Miranda  
Chairman Dutch Avifaunistic Circle

Alex Rukhaia  
Director SABUKO

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<sup>1</sup> In Dutch: Avifaunistische Kring Nederland (AKN)

# 1. Introduction

In spring 2015 the Chorokhi river delta (Ajara, Georgia) South of the city of Batumi was monitored on birds, mainly for determining the presence of species and to count as many birds of as many species as possible.

The observations were carried out by Rinse van der Vliet on behalf of the Dutch Avifaunistic Circle (AKN), section of the Netherlands Ornithologists Union.

This report is mainly an overview of the bird observations by the author in and around the Chorokhi delta (from here on the 'delta') in the period from 30 April to 8 May and from 12 to 13 May 2015. The report starts with a short description of the area and the different parts within the delta (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 presents the method used and the fieldwork. In Chapter 4 the results by subarea are treated and some comparisons are given. Chapter 5 gives species-specific information. Chapter 6 shows the most important findings and gives some recommendations.

Since about 2008 the Batumi area has become highly popular among birdwatchers because the 'Eastern Black Sea route' proved to be a bottleneck (between the Black Sea in the West and the Western Caucasus in the East) during the southward migration for many birds migrating from their breeding areas to their wintering grounds. Yearly counts, with a focus on raptors, are organised and maintained by The Batumi Raptor Count (BRC; <http://www.batimiraptorcount.org>) which is a project of the Society for Nature Conservation (SABUKO; <http://www.sabuko.org/index.php/en>). These monitoring activities have been performed almost exclusively in autumn, while until recently, the area in spring was mostly ignored.

This report could not have been possible without the help of other people.

Thanks to Frank de Miranda and Martin Lok (both AKN) for the invitation. Many thanks to Frank, Martin and Jasper Wehrmann (BRC) for thoroughly commenting on an earlier version of this report. Johannes Jansen (BRC) took care for logistical preparations and informed me about several subjects. Fred van Olphen (foundation Aurora Borealis) kindly supported with financial matters. Alexander Rukhaia (SABUKO) was very helpful in many ways: logistics, contacts, translations, introducing me to the country and to the delta and for good company. Last but not least Levan Leonidze and his family are thanked for their hospitality and housing me in nearby Akhalisopheli.

## 2.The Chorokhi delta

The Chorokhi river (in Turkish: Çoruh; in Georgian: ჩოროხი *ch'orokhi*) rises in the Mescit Mountains in Northeast Turkey and flows into Georgia, where it reaches the Black Sea just south of Batumi (Ajara) a few kilometres North of the Turkish-Georgian border (Figure 1). This is the Chorokhi delta (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Inset Chorokhi delta.



Figure 2. Overview of the Chorokhi delta.

## 2.1. The delta

Since many decades the delta has been known as an important stop over site for shorebirds and passerines by former soviet ornithologists. Because many data has been published in Russian language only, the delta was poorly known to the non-Russian speaking community. But in recent years the Batumi area has been 'discovered' by western European birdwatchers. In the nearby foothills North of Batumi a raptor migration site has revealed a bottleneck for more than one million raptors every autumn (<http://www.trektellen.nl/site/totals/1047/2015/0> and <http://www.trektellen.nl/site/totals/1048/2015>). These countings are organised and maintained by the Batumi Raptor Count (BRC). During these regular and intensive visits several data was added to the species list and many birders also visit the Chorokhi delta for one or two days. Next to these visitors a bird ringing station has been operating in the delta in autumn (in the Southern ponds area; <http://www.trektellen.nl/site/totals/1084/2015>) since 2010.

The delta has proven to be an excellent spot for bird watching due to its great variety of habitats, ranging from marshes and ponds to gravel beaches and the seashore, a boulder plain (dry and wet), mudflats, reed beds and, of course, the river itself. This and its strategic location at the South end of the West-Georgian plains make the delta a spectacular, ever-changing bird paradise, where virtually any species migrating through this part of the world can be expected. The area is most noteworthy for its diversity of herons, rails, waders, gulls, terns and for its wealth of passerines hiding in its bushes and reed beds. Finally, good visible migration can be seen crossing the area, especially swifts, swallows, wagtails, pipits, bee-eaters and fairly good numbers of raptors migrating through the area. See also: <http://www.batumbirding.com/batumi/chorokhi-delta/node/88>.

The delta is a serious candidate for IBA status. During the hunting season from August to mid November a lot of hunting activity is observed regularly. Although there should be no hunting at all in spring a freshly-shot Common Crane was found (see Chapter 5 under that species). In spring 2014 a freshly-shot Grey Heron, a Marsh Harrier and two Steppe Buzzards were found (pers obs J. Wehrmann).

The river was during the visits fast flowing and quite deep, but nevertheless held several dozens of rather sparsely vegetated islands and sandbanks. The river is hydro-electric dam regulated, which means that the water level depends on the need of electricity. Water level can change quickly within two hours with up to 50 cm difference.

The vegetation in the delta holds patches of medium high (3-5 m) bushes and a few reed beds interspersed with smaller and some larger clearings. Along the edges of the area, near the Northern Ponds and in Akhalisopheli patches of taller woodland are present. Dominant vegetation consists of among others *Hippophae rhamnoides* (Sea Buckthorn), *Paliurus spina-christi*, *Imperata cylindrical*, *Cynodon dactylon*, *Pancratium maritimum* and *Glaucium corniculatum*.

Apart from birds other easy to observe fauna consists of the endemic and endangered Black Sea subspecies of Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena relicta*, Short-beaked Common Dolphin *Delphinus delphis ponticus* and Common Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus ponticus*.

The most common amphibians are Eurasian Marsh Frog *Pelophylax ridibundus* and Common Tree Frog *Hyla arborea* and reptiles which can be seen are European Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*, Dice Snake *Natrix tessellata* and European Pond Terrapin *Emys orbicularis*. The delta is an important site for Clarks' Lizard *Lacerta clarkorum* and three species of sturgeon: Persian Sturgeon *acipenser persicus*, Starry Sturgeon *acipenser stellatus* and Beluga Sturgeon *Huso huso*.



Figure 3. Areal view of the Chorokhi river with the delta and the Black Sea in the back. Photo: Deltares.



Figure 4. The author and a Georgian birder. Photo: TV Ajara.

## 2.2. The study area

The names and borders of the study area, including the borders of the different subareas, mainly correspond with the borders as set out in [www.observado.org](http://www.observado.org):

In the West the Black Sea; in the South the village of Gonio Fortress (mainly South to the canal North of this village), the E70 and the main road through and including the village of Akhalisopheli (East to Ombolo); in the East the bridge crossing the river between the villages of Khelvachauri and Makho and in the North the road leading along the North bank of the river and the Batumi Airport.

The bridge of the E70 crossing the river between Akhalisopheli and Batumi (from here on called 'the bridge') divides the Eastern part of the river from the delta (West of the bridge).

The size of the delta West of the bridge is approximately 900 ha (approximately 3 x 3 km). East of the bridge a stretch of river of 6 km to the East is monitored.

