

# HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA & TRANSYLVANIA

3 – 14 MAY 2009

## TOUR REPORT

**LEADER:** JÁNOS OLÁH

Our classic Eastern European bird tour of Hungary, Slovakia & Transylvania has proved a great success ever since we launched it back in 2000. It offers a wide range of exciting bird species plus also takes you to some of the last refuges of nature in our home continent! The vast grassland of the Hortobágy National Park, the rolling Zemplén foothills of the Carpathians and the high altitude coniferous forests of Transylvania are among the finest bird watching places in Europe and a visit to these magnificent areas is without a doubt a great experience. This was Birdquest's sixth visit to Hungary, Slovakia and Romania within one tour. Hungary is well-established as one of the prime birding destinations in Europe and both Slovakia and Transylvania certainly offer an additional selection of exciting specialities. This tour transects the Carpathian Mountains, foothills and lowland in search of the marvellous Wallcreeper at the higher elevations to the skulking Aquatic Warbler of the lowland marshes. Raptors are abundant and include: Saker; Red-footed Falcon and both Eastern Imperial and White-tailed Eagles. There is also the prospect of all the European woodpeckers, an excellent selection of owls and a series of interesting "back-up" species such as Western Capercaillie, Little Crake, Corncrake, Great Bustard, Moustached Warbler, Collared Flycatcher etc. Equally welcome is the opportunity to look for Carpathian Brown Bears in Transylvania.

This year the weather was unusually dry prior to our tour and the long sunny spell continued all the way through our 12 days of birding. However, apart from a few thunder storms and some windy days the weather was co-operative. A few migrants and breeding birds were slightly late but we still recorded 220 species during our quest. We got very close to our record of 222 a few years back but missing a few common migrants like Pied Flycatcher and Garden Warbler prevented us from breaking this record. Nevertheless 220 species is also a reasonable total for Europe but most importantly we saw almost all the specialties of the region. We saw 15 'diamond' species and recorded 16 species of raptors, 7 species of owls, 10 species of woodpeckers and 17 species of warblers. Trip highlights included superb 'walk away' views of Ural Owl and White-backed Woodpecker in the Zemplén Hills, Hazel Grouse and yet more White-backed Woodpeckers in Slovakia, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting around Torockó, stunning looks at both drumming male Three-toed and Black Woodpeckers plus Wallcreepers in Transylvania, a breeding plumaged Dalmatian Pelican, a family party of Sakers, displaying Great Bustards, secretive Little Crakes, Great Snipe and skulking Moustached and Aquatic Warblers in the Hortobágy. Our mammal highlight was undoubtedly the superb views of Carpathian Brown Bears of which we saw six in a

single late afternoon. All in all it was another memorable action-packed Birdquest to Central Europe, which both the leader and the participants will remember for a long time.

After arriving at Budapest airport we quickly gathered our luggage and in a few minutes we were heading towards Tokaj, a World Heritage site in the north-eastern corner of Hungary. On the way we stopped for a quick picnic lunch where we saw two Eastern Imperial Eagles. They were fairly distant nevertheless a great start to the tour! After a little more than three hours later we arrived at Komlóska our base for the next three nights while birding in the Zemplén Hills and Slovakia. The Zemplén area is a range of rounded chalk hills cloaked in ancient deciduous forest with the occasional peculiar volcanic outcrop on which there is invariably a castle, most of which was ruined in the battles against the Turks in the sixteenth century. We were greeted by White Storks on nests and singing nightingales virtually everywhere. We quickly checked into our nice hotel surrounded by forest and soon afterwards drove to the Bodrog Floodplain. Most of the afternoon was spent in this gallery forest habitat with oxbow lakes and temporary wet meadows. We saw Black Stork, Black Kite and two different adult White-tailed Eagles. Further common birds included two drake Garganeys, Ferruginous Ducks and a fine male Whinchat. Late in the afternoon we drove to a nearby quarry. On the way we had a very tame Lesser Spotted Eagle which stayed on the top of bush even when we parked the car by the roadside. A few minutes later we silently walked into the quarry and soon located two Eurasian Eagle Owl chicks and also their mother, which was hiding nearby – one of the heaviest and most powerful owls in the World. Early next morning we walked behind the hotel in search of the more elusive denizens of the Zemplén Hills. We were also joined by our local guide Zoltán "Woodpecker Man" Petrovics who knows these hills like the back of his hand having spent 30 years in this area. We heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker on the first part of the walk but our first 'seen' woodpecker was the rare White-backed! Zoltán took us to an active hole where we made ourselves comfortable and could watch both sexes while they were feeding young. This shy and scarce species has declined in Europe a lot and the Zemplén Hills, with over 100 breeding pairs, has probably the highest density anywhere in Europe. Other woodpeckers were also seen in the immediate vicinity of the White-backed hole. We had 'whistled in' a curious male Grey-headed Woodpecker and as soon as we had sufficient prolonged views of the White-backed Woodpeckers we walked another 100 meters to a Black Woodpecker hole. After some time the male showed up and while waiting we saw a male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker too. Also Collared Flycatchers were constantly in the view as they were busily singing and defending their territories. A magical morning which was not over yet! Still on our forest walk we entered the realm of the enigmatic Ural Owl. We took a little side valley and soon we found a gorgeous female Ural Owl, and could take delight in a prolonged view of this small-eyed, long-tailed owl by telescope. After this truly outstanding morning we had a fine meal in a nearby Csárda. In the afternoon we visited grassland with scattered oak trees where we had great looks at a magnificent Eastern Imperial Eagle and also found a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker hole with the male frequently feeding the young. Later we tracked down a rufous morph Tawny Owl but our search for Corncrake was fruitless as none were heard at the best location. After this exciting day with many woodpeckers and owls we got back to the Hotel and had our first taste of the famous Tokaj wine at dinner.

