

In 2013 [the European Crossbill Guides Foundation](#) published its guidebook to the Eastern Rhodopes. Ecotourists and naturalists can be very happy to have such professional and specialized nature guide to the Eastern Rhodopes, one of the regions in Europe with the highest biodiversity.

The Eastern Rhodopes (in Bulgaria and Greece) are described in 256 pages with 18 routes: 10 in Bulgaria and 8 in Greece. Most are car routes with short walks, and half – full day walks. *“But all gentle walks, for naturalists who like to enjoy the landscape and see flora and fauna; not for those who want to cover as much ground as possible in a single day”*, as Dirk Hilbers, the founder and director of the Crossbill Guides Foundation explains.

Dirk, who is also co-author of the Eastern Rhodopes guidebook, is convinced that all routes in the Eastern Rhodopes have their unique attractions. One of his favourite is the short walk to the Armira bridge near Ivaylovgrad. *“It is away from the more famous parts near Madzharovo, and was therefore a true surprise for us. The splendid steppe habitat here is a true treat, as is the sudden change from steppe to well-developed woodland and the beautiful Armira River. This route becomes more impressive with each time you walk it”*, Dirk says.

The Crossbill Guidebook (in English only) on the Eastern Rhodopes covers the territory from the Aegean coast to the Arda River and from Zlatograd to the Evros River. It describes the forests, cliffs, scrubland, rivers and streams, dry grasslands etc.

In the Bulgarian territory Dirk Hilbers and the Crossbill team were mostly impressed by the originality and authenticity of the land. *“The landscape is a blend of intact ecosystems. Compare this to for example areas in France with a similar climate and terrain (hilly and rocky). You see that fields, meadows and forests in France are strictly separated without transitions – a result of intensive land use. In the Eastern Rhodopes the original gradual changes between these habitats are everywhere, and precisely these in-between landscapes attract many rare birds, plants and other species. The Eastern Rhodopes also combine the scenic beauty and pleasant landscape people appreciate from southern France, with the adventure and exotic flora and fauna of far away travel and the authenticity of a local rural culture that has disappeared in so many places in Europe”*, Dirk says.

The Eastern Rhodopes and the coastal wetlands of Greek Thrace have a complementary flora, fauna and wildlife. Separately, both are great areas to visit for birdwatchers and naturalists. *“Combined - and they are so easily combined - they rank among the best natural areas in Europe. Together, they have the status that Paris has among the European cities. Or Berlin, or Rome or Barcelona”*, Dirk Hilbers is convinced.

This is the 13th guidebook of Crossbill Guides Foundation. Currently, they release two more guides: North-East Poland and Extremadura (Spain). The production of the Crossbill Guide to the Eastern Rhodopes was financially and content-wise supported by [New Thracian Gold project](#), ARK Foundation and Netherlands Postcode Lottery.