### West of the bridge, South of the river:

**Chorokhi river:** <http://observado.org/gebiet/info/181131>

The river itself, including the more or less vegetated edges, the river mouth and about twenty larger and smaller sparsely vegetated islands and sandbanks in the river. A few horses are grazing on the larger islands.

Visited on: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 13 May.



Figure 6. The bridge, dividing the Eastern part of the river from the delta (right site). Photo: Rinse van der Vliet



Figure 7. The Chorokhi river West of the bridge. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet

**Coast & Sea:** <http://observado.org/gebiet/info/181136>

The Southeastern shore of the Black Sea and the sea dike consisting of gravel.  
Visited on: 30 April and 1, 3, 6, 8 and 13 May.

**Military camp:** <http://observado.org/gebiet/info/181133>

Covers approximately one third of the entire study area with low and medium high bushes interspersed with small clearings, two small canals, a minor stream, a couple of medium-sized reed beds and a grassy plane alternating with moist areas adjacent to the Southern ponds. Next to this a

gravel factory is operating near the bridge at the Eastern end of the area. A number of cows is grazing here.  
Visited on: 30 April and 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 13 May.



*Figure 8. Old army building in the Military camp. Photo: Pieter Cox*



*Figure 9. Military camp. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet*



Figure 10. Military camp, the entrance. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet

**Southern Ponds & Wetlands:** <http://observado.org/gebied/info/181132>

One major pond (several acres) bordered by the sea dike and separated by rather small dikes from four minor ponds (together also several acres) adjacent to a few reed beds and low to medium high bushes interspersed with small grassy clearings.

Visited on: 30 April and 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 12 and 13 May.



Figure 11. Southern ponds. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet



Figure 12. Southern ponds. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet



Figure 13. Southern ponds. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet



Figure 13. Southern ponds. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet

**West of the bridge, North of the river:**

**Northern Part:** <http://observado.org/gebied/info/181137>

The area North of the river (excluding the next two subareas) and West of the bridge, mostly covered with low bushes and several minor wet areas in between the vegetation.

Visited on: 2, 4 and 7 May.

**Northern Ponds:** <http://observado.org/gebied/info/181134>

Three small ponds, a marshy reed bed and a few lanes with higher trees along the E70.

Visited on: 2 and 4 May.

**Dump Site:** <http://observado.org/gebied/info/181135>

The Batumi Rubbish Dump containing rubbish(..) and lower bushes.

Visited on: 2 and 12 May.



Figure 14. Dump site. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet

**East of the bridge (East to the bridge between Khelvachauri and Makho), the river itself and the North bank:**

Consists of several major and minor islands and sandbanks. In the Eastern part of the researched area there is a minor stretch of woodland. Just North of the North bank a power station and a gravel factory are operating near a grassy plane with scattered low bushes. Visited on: 7 May.



Figure 15. North bank of the river, East of the bridge. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet



*Figure 16. The river East of the bridge. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet*

***East of the bridge (East to the bridge between Khelvachauri and Makho), the South bank:***

Low, medium high and higher trees between the river and adjacent Akhalisopheli. The village itself holds wooded gardens.

Visited on: 5 and 13 May.



*Figure 17. The river East of the bridge, in the back, the South bank. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet*



Figure 18. The central crossing at Akhalisopheli. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet

### 2.3. The Weather

During almost the entire visit the weather was good for monitoring birds.

On most days it was partly or completely clouded, only two days were warm and sunny.

Although four days started with some drizzle and significant rainfall occurred on three days, this was never really annoying and the rain remained only for a few hours.

The wind was blowing from different directions, was weak to moderate on most days and was never annoying nor did it seem to have any significant negative effect on bird activity.

### 3.Methods

The assignment was to conduct a bird survey mainly for establishing an as complete as possible species list and to count bird numbers of all observed species in the entire Chorokhi delta during the for birds most productive period in spring. Thus a more or less semi-quantitative survey.

The period from the end of April to mid May was chosen to be the best period, because of high numbers of migrants during this period and the fact that most breeding bird species should be back from their wintering grounds. When preparing the trip I decided to focus on breeding/territorial birds and staging migrants using the area as a stopover site.

#### 3.1. Interpretation and processing of the data

By using the Android cell phone app ObsMapp (version 5.2.1) as many observations as possible were entered in the connected [www.observado.org](http://www.observado.org) directly after the sightings had been done. By doing so, for all of these sightings, species name, number of specimen, exact location, date and time were automatically recorded. For a number of species in which sex and age is readily recognisable this is also entered. For most of the entered observations the behaviour 'on the spot' was sufficient. Other observations required recording other behaviour like: singing, flying (with or without direction), swimming, feeding etc. For most of the observed species all records were entered directly after the sightings had been done. For the remaining 32 species, which proved to be so common that entering every sighting would be too time consuming, daily summaries of the numbers and behaviour were noted.

#### 3.2 Fieldwork

All fieldwork was carried out on foot using binoculars and telescope for identifying and counting. I did not encounter any annoying obstacles while entering the area, more or less the whole area was easily accessible. Except of course for the sandbanks and islands in the river.

##### *Visits to the area:*

30 April 2015:	18:00h-20:45h (2,75 hours)
1 May 2015:	06:30h-19:15h (12,75 hours)
2 May 2015:	07:20h-20:35h (13,25 hours)
3 May 2015:	05:55h-19:45h (13,75 hours)
4 May 2015:	08:40h-09:40h & 15:00h-16:15h (2,25 hours)
5 May 2015:	07:20h-09:00h (1,75 hours)
6 May 2015:	05:40h-19:55h (14,25 hours)
7 May 2015:	07:50h-22:30h (14,75 hours)
8 May 2015:	05:50h-16:15h (10,50 hours)
12 May 2015:	11:20h-21:00h (9,75 hours)
13 May 2015:	05:30h-15:30h (10 hours)
Total	105,75 hours

See Chapter 2 for visits to the different subareas.

Because of the fact that I never visited the country before, I obviously will not have a good picture of the numbers and distribution of early migrants. Next to this I do not have reliable information about early breeders, which have reduced (vocal) activity during May (but see chapter 4.2).

## 4.Results

An overview of all the records entered in [www.observado.org](http://www.observado.org) can be found here:

<http://tinyurl.com/pggcjpm>. Scientific names of species which are mentioned in Chapter 5 are not repeated in this chapter.

### 4.1. Species and numbers

A total of 162 species was found in the study area (see Chapter 5) . This number excludes two possible species (Chiffchaff - *Phyloscopus collybita* and Savi's Warbler - *Locustella luscinioides*), three (sub)species of Western Yellow Wagtail and four species only seen in the Batumi park/Batumi harbour (Little Gull, Common Tern, Wryneck, Northern Wheatear; Chapter 5 at the end of the species list). All observed species are recorded in [observado.org](http://www.observado.org) which resulted in a total of 1286 recorded sightings. For 136 species all sightings are recorded in [observado.org](http://www.observado.org), for the remaining 32 common species daily summarising notes about numbers and behaviour were made.

Breeding birds: Not very easy to assess, because of low song activity or lack of other indicators for breeding. Soon after arriving in the delta it became clear that the area is much more important for migrating birds than for breeding birds. Little Ringed Plover and Yellow-legged Gull are definitely breeding birds in the area, as are Common Swift and House Sparrow in old army buildings.

Other probable breeding birds are: Little Grebe, Little Bittern, Water Rail, Common Moorhen, Little and Baillon's Crake (pers. obs. A. Abuladze), Marsh Harrier, Common Kingfisher, Eurasian Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler and White Wagtail.

Possible breeders are: Black-crowned Night Heron, Red-backed Shrike and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler.

In Akhalsopheli territorial birds were more obvious: Hooded Crow, Long-tailed Tit, Great Tit, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Common Blackbird, Song Thrush, Common Redstart, White Wagtail, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, European Goldfinch.

Thrush Nightingales were quite often singing, but this is definitely not a breeding species.

The most common and widespread migrant species at the time were: Purple Heron, Black Kite, European Honey Buzzard, Steppe Buzzard, Yellow-legged Gull (immature birds), Black-headed Gull, Common Swift, European Bee-eater, Barn Swallow, Sand Martin, Red-backed Shrike, Great Reed Warbler, Willow Warbler, Barred Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Thrush Nightingale and Western Yellow Wagtail (flava).

### 4.2. Comparison with other information

The only more or less structural birdmonitoring in the delta in spring that I am aware of and which lasted more than a couple of days was carried out by Jasper Wehrmann and Jonas von Tschirnhaus in the preceding year (from 31 March to 20 May 2014 with a total of 24 survey days). See <http://tinyurl.com/px6863p> for data. The most obvious differences in 2014 compared to my data are: Black-throated Loon 116 on 4 April; Kentish Plover seen on four days between 1 and 12 May in the river mouth and in the Southern ponds with a maximum of three individuals; a Bar-tailed Godwit on 4 and 8 May; up to twelve Black-tailed Godwits on 31 March; in the Southern ponds 20 Eurasian Curlews on 6 April; Little Stint was seen regularly with up to 44 individuals on 8 May; Temmicks Stint was seen on five days; Dunlin was observed regularly with a maximum of 35 in the river on 2 April; three Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were seen on 8 May at the river mouth and between 6 April and 1 May 14 Moustached Warblers were found.

Furthermore regular surveys are being held by Alexander Abuladze ([abuladze@inbox.ru](mailto:abuladze@inbox.ru)), but access to these data is limited.

Prior to my visit a group of birders visited the area on 25 April 2015 which produced ten (sub)species that I could not find: Saker Falcon - *Falco cherrug*, Spotted Crake - *Porzana porzana*,

Heuglin's Gull - *Larus fuscus heuglini*, Western Jackdaw - *Coloeus monedula*, Eurasian Penduline Tit - *Remiz pendulinus*, Siberian Chiffchaff - *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*, Eastern Orphean Warbler - *Sylvia crassirostris*, Bluethroat - *Luscinia svecica*, Siberian Stonechat - *Saxicola maurus*, Spanish Sparrow - *Passer hispaniolensis*.

#### **4.3. Chorokhi River West of the bridge**

The river mouth usually contained many species, such as duck, cormorants, herons, shorebirds, terns and many gulls. The islands in the river itself were used as breeding places for Yellow-legged Gulls and as staging areas for herons, immature gulls, waders and Black Kites.

#### **4.4. Coast & Sea**

Black-throated Loons, a few grebes, Great Cormorants, Sandwich Terns and gulls were seen feeding at sea. Some duck, a Shag and an Arctic Skua were seen migrating North.

#### **4.5. Southern Ponds & Wetlands**

Together with the adjacent Military Camp the best part of the delta, especially for migrating passerines in many species, but also herons, grebes, rails and waders.

#### **4.6. Military Camp**

Together with the adjacent Southern Ponds easily the best part of the delta, especially for migrating passerines in many species and much more.

#### **4.7. Northern Part**

More or less similar species as in the Southern Ponds and the Military Camp (par. 4.5 and 4.6), but in much lower numbers and fewer species.

#### **4.8. Northern Ponds**

This part hosts a few duck, herons, rails and other marsh birds.

#### **4.9. Dump Site**

The Batumi rubbish dump serves a banquet for gulls, Black Kites and Hooded Crows. Also wagtails, House Sparrows and Corn Buntings are attracted to this area.

#### **4.10. Chorokhi River east of the bridge: North bank**

The river to the East of the bridge appeared to be not as rich as the part West of the bridge. In the river itself a few herons and sandpipers and Little Ringed Plovers were seen. The only gulls around were Yellow legged Gulls (especially breeding pairs), in the evening just East of the bridge a sleeping roost of gulls was present. The field just North of the river bank produced some raptors and a group of Corn Buntings.

#### **4.11. Chorokhi River east of the bridge: South bank**

The South bank of the river has some more cover and bushes for migrant passerines than the North-bank and the adjacent gardens in Akhalisopheli harbours a number of species (common woodland and garden species) which don't occur in the delta West of the bridge.

## 5. Species Accounts

Observado.org follows the IOC World Bird List (Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). 2015. IOC World Bird List (v 5.3). doi : 10.14344/IOC.ML.5.3: <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>) in taxonomy, sequence and nomenclature, therefore the contents of this chapter will do the same.

Species with an asterisk (\*) have each observation recorded in [www.observado.org](http://www.observado.org).

Up to a maximum of twelve records per species (not necessarily coinciding with the number of individuals) all sightings are mentioned in this chapter.

Used abbreviations:

2cy = second calendar year

3cy = third calendar year

>3cy = older than third calendar year

### **Common Quail** - *Coturnix coturnix*\*

One flushed just behind the sea dike on 1 May and another one on 13 May in the Southern ponds area.

### **Gadwall** - *Anas strepera*\*

A female in the Southern ponds on 6 May and a male in the same area on 13 May.

### **Eurasian Wigeon** - *Anas Penelope*\*

On 3 May a male was swimming in the Southern ponds.

### **Mallard** - *Anas platyrhynchos*\*

Two on 1 May in the Military camp and two males flying East of the bridge following the river to the East on 7 May.

### **Northern Shoveler** - *Anas clypeata*\*

Five were swimming in the river mouth on 1 May and a male was present in the Southern ponds on 6 May.

### **Northern Pintail** - *Anas acuta*\*

One in the river mouth on 1 May, two males and a female on 2 May in the river, again two males and a female in the river mouth on 6 May and a pair on 12 and 13 May in the Southern ponds.

### **Garganey** - *Anas querquedula*\*

Seen on 30 April (male) in the Southern ponds, on 1 May in the Southern ponds (three) and in the river (14) and three flying South along the coast, on 3 May three in the Southern ponds and five flying North along the coast, on 6 May five in the Southern ponds and ten in the river mouth, on 12 May three in the Southern ponds and six on 13 May in the river mouth.

### **Eurasian Teal** - *Anas crecca*\*

Three swimming in the river mouth on 1 May, two females and a male in the river mouth on 6 May and a male on 12 May in the Southern ponds.

### **Red-crested Pochard** - *Netta rufina*\*

Two males and a female on 1 May in the Southern ponds and a pair in the same area on 6 May.

### **Ferruginous Duck** - *Aythya nyroca*\*

Two males were in the Southern ponds on 1 May and on 2 May two males were seen in the Northern ponds. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> two birds were flying North and a pair was present in the Southern ponds. On 6, 8 and 12 May three males were swimming in the Southern ponds and on 13 May one male was present there.

**Tufted Duck - *Aythya fuligula*\***

A female on 2 May in the Northern ponds.

**Black-throated Loon - *Gavia arctica*\***

On 30 April and 1, 3, 6 and 8 May respectively 15, 20, 14, 7 and 8 birds were counted swimming at Sea. On the 6<sup>th</sup> also four birds were seen migrating in a Northerly direction.

**Little Grebe - *Tachybaptus ruficollis*\***

One calling, so probably territorial, in the Southern ponds on 1 May. In the same area two on 6 May and three on 8, 12 and 13 May. Four birds in the Northern ponds on 2 May.

**Red-necked Grebe - *Podiceps grisegena*\***

A bird at sea on 30 April, 3 and 6 May.

**Great Crested Grebe - *Podiceps cristatus*\***

Birds at sea on 30 April (three) and on 3 (three), 6, 8 (five), 12 (four) and 13 May. One in the Southern ponds on 1 and 3 May.

**Black-necked Grebe - *Podiceps nigricollis*\***

One in the Southern Ponds on 1, 3, 6 and 8 May.

**Black Stork - *Ciconia nigra*\***

Singles migrating North on 3 May and 13 May.

**White Stork - *Ciconia ciconia*\***

One bird flying by on 1 May, two flying South over the Southern ponds on 6 May and one migrating North East of the bridge on 7 May.

**Glossy Ibis - *Plegadis falcinellus*\***

One on 1 May South over the Southern ponds. On 2, 3 and 4 May 21 were counted near the Northern ponds. On 6 May groups of 40, 31 and 25 were flying North over the Southern ponds. On 8 May 13 in the Military camp and two on 12 and 13 May in the Southern ponds.

**Eurasian Spoonbill - *Platalea leucorodia*\***

On 6 May a 2cy was present in the Southern ponds and an adult was present in the river. On 7 May two 2cy birds were flying North. On 8 and 13 May one was seen in the river mouth.

**Eurasian Bittern - *Botaurus stellaris*\***

One on 4 May discovered in the Northern ponds.

**Little Bittern - *Ixobrychus minutus*\***

In total 23 sightings of this species, mainly in the Southern ponds area, but also in various other places with suitable habitat. Most birds flushed, therefore there could have been many more birds present than the number of sightings suggests.

**Black-crowned Night Heron - *Nycticorax nycticorax*\***

In the evenings of 30 April and 2, 5, 7, 8, 13 respectively 29, 18, 11, 26, 1 and 9 birds were flying to a sleeping roost. All movements were in Northerly direction. On 2 May five birds were seen at the Dump site and on 4 May five were counted in the northern part of the river delta.

**Squacco Heron - *Ardeola ralloides*\***

Five on 2 May in the Northern ponds and two on the Dump site. On 3 and 4 May one in the Military camp. In the Southern ponds five on 6 May and four on 8 May. On 12 May three in the Military camp and one in the Southern ponds and on 13 May again three in the Military camp.

**Western Cattle Egret - *Bubulcus ibis*\***

One in the Southern ponds on 1 May, two at the Dump site on 2 May and one in the Military camp on 7 May.

**Grey Heron - *Ardea cinerea*\***

A total of 13 sightings of one or a couple of birds in all areas until 7 May with a maximum of 20 on 6 May in the river mouth and seven East of the bridge on 7 May.

**Purple Heron - *Ardea purpurea*\***

At least 55 sightings, almost anywhere in suitable habitat. Seen every day, usually between 10 and 25 birds a day. At least three 2cy birds were identified. One of the key-species in the delta.

**Great Egret - *Ardea alba*\***

On 1 May 2 were present in the Military Camp and six in the Southern ponds. On 2 May two near the bridge, four in the river between the bridge and the river mouth and two East of the bridge. On 5 May again two East of the bridge and on 6 May one in the Military camp. On 7 May in the river East of the bridge, South of the construction works and on 8 May one in the Southern ponds.

**Little Egret - *Egretta garzetta*\***

A total of 15 sightings, seen daily, with a maximum of 31 on the southern end of the Southern ponds on 13 May and 18 on 3 May in the same area. North of the river a maximum of five at the Dump site.

**European Shag - *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*\***

One adult flying North above sea in the morning of 3 May. Quite a surprise.

**Great Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*\***

Seen almost daily with a maximum of 30 on 6 May at the sea dike near the river mouth. On most other days 18 birds or less where seen.

**European Honey Buzzard - *Pernis apivorus***

A very common migrant. Seen every day, with tens on some days to hundreds on other days. On 13 May 1800 birds were migrating North over Akhalisopheli between 14:20h and 15:10h. On 6 May very many thousands were migrating over Sakalvasho (pers. comm. G. Major), on that day only a couple of hundred birds where seen over the delta.

**Black Kite - *Milvus migrans***

A very common migrant. Seen every day, on most days some hundreds were seen, concerning actively migrating groups as well as daily staging birds especially on river banks and at the Dump site.

**Short-toed Eagle - *Circaetus gallicus*\***

On 2 May ten were counted migrating North over the Dump site and on 7 May two birds North over the river east of the bridge. A few birds were seen just outside the delta.

**Western Marsh Harrier - *Circus aeruginosus*\***

One or two females were seen almost daily. A probable nest site was found in the central reed beds. On 2 May two birds in the Northern Ponds. Probably at least two breeding territories in the entire delta. A few actively migrating birds were noted.

**Pallid Harrier - *Circus macrourus*/ Montagu's Harrier - *Circus pygargus*\***

Two ringtails to the North on 1 May. Next to this more than 15 migrating birds were migrating North.

**Pallid Harrier - *Circus macrourus*\***

One 2cy on 6 May and one adult female on 7 May, another 2cy over the Military camp on 8 May and one ringtail over the Southern ponds on 12 May.

**Montagu's Harrier - *Circus pygargus*\***

A ringtail on 2 May migrating North, an adult female on 2 May in the Military camp, one ringtail over the Military camp on 7 May and an adult female on 8 May in the same area.

**Levant Sparrowhawk - *Accipiter brevipes*\***

Not a common bird in the delta, but total counts of migrating groups numbered 55 and 40 birds over the area on 1 and 2 May. On 5 May about 60 just outside the delta. The only bird seen resting for a while near the Southern ponds was an adult male on 1 May.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk - *Accipiter nisus***

Seen daily until 8 May. With a maximum of up to 20 on 2 and 6 May. Always migrating as singles or in pairs and often using the area as a staging/hunting site.

**Common Buzzard - *Buteo buteo vulpinus***

A common species, seen every day. Migrating as well staging in the area, especially in and around the Military camp. Some tens to a couple of hundred birds per day.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle - *Clanga pomarina*\***

Four birds migrating North on 6 May, one bird flying around in the Southern ponds area on 8 May and one migrating North east of the bridge on 13 May.

**Steppe Eagle - *Aquila nipalensis*\***

Ten birds flying North on 2 May, one was present in the area on 3 and 6 May. One 2cy was migrating North over the Northern part on 7 May and an adult in the same direction on 8 May.

**Booted Eagle - *Hieraaetus pennatus*\***

Eight birds migrating North on 2 May and one in the Southern Ponds area on 6 May and in the Military camp on 8 May. Also just outside the delta several birds were seen. Most birds concerned dark morphs.

**Lesser Kestrel - *Falco naumanni*\***

Two birds calling in the Military camp on 1 May, an adult male on 2 May on a pylon North of the river East of the bridge and an adult male South of the Southern ponds on 13 May.

**Common Kestrel - *Falco tinnunculus*\***

On 2 May a male near the river mouth and a male at the Dump site. On 3 May one in the Military camp and on 7 May a female in that area.

**Red-footed Falcon - *Falco vespertinus*\***

An adult male on a pole in the Military camp on 7 May, in the evening of 12 May a male was hunting over the Southern ponds and on 13 May again a male in the Military camp.

**Eurasian Hobby - *Falco subbuteo*\***

Single birds flying North on 1 and 7 May, two birds doing the same on 6 and 13 May and one bird perched in a tree near the Northern ponds on 4 May.

**Peregrine Falcon - *Falco peregrinus*\***

An adult male with prey flying South over the Southern ponds on 6 May. So presumably one of a breeding pair (just?) South of the delta.

**Water Rail - *Rallus aquaticus*\***

Four different birds heard on 1 May, three of them in and around the Southern ponds, one on 4 May in the Northern ponds and on 6 May in the Military camp and in the Southern ponds. Presumably a breeding species.

**Corn Crane - *Crex crex*\***

One was calling for a while in the evening of 12 May in the Southern ponds area.

**Little Crane - *Porzana parva*\***

A total of 13 birds observed (eleven birds seen), of which eight on 1 May, most of them in the Southern ponds area and surroundings. Two birds on 3 May in the same area and on 4 May one in the Northern ponds. On 6 May two birds were found in the Military camp.

**Common Moorhen - *Gallinula chloropus*\***

In total 23 records of one to four birds, most of them in the Southern and Northern ponds and surroundings. Ten birds counted just north of the river mouth on 4 May. Probably a fairly common breeding bird in suitable habitat.

**Eurasian Coot - *Fulica atra*\***

Groups of 16, 10 and 10 were counted in the Southern ponds on 1,3 and 6 May. A group of 19 birds was present in the Northern ponds on 2 May.

**Common Crane - *Grus grus*\***

Four were present around the Southern ponds area on 1 May. On 3 May three and four birds were flying North. On 6 May a freshly shot bird was found dead at the sea dike. On 7 May a group of 14 was flying South.

**Black-winged Stilt - *Himantopus himantopus*\***

Always present in the Southern ponds with a maximum of 20 birds on 6 May. Not seen in other areas.

**Pied Avocet - *Recurvirostra avosetta*\***

On 13 May one was present on a river bank and later on that day one (the same) was seen further downstream.

**Spur-winged Lapwing - *Vanellus spinosus*\***

The surprise of the visit. Found on 6 May around 10:00am in the Southern ponds, the bird stayed in the area until at least the late afternoon. Said to be the third record for Georgia and the first bird seen and photographed alive. The first two records concerned old museum-specimen.



Figure 19 and 20. Spur-winged Lapwing - *Vanellus spinosus*. 6 May 2015. Photos: Rinse van der Vliet

**Grey Plover** - *Pluvialis squatarola*\*

On 1 and 3 May probably the same bird was present in the Southern ponds, on 6 May another (adult summer) bird visited the same area. On 12 and 13 May a third bird was present here.

**Common Ringed Plover** - *Charadrius hiaticula*\*

One bird on 1, 3 and 8 May in the Southern ponds. Birds on and around river banks were seen on 6 (four), 8 (three) and 13 May (15).

**Little Ringed Plover** - *Charadrius dubius*\*

At least 20 records of staging migrants and territorial birds. Territories (singing and alarming birds and birds showing distraction behaviour) were found in the Military camp, on the sea dike and on river beds, also east of the bridge. Maximum numbers are 20 in the Military camp on 30 April and 15 on 6 May in the river. Probably at least ten breeding pairs were present in the whole area.

**Kentish Plover** - *Charadrius alexandrinus*\*

Two birds foraging at the seashore adjacent to the Southern ponds on 8 May.

**Great Snipe** - *Gallinago media*\*

Flushed from a very short distance in the Southern ponds in the evening of 12 May.

**Common Snipe** - *Gallinago gallinago*\*

Single birds in the Military camp on 30 April and flyby's on 1 and 6 May.

**Black-tailed Godwit** - *Limosa limosa*\*

Two birds on a riverbank east of the bridge on 2 May, single birds on 3, 6 and 13 May in the Southern ponds and four in the same area on 12 May.

**Whimbrel** - *Numenius phaeopus*\*

Four on 1 May, two on 3 May, two flying North on 6 May, two on 7 and 8 May and three on 13 May. Seen in the river mouth, the Military camp and the Southern ponds.

**Eurasian Curlew** - *Numenius arquata*\*

One on 6 May on a river bank.

**Spotted Redshank** - *Tringa erythropus*\*

Single birds in the Southern ponds on 30 April, 6 and 8 May.

**Common Redshank** - *Tringa tetanus*\*

Four on 1 May in the river mouth, two on 3 and 6 May in the Southern ponds, also on 6 May in the river, on 8 May two in the Southern ponds, one in the river mouth and four on a river bank. On 13 May two in the Southern ponds.

**Marsh Sandpiper** - *Tringa stagnatilis*\*

In the Southern ponds on 30 April and on 1, 3, 6 (two), 8 and 12 (two) May.

**Common Greenshank** - *Tringa nebularia*\*

On 30 April one in the Military Camp and on 1 May two in the river and one in the Southern ponds. On 2 May four in the river east of the bridge and two in the Northern ponds. On 8 May two in the Southern ponds.

**Green Sandpiper** - *Tringa ochropus*\*

On 2 May two birds east of the bridge in the river and on 3 May one in the Southern ponds.

**Wood Sandpiper** - *Tringa glareola*\*

Seen every day, at least 30 sightings. Most birds in the Southern ponds and in the Military camp. Maximum numbers were groups of 40 birds on 1 May in the Southern ponds and 30 on 30 April around the Military camp and the Southern ponds.

**Common Sandpiper** - *Actitis hypoleucos*\*

Widespread, with at least 15 sightings of one or two birds, especially on river banks and edges (also east of the bridge), but also some in the Southern ponds.

**Little Stint** - *Calidris minuta*\*

On 1 May four in the Southern ponds and (another?) four in the river. On 3 May one in the Southern ponds and a group of seven together with a Broad-billed Sandpiper North over the Military camp. The same combination (the same group?) on 7 May flying North at the other side of the river. On 6 May one in the river and on 8 May six in the river.

**Temminck's Stint** - *Calidris temminckii*\*

One in the Southern ponds on 13 May.

**Curlew Sandpiper** - *Calidris ferruginea*\*

Two on 1 May in the Southern ponds and one on 6 May in the river and in the Southern ponds. On 8 May five in the river and on 13 May one.

**Dunlin** - *Calidris alpina*\*

On 30 April one in the Southern ponds and on 1 May one in the river.

**Broad-billed Sandpiper** - *Limicola falcinellus*\*

On 3 and 7 May one flying North with a group of seven Little Stints (see under that species). On 6 and 8 May three in the river and on 13 May two in the river.

**Ruff** - *Philomachus pugnax*\*

Twelve records. Seen almost daily in and around the Southern ponds. On 30 April 23 birds, on 1 May 15 and on 13 May nine birds.

**Collared Pratincole** - *Glareola pratincola*\*

A group of four feeding near the North bank in the river and on 7 May eight birds at the same place. On 13 May three in the Southern ponds.

**Black-headed Gull** - *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Seen every day, a large group was present in the river mouth. Daily estimate 500-1000 birds. Adult and immature (2cy) birds in approximately equal numbers.

**Mediterranean Gull - *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*\***

On 30 April seven birds flying along the coast above the sea, on 1 May 20 birds doing the same and two in the river mouth, on 3 May two over the Southern ponds, on 6 May seven flying North along the coast, on 8 May three in the river mouth and one flying North and on 13 May eight in the river mouth. All three in the field recognisable age classes were seen: 2cy, 3cy and >3cy. Of course no juveniles (yet).

**Caspian Gull - *Larus cachinnans*\***

The identification was not always easy (hybrids?), but definitely in much lower numbers than Yellow-legged Gull. Most concerned immature birds, especially 2cy. Because of the identification problems difficult to give a proper estimate, but some tens daily could be reality. All birds seen in the river, on river banks and a few at the Dump site.

**Yellow-legged Gull - *Larus michahellis***

In numbers probably the most common species using the area, at least the most common non-passerine. Most birds were roosting on river banks and hundreds of birds using the dump site as a feeding place. Many birds did sleep on river banks East of the bridge and were seen flying West in the early morning. A breeding species on river islands, at least 30 (but maybe tens more) breeding pairs/nesting sites counted, from the river mouth in the West to as far East as halfway the two bridges, probably not further to the East. On 6 May one nest was found on the sea dike near the river mouth, it contained one egg, two days later the nest was empty.

Total estimation: 2500-3000 birds (including Caspian Gull), roughly containing: 2cy (80%), 3cy+4cy (12%) and >4cy (8%).

**Armenian Gull - *Larus armenicus*\***

Definitely not a common bird in May in the delta. There might have been a few more birds around, but only three birds, all on river banks, identified with certainty: an adult on 2 May, a 3cy on 6 May and a 2cy on 8 May.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull - *Larus fuscus fuscus*/ Heuglin's Gull – *Larus heuglini*\***

Two adults on 2 May and two adults on 6 May on a river bank.

All birds small with thin bill, very long-winged and had quite black(ish) upperpart coloration, suggesting fuscus.

**Gull-billed Tern - *Gelochelidon nilotica*\***

All birds concerned adult birds, mainly in the river mouth: four on 1 May, one to three on 6 May, five on 8 May and one or two on 13 May.

**Sandwich Tern - *Thalasseus sandvicensis***

Seen every day, especially in the river mouth and flying along the coast. Maximum count was 69 on 13 May. All birds seen well enough concerned adult birds. In the Batumi harbour 468 birds were counted on 4 May.

**Whiskered Tern - *Chlidonias hybrid*\***

On 13 May two birds flying North over the river and later on that morning four birds were present in the river mouth.

**White-winged Tern - *Chlidonias leucopterus*\***

An adult in the Southern ponds on 1, 6 and 8 May. On 2 May an adult was feeding above the north bank of the river and on 13 May five birds were present in the Southern ponds.

**Parasitic Jaeger - *Stercorarius parasiticus*\***

A dark (sub)adult flying south above sea on 1 May.  
Outside the delta two dark (sub)adult birds were seen off the Batumi harbour.

**Rock Dove** - *Columba livia*\*

A white bird flying South on 4 May and another normal coloured bird doing the same on 8 May.

**Common Wood Pigeon** - *Columba palumbus*\*

One flying South over the Military camp on 13 May.

**European Turtle Dove** - *Streptopelia turtur*\*

With only fifteen records between 2 and 8 May not common. Most birds seen in and around the Military camp on 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8 May with respectively 9, 17, 7, 4 and 5 birds.

**Common Cuckoo** - *Cuculus canorus*\*

A singing bird in the Military camp on 1 May and another one there on 3 May. On 5 May a bird was singing on the South bank east of the bridge and on 6 May a singing individual east of the Southern ponds.

**Western Barn Owl** - *Tyto alba*\*

In the late evening of 7 May a bird was constantly calling from a large Eucalyptus in Akhalisopheli.

**Short-eared Owl** - *Asio flammeus*\*

Flushed from some bushes on the sea dike near the Southern ponds on 1 May.

**European Nightjar** - *Caprimulgus europaeus*\*

In the early morning of 13 May seen in the Military camp.

**Common Swift** - *Apus apus*

A very common migrant. On 1 May more than 1000 and on 2 and 3 May more than 4000 birds were seen migrating North. From then on numbers were slowly decreasing. One nest found in an old army building in the Military camp on 7 May.

**European Roller** - *Coracias garrulous*\*

One bird in the evening of 12 May in the Military camp.

**Common Kingfisher** - *Alcedo atthis*\*

On 2 May on the South bank in the river near the bridge and on the same day on the North bank of the river. On 4 May just North of the river mouth and on 5 May on the South bank of the river east of the bridge. On 6 May one in the Southern ponds.

**Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** - *Merops persicus*\*

In the evening of 7 May two birds together in the top of a tree in the Military camp.



Figure 21. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater - *Merops persicus*. Photo: Rinse van der Vliet

**European Bee-eater - *Merops apiaster***

A very common migrant. (Some) hundreds of birds per day migrating North, often in large groups. A few birds using the area as a staging site.

**Eurasian Hoopoe - *Upupa epops*\***

On 1 May two in the Military Camp, on 3 May one in the Military camp and one in the Southern ponds area and on 6 and 8 May also one in that area.

**Red-backed Shrike - *Lanius collurio***

On most days the most common passerine, at least the most widespread in the area, on some days almost every bush in the Military camp holds a Red-backed Shrike. So many tens to some hundreds per day.

**Lesser Grey Shrike - *Lanius minor*\***

Seen every day on at least 35 occasions, especially around the Military camp. Two to fourteen birds per day.

**Woodchat Shrike - *Lanius senator*\***

Birds in and around the Military camp on 3, 6 (three), 8 (two), 12 (three) and 13 May.

**Eurasian Golden Oriole - *Oriolus oriolus*\***

At least 13 sightings especially around the Military camp and the Southern ponds, two to four birds per day. Some actively migrating, one bird singing.

**Rook - *Corvus frugilegus*\***

On 3 and 13 May one bird flying North over the Military camp.

**Hooded Crow** - *Corvus cornix*

A common bird just outside the delta, but also quite a few birds flying by and over the area. Every evening tens flying South over the Military camp to a sleeping roost.

**Great Tit** - *Parus major*\*

Two near the bridge in the Military camp on 1 May, one near the Northern ponds on 2 May, six on the South bank East of the bridge on 5 May and one on the North bank close to the bridge near Khelvachauri.

**Greater Short-toed Lark** - *Calandrella brachydactyla*\*

Three birds flying West from the sea dike on 6 May and one or two birds near the Southern ponds on 13 May.

**Wood Lark** - *Lullula arborea*\*

One flying North over the Military camp on 6 May.

**Sand Martin** - *Riparia riparia*

In the evening of 30 April a sleeping roost of about 2000 birds was present in the central reed beds near the Southern ponds. In the first week of May (some) hundreds were present and/or are migrating North every day, from then on decreasing numbers.

**Barn Swallow** - *Hirundo rustica*

A very common migrant with (some) thousands per day migrating North and smaller numbers sleeping in the reed beds of the Southern ponds.

**Common House Martin** - *Delichon urbicum*

Less common than the previous two species, with tens to some hundreds of individuals per day migrating North.

**Red-rumped Swallow** - *Cecropis daurica*\*

Two calling birds among a group of Barn Swallows above the Southern ponds on 1 May. On 3 May two birds were resting on a telegraph pole in Akhalisopheli among many House Martins, on the same day one bird above the Dump site.

**Long-tailed Tit** - *Aegithalos caudatus*\*

A group of four was present on 5 May in Akhalisopheli.

**Willow Warbler** - *Phylloscopus trochilus*

A very common migrant. Every day (some) tens of birds were seen or heard. Slowly decreasing from 5 May on.

**Great Reed Warbler** - *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

A very common migrant. Every day many tens of individuals were seen or heard calling, especially around the Military camp and in the Southern ponds, but also in other areas.

**Moustached Warbler** - *Acrocephalus melanopogon*\*

In the early morning of 13 May two birds were seen in the reed beds near the Southern ponds. The delta is said to be wintering place only next to migrants. Hence no breeding has been confirmed yet.

**Sedge Warbler** - *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Almost daily sightings, with a maximum of at least ten birds in the Southern ponds and around the Military camp. Some birds singing, so probably a localised uncommon breeding bird.

**Eurasian Reed Warbler** - *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Not as common as one should expect, not even recorded daily. A maximum of around 15 individuals on 6 May in the central reed beds and the Southern ponds. Also several (but not so many) birds singing. So probably a local fairly common breeding bird.

**Marsh Warbler** - *Acrocephalus palustris*\*

The first three (singing) birds were noted on 6 May, also three on 8 May, one on 12 and one on 13 May.

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** - *Iduna pallida*\*

Three birds seen on 3 May around the Military camp, including one singing. Another singing bird on 4 May in the Northern ponds and on 5 and 13 May a bird seen near the Southern ponds.

**River Warbler** - *Locustella fluviatilis*\*

Birds were singing on 5 May on the south bank of the river east of the bridge, on 6 May two in the Military Camp and one in the Southern Ponds area, on 8 May one in Akhalisopheli and two in the Military Camp and on 12 May again in the Military Camp and in the Southern Ponds area.

**Blackcap** - *Sylvia atricapilla*\*

Only east of the bridge: On 2 May one singing in Akhalisopheli, on 5 May singing South of the South bank east of the bridge and on 7 May three singing birds near the eastern bridge South of Kelvachauri and another one on 8 May in Akhalisopheli.

**Garden Warbler** - *Sylvia borin*\*

Three birds including two singing on 7 May just South of Kelvachauri on the North bank of the river.

**Barred Warbler** - *Sylvia nisoria*

A very common migrant. Every day (some) tens of birds in all areas, but especially around the Southern ponds and the Military camp. Also some birds displaying. Increasing from 5 May on.

**Lesser Whitethroat** - *Sylvia curruca*

A common migrant. Several to around 25 birds daily especially around the Military camp. From 5 May on decreasing.

**Common Whitethroat** - *Sylvia communis*

A very common migrant. Around 10 to 40 birds per day, especially around the Military camp. Increasing from 5 May on.

**Common Starling** - *Sturnus vulgaris*\*

Two on 2 May near the Dump site and two flying South along the sea dike on 6 May.

**Rosy Starling** - *Pastor roseus*\*

On 12 May a group of 20 birds was flying North over the Southern ponds, on 13 May groups of two and 17 were flying North and groups of 50 and five were present in the Military camp and along the sea dike respectively.

**Common Blackbird** - *Turdus merula*\*

Eight records in and around Akhalisopheli, on 8 May two males and a female were noted in the Military camp.

**Song Thrush** - *Turdus philomelos*\*

Two singing birds in Akhalisopheli on 2 May.

**European Robin** - *Erithacus rubecula*\*

One on 7 May at the North bank of the river near the Eastern bridge and one in Akhalisopheli on 13 May.

**Thrush Nightingale** - *Luscinia luscinia*

A very common migrant. Many tens of birds each day, many of them singing. Most birds in the Military camp and around the Southern ponds.

**Common Nightingale** - *Luscinia megarhynchos*\*

One singing bird discovered among the many Thrush Nightingales in the early morning of 3 May.

**Common Redstart** - *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*\*

Seen almost every day in low numbers with a maximum of six individuals on 7 May, especially around the Military camp and in Akhalisopheli where a singing male was observed on 7 and 13 May. At least one them concerned the subspecies *Samamisticus*.

**Whinchat** - *Saxicola rubetra*\*

Recorded every day especially in and around the Military camp. One to twelve birds per day.

**Eastern Black-Eared Wheatear** - *Oenanthe (hispanica) melanoleuca*\*

Single females in the Military camp on 1 May, at the Dump site on 2 May and on the sea dike near the Southern ponds on 3 May. All three birds seen well.

**Spotted Flycatcher** - *Muscicapa striata*

A common migrant. Seen every day in all areas, but decreasing from 8 May on. On some days more than 15 individuals observed.

**Red-breasted Flycatcher** - *Ficedula parva*

A common migrant. Recorded in good numbers in all areas with suitable habitat (on some days at least 15 per day) from 2 May to 7 May, after that date numbers decreased. Was seemingly absent on the first two days.

**House Sparrow** - *Passer domesticus*\*

A group of 30 birds feeding at the Dump site on 2 May, a pair at a nest site in an old army building on 7 May and two pairs in another building on 8 May, both in the Military camp. On 8 May also a male at the sea dike. Next to these sightings this is a common bird in Akhalisopheli.

**Western Yellow Wagtail** - *Motacilla flava*

A very common migrant.

Taxa seen: *Flava*, *Feldegg* and *Thunbergi*.

*Flava* being the most common on most days followed by *Feldegg* and a few *Thunbergi*.

On most days (some) hundreds of birds migrating North and using the area as a staging/feeding site. A sleeping roost in the reed beds around the Southern ponds contained at least 400-500 birds. On 30 April approximately 80% (approximately 200 birds) contained *feldegg*, on all other days *flava* was the most common (sub)species.

**Citrine Wagtail** - *Motacilla citreola*\*

On 1 May two near the sea dike at the Southern end of the Southern ponds. Three singles flying by on 3 May around the Military camp and the Southern ponds and on 6 May one over the Southern ponds.

**White Wagtail** - *Motacilla alba*

A common breeding bird in and around Akhalisopheli. A probable nesting site was found on the North bank just West of the bridge and a few birds were seen along the edge of the Military camp.

**Tawny Pipit** - *Anthus campestris*\*

On 1 May one flying South over the Southern ponds, on 3 May one in the Military camp, on 6 May flying South over the Southern ponds and on 7 and 8 May two birds were present in the Military camp.

**Tree Pipit** - *Anthus trivialis*

A common migrant. About 10 to 40 individuals per day migrating North, also birds present in the area.

**Red-throated Pipit** - *Anthus cervinus*

A common migrant. About 10 to 40 individuals per day migrating North, also birds present in the area, especially in near the river mouth and in the Military camp.

**Water Pipit** - *Anthus spinoletta*\*

On 1, 3 and 6 May a bird seen and heard calling, all flying South along the sea dike.

**Common Chaffinch** - *Fringilla coelebs*\*

On 4 May one singing in the Military camp, on 5 May at least six birds (three singing) on the South bank of the river east of the bridge and on 7 May five singing on the North bank of the river near the Eastern bridge. A common breeding bird in Akhalisopheli.

**European Greenfinch** - *Chloris chloris*\*

Two at the Southern end of the Southern ponds on 1 May. Five (including three singing birds) just South of Kelvachauri on the North bank of the river. Also several birds in Akhalisopheli.

**Eurasian Siskin** - *Spinus spinus*\*

Two birds flying by over the Southern Ponds on 6 May and one flying North on 7 May east of the bridge.

**European Goldfinch** - *Carduelis carduelis*\*

Five birds on different locations along the North bank of the river between the two bridges and a couple of birds in Akhalisopheli.

**Common Linnet** - *Linaria cannabina*\*

One South over the Southern ponds on 6 May and one in the Military camp on 7 May.

**Common Crossbill** - *Loxia curvirostra*\*

A group of four birds flying Southwest over the Military camp on 4 May.

**Hawfinch** - *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*\*

One in Akhalisopheli on 2 May and one flying East along the North bank of the river East of the bridge.

**Corn Bunting** - *Emberiza calandra*\*

Seen every day on more than 40 occasions. Largest groups containing 83 individuals on 2 May on the North bank East of the bridge and 80 birds on 13 May at the extreme Southern end of the Southern ponds. All other observed groups did not exceed twelve birds.

**Ortolan Bunting** - *Emberiza hortulana*\*

Seen between 2 and 8 May and on 13 May on more than 25 occasions in all areas, most of the sightings involved singles and small groups of up to seven birds.

**Black-headed Bunting** - *Emberiza melanocephala*\*

Most birds in the Military camp and around the Southern ponds: one bird on 1, 2, 3 and 6 May; three birds on 4, 8 and 13 May.

**Common Reed Bunting** - *Emberiza schoeniclus*\*

One on 1 May in the Southern ponds area.

Additional species observed outside the study area in the Batumi park and harbour on 4 May:

**Little Gull** - *Hydrocoloeus minutus*\*

Two 2cy birds in the Batumi harbour.

**Common Tern** - *Sterna hirundo*\*

One adult in the Batumi harbour.

**Eurasian Wryneck** - *Jynx torquilla*\*

One in the Batumi park.

**Northern Wheatear** - *Oenanthe oenanthe*\*

One male in the Batumi park.

## 6. Evaluation, conclusions and recommendations

Although the monitoring effort in the Chorokhi delta lasted for only eleven days I think I have got a good impression of the status of many species which arrive and migrate in late spring (May).

The Chorokhi delta turned out to be very rich in species diversity in (late) spring. Most species concern migrants, staging birds using the area as a stop-over site and actively migrating birds passing through the area. Although a number of species breed in the study area it seems clear that the delta is much more important for migrants; especially passerines can occur in enormous numbers. The most numerous species are: Purple Heron, Black Kite, European Honey Buzzard, Steppe Buzzard, Yellow-legged Gull, Black-headed Gull, Common Swift, European Bee-eater, Barn Swallow, Sand Martin, Red-backed Shrike, Great Reed Warbler, Willow Warbler, Barred Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Thrush Nightingale, Red-breasted and Spotted Flycatchers, Yellow Wagtail (flava and feldegg) and Red-throated and Tree Pipits.

The wetland areas (the Southern ponds and the river mouth) are of significant importance for migrating waterbirds (duck, rails, shorebirds, gulls and terns). The entire Military camp hosts good numbers of migrating songbirds resting and feeding in its bushes and fields.

All parts of the study area are freely accessible, but during my visit not many people made use of the opportunity to enter the area South of the river (the most valuable part). Apart from some fishermen in the Southern ponds, on some evenings a number of fishermen at the sea dike, a few hunters training their dogs and a handful of tourists in the weekends, the area seemed deserted.

The most vulnerable part is probably the Southern ponds area, with limited space for shorebirds and wildfowl available. The dams in the ponds are connected to each other, thus people can easily enter each corner of this area. When disturbed here, the only suitable place for shorebirds are the islands and sandbanks in the river, but when the water level is high there is not much habitat left. It is important to preserve the Southern ponds area as a nature reserve, because waterbirds (especially shorebirds and duck) are easily disturbed here. A solution might be to disconnect the dams from each other, so people cannot enter the dams and shorebirds have a safe place to rest.

It is also important to realise the value of the Military camp. For the casual observer the grassy plain of the Military camp might look like just an ordinary plain, but this habitat is not very common along the Georgian coast and therefore of great importance for birds which make use of this habitat. Some (but not too much) grazing is important to keep certain parts of this area open.

The largest impact on birds is the fact of intensive illegal shooting in autumn (pers. comm. J. Wehrmann). Even legal shooting on birds such as Common Quails and Wood Pigeons is of negative influence to migrants which use the delta as stop over and feeding site, due to increased stress level. This also counts for hunters practising with their dogs in spring. Since active prosecution of illegal shooters is absent in Georgia, any treatment of the Delta as a nature reserve must include an active treatment of illegal hunting and possibly also ban legal hunting.