The next day, after a substantial early breakfast we drove to nearby woodland in Slovakia. Reaching Rejdova village we had Fieldfares everywhere in the gardens and as soon as we stopped by the forest edge we heard crossbills. This year crossbills were a prominent feature of this area as we saw flocks of up to 150. We were at about 800m to 1100m above sea level here and certainly the food was plentiful for these cone-eaters. Later on the tour we found out why we had so many crossbills in Slovakia in the lower parts of the Carpathian Mountains, as we could not find a single one in the high parts of the endless coniferous forest of Transylvania. After we geared up we soon set off for a longer walk in the mixed deciduous and spruce woodland deep in the Carpathian Mountains. First we had looks at Crested Tit, Willow Tit and Firecrest. Next we had a very interesting observation as a superb pair of White-backed Woodpecker flew right above us in response to Pygmy Owl call. Not only the fact it was responding to Pygmy Owl was exciting but it was in sheer coniferous forest, a habitat in

which János has never seen this species. The density of the skulking Hazel Grouse is still remarkably high in this forest so despite being in early May we were very much hoping to contact with this shy 'chicken'. Not later when we started to speak about it we heard one calling from a close dense coniferous patch. After a few nervous minutes it stopped calling without any sign of interest so we tried another tactic: János will push the grouse towards the group! So János was bushwhacking for minutes to get behind the target and finally managed to push the birds but unfortunately nobody saw the 'brown missile'. Fortunately as we continued walking after another few hundred meters we flushed one from the ground and as it flew and glide across the path and away most of us had good views of it. We soon arrived at a Pygmy Owl territory but despite much effort we had no response. Even the Three-toed Woodpecker eluded us and was heard only. We had other higher elevation birds here such as Goldcrest, Willow Warbler and Bullfinch. We decided to change location and after a quick picnic lunch we were up and ready to explore another site when the skies darkened, the rain poured down and we had to beat a hasty retreat! On the way back to our Hotel the rain followed us for about one hour but by the time we got to the Szádell! Gorge it had stopped. We had a brief detour to see the Common Souseliks in a grazed area at the base of the Torna Castle. I was just explaining the importance of this mammal for raptors especially for Saker when one suddenly showed up. We even saw it going for the Souseliks, dropping from its perch and building up enormous speed just about a meter above the ground and blasting through the Souselik 'town'. If a Souselik happens to be in the flight path then it is curtains for the unfortunate creature, but the falcon was not in luck on this occasion. In the Zemplén Hills close to our base we stopped to see a female Syrian Woodpecker on a telegraph pole and a fly-by Green Woodpecker, which was unfortunately too quick to be Kurt's life bird. After this exciting day and our dinner we had a wine tasting in the hotel cellar. We had several types of the famous Tokaj wine, from which the '5 puttony' Tokaji Aszú made this region well-known several hundreds of years ago.

Next morning before breakfast we had another walk in the forest around the Hotel where we had pretty good views of Black Woodpecker and more Collared Flycatchers. Later we drove to Tokaj where apparently the first Corncrake was heard. We drove to the spot but it was another 30 minutes until the bird started to call fairly close to us. After some tactical discussion and a few more minutes we all had good looks of this strange bird! We had a few more minutes in a scrubby area around Tokaj where we saw River and Barred Warblers. Later we left the Zemplén area and drove to the Romanian border stopping briefly at Újfehértó where we had brilliant views of a Short-toed Lark, which is a highly localised bird in the Carpathian Basin. We could study it displaying in the air and on the ground as well. Later we crossed the Hungarian-Romanian border where an obliging Nightingale was perched up on a wire. Our first stop was at a reservoir near Élesd, where we saw well over a hundred Great-crested Grebes, Red-necked Grebes, Common Sandpipers, several displaying pair of Little Ringed Plovers, three Mediterranean Gulls and three species of marsh terns including a dozen superb looking White-winged Terns. Our main target bird in this area however was the Ortolan Bunting. We had several of these colourful birds while having our picnic lunch. Two of them allowed very close approach as a female was collecting nest material and a young male was guarding her. In the late afternoon we arrived to Torockó (Rimetea), which is a picturesque tiny village in the Bihar (Island) Mountains. In this lovely World Heritage village the windows of the houses we stayed in looked out over an impressive limestone escarpment near the settlement. After tasting some local delicacies, we tried some owling. As we walked out of the house we heard two different Eurasian Scops Owls. It took a while to track down that they were calling in a fenced area and in fact it sounded like if they were calling from the village library! We just could not find any way in and the birds were not responding at