

KNoK Georgia Spring Birding Tour 2027, draft Per Klunderud group

**Possible dates Friday 23rd of April – Tuesday 4th of May 2027, 11 nights.**

## Day 1 – Arrival in Tbilisi

Airport pick up and transport to hotel. Light evening meal.

## Day 2 – Transfer to Kazbegi (Stepantsminda)

Breakfast at the hotel then transfer to Kazbegi (Stepantsminda), our base for the next three nights. This first day will be dedicated to getting familiar with the surrounding area; we will explore the valleys, partly walking and partly driving.

**Possible species:** Red-breasted Flycatcher (on the way to Kazbegi (Ananuri forest)), Alpine and Red-billed Chough, Ring Ouzel, Red-fronted Serin, Rock Bunting.

**Possible Mammals:** East Caucasian Tur, Chamois

## **Reptiles: *Vipera dinniki***

Landmark - Friendship Monument on the way to Kazbegi, near Gudauri

The Friendship Monument (Russia–Georgia Friendship Monument) is a large Soviet-era circular monument located on the Georgian Military Highway near Gudauri, overlooking the dramatic Devils Valley (Aragvi Gorge). Built in 1983 to mark the 200th anniversary of the Treaty of Georgievsk, it features colorful mosaic murals depicting scenes of Georgian and Russian history and local life. It's also one of the best roadside panoramic viewpoints on the way to Kazbegi (Stepantsminda).

Overnight: Kazbegi : [Hotel Gold Kazbegi](#)

## Day 3 – Kazbegi: Elia Church & mountain slopes

Early start for the Elia Church area, a productive viewpoint for high-mountain birds and

mammals. We scan alpine slopes and ridges for Caucasus specialties and most likely also encounter big numbers of Eastern Caucasian Turs nearby.

Later we bird scrub and thickets, including buckthorn areas, for mountain passerines.

**Possible species:** Caucasian grouse, Caucasian snowcock, Great Rosefinch, White-winged Redstart, Caucasian chiffchaff, Wallcreeper, Rock Thrush, Bearded Vulture.

**Possible Mammals:** East Caucasian Tur, Brown Bear, Grey Wolf, European Lynx, Red fox, Caucasian (Persian) squirrel.

**Reptiles:** Vipera dinniki

Landmark - Elia Monastery

Elia Monastery (St. Elijah's Monastery) is a small, active Orthodox monastery perched on a hillside above Stepantsminda (Kazbegi). It's a peaceful spot with excellent panoramic views over the town and the surrounding valleys, and on clear days you can often see Mount Kazbek and Gergeti Trinity Church from a different angle. The visit is usually short and calm, and as with all monasteries in Georgia, modest dress is recommended.

Overnight: Kazbegi

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## Day 4 – Kazbegi: Georgian Military Road → Dariali Gorge

Morning “clean-up” birding around Kazbegi, then north along the Georgian Military Highway to the impressive Dariali Gorge and Dariali Monastery complex. The area is good for Griffon Vultures, occasionally Cinereous, and other soaring raptors. If time allows, we continue to the Terek Valley for additional birding and a chance of mammals.

**Possible species:** Golden Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Caucasian Grouse, Wallcreeper, Red-fronted Serin, Crag Martin.

**Possible Mammals:** East Caucasian Tur, Brown Bear, Grey Wolf, European Lynx, Red fox, Caucasian (Persian) squirrel.

**Reptiles:** Vipera dinniki

Landmark - Dariali Monastery

Dariali Monastery (Holy Archangels Monastery) is a modern Georgian Orthodox monastery set in the dramatic Dariali (Darial) Gorge near the Georgia–Russia border. Surrounded by steep cliffs and the Terek River valley, it's a striking and very scenic stop on the Georgian

Military Highway. The grounds are peaceful, and the viewpoint from the monastery gives a great sense of the scale of the gorge. As with other monasteries, modest dress is recommended.

Overnight: Kazbegi

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## Day 5 – Kazbegi → Eastern steppes (Dedoplistskaro)

Transfer day (typically up to ~5 hours driving, plus stops). We enter the steppe zone around Dedoplistskaro, an excellent base for eastern Georgia's semi-desert and raptor hotspots. If conditions allow, we visit Eagle Gorge, with potential for storks, vultures, and eagles.

**Possible species:** Alpine Accentor, Twite, Horned Lark, Egyptian Vulture, Black Stork, Peregrine Falcon, Corn and Rock buntings.

**Possible Mammals:** Red fox, Caucasian (Persian) squirrel, Golden Jackal, Chamois.

Overnight: Dedoplistskaro : [Hotel Autograph](#)

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## Day 6 – Vashlovani National Park (4x4 day)

4x4 vehicles required. Full-day exploration of Vashlovani National Park, one of Georgia's wildest and most scenic landscapes—badlands, cliffs, canyons, open steppe and semi-desert. We do a loop route with frequent stops for birding, wildlife scanning and photography.

Typical Spring highlights (indicative): rock nuthatches, wheatears, buntings, shrikes/warblers (season-dependent), raptors overhead; Goitered Gazelle is possible.

**Possible species:** Western Rock Nuthatch, finches, Black-eared and Isabelline wheatears, Corn, Rock and Black-headed Bunting, Eastern Imperial, Lesser-spotted and Greater Spotted Eagles, Eastern Orphian Warbler, Calandra Lark, Tawny Pipit.

**Possible Mammals:** Grey Wolf, Red fox, Golden Jackal, Goitered Gazelle, Small Five-toed Jerboa.

**Reptiles:** Eremias velox, Malpolon insignitus, Eryx jaculus, Macrovipera lebetinus, Eumeces schneideri.

Overnight: Dedoplistsdkaro

*Note: In the warm, dry steppe/semi-desert areas we visit today and the next two days (Vashlovani / Chachuna / Davit Gareji), snakes may be encountered, including the Levantine viper (Macrovipera lebetina) with special attention. Encounters are uncommon, but we will take standard precautions: watch your footing, stay on established tracks where possible, and do not approach or handle any wildlife.*

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## Day 7 – Chachuna Managed Reserve & Dali Reservoir + mud volcanoes (4x4 day)

4x4 vehicles required. Early departure to the Chachuna Managed Reserve, focusing on the wide-open steppe and the wetland system of Dali Reservoir. In spring this area can be excellent for a mix of waterbirds, larks, raptors, and steppe specialties, with activity often peaking early and late in the day.

In the afternoon we visit the region's mud volcanoes, a striking landscape. On the return we continue scanning first for Black Francolin and other goodies.

Typical Spring highlights (indicative): larks, wheatears, rollers/bee-eaters later in spring, eagles and vultures.

**Possible species:** Eastern Imperial Eagle, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Steppe Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Demoiselle Crane, Saker Falcon, Black Francolin, Turkmenistan Short-toed Lark, Great Short-toed Lark, Calandra Lark, Lesser Kestrel, Black, Egyptian and Griffon Vultures, Ruddy Shelduck, Ménétries's and Moustached Warblers.

**Possible Mammals:** Grey Wolf, Red fox, Golden Jackal.

**Reptiles:** Eremias velox, Malpolon insignitus, Eryx jaculus, Macrovipera lebetinus, Eumeces schneideri.

Landmark - Mud volcanoes

The Chachuna mud volcanoes are a small cluster of active mud cones in the semi-desert landscapes of the Chachuna area (Iori River valley, eastern Georgia). Here, cool, mineral-

rich mud slowly rises to the surface and bubbles from little vents, forming low cones and cracked grey “mud fields.” The setting feels very remote and wild, and it’s a great stop for unusual geology, wide open steppe views, and photography. Visitors should walk carefully and stay on firmer ground around the active vents.

Overnight: Dedoplistsdkaro

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## Day 8 – Davit Gareji monastery complex → Krtsanisi forest → Tbilisi

Morning birding around the Davit Gareji rock monastery, with steppe birding en route. Cliff and rocky-slope habitats hold characteristic “rock” species, while the surrounding steppe can be busy in spring. Later we drive to Tbilisi.

**Possible species:** Black-eared, Pied and Isabelline wheatears, Corn and Ortolan Bunting, Calandra Lark, Black, Egyptian and Griffon Vultures, Lesser, Middle, Syrian and Black Woodpeckers, Golden Oriole, Levant Sparrowhawk, Scops Owl, Semi-collared and Red-breasted Flycatchers.

**Possible Mammals:** Red fox, Golden Jackal, Caucasian (Persian) squirrel, Grey squirrel.

**Reptiles:** *Macrovipera lebetinus*.

Landmark - Davit Gareji rock monasteries

The Davit Gareji rock monasteries are a unique complex of cave monasteries carved into the semi-desert cliffs along the Georgia–Azerbaijan border. Founded in the 6th century by St. David (one of the Assyrian Fathers), the site includes ancient chapels, monks’ cells, and corridors cut directly into the rock. Some areas contain remarkable medieval frescoes, and a short walk up to the ridge offers sweeping views over the stark steppe landscape. It’s one of Georgia’s most distinctive cultural highlights, combining history, architecture, and dramatic scenery.

Overnight: Tbilisi

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## Day 9 – Kojori forest (Krüper’s Nuthatch) → Javakheti lakes

Early visit to Kojori forest for Krüper’s Nuthatch. Then we drive south to Javakheti, Georgia’s high-altitude volcanic plateau of lakes and marshes.

We bird a selection of lakes, typically including Saghamo and Madatapa, depending on conditions and current bird concentrations.

Typical spring highlights (indicative): pelicans (season-dependent), ducks and grebes, cranes (timing-dependent), Armenian Gull, and a variety of waders during passage.

**Possible species:** Krüper's Nuthatch, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans, Ruddy Shelduck, Ferruginous Duck, Armenian Gull, Black-necked and Red-necked grebes, variety of waders during passage, Bearded Vulture, critically endangered subspecies of Common Crane (*Grus grus archibaldi*).

**Possible Mammals:** Red fox, Golden Jackal, European Marbled Polecat, Caucasian (Persian) squirrel, Grey squirrel.

**Reptiles:** *Vipera transcaucasiana*

Overnight: Valodia's (guesthouse) Javakheti: [Valodia's Cottage](#)

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## Day 10 – Vardzia cave city & Khanchali Lake

We combine culture and birding at Vardzia, the spectacular cliff-side cave city, where rocky habitats can be very productive for cliff and open-country birds.

Later we focus on Khanchali Lake, an important wetland with potential for excellent waterbird and wader diversity in spring. The order of sites may be adjusted for light, wind and bird activity.

**Possible species:** Western Rock Nuthatch, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans, Ruddy Shelduck, Egyptian and Bearded Vultures, Lesser and Greater Spotted Eagles.

**Possible Mammals:** Red fox, Golden Jackal.

### Landmark - Vardzia cave city

Vardzia is a spectacular medieval cave city carved into the cliffs above the Mtkvari (Kura) River in southern Georgia. Built mainly in the 12th century during the reign of Queen Tamar, it once contained hundreds of rock-cut rooms—chapels, living quarters, tunnels, and storage spaces—spread across multiple levels. The highlight is the Church of the Dormition, famous for its well-preserved frescoes. Today you can explore the cave

passages and terraces while enjoying dramatic views over the surrounding valley—one of Georgia's most impressive historical sites.

Overnight: Valodia's

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## Day 11 – Return to Tbilisi: city time & farewell dinner

Drive back to Tbilisi, check-in, then a relaxed afternoon (city walk/tour and free time).

Evening farewell dinner.

Overnight: Tbilisi

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## Day 12 – Departure to Airport

Transfer to the airport for departure.

### Wildlife notes (mammals & reptiles)

Although this is primarily a birding tour, we will also look out for other wildlife. In the Kazbegi area we often encounter **East Caucasian Tur** on the mountain slopes, Chamois in Truso valley and there is always a chance of mammals such as **Red Fox**. In the eastern steppe and semi-desert regions (Dedoplistsdkaro–Vashlovani–Chachuna–Davit Gareji), possible mammals include **Goitered Gazelle** (Vashlovani) and **Golden Jackal**. Reptile activity depends strongly on weather, but **lizards** are often seen on warm days, Agama may occur in Vashlovani and **snakes may be encountered**, including the **Levantine viper (Macrovipera lebetina)**; encounters are uncommon, and we follow standard safety precautions (watch your footing, stay on established tracks where possible, and never approach or handle wildlife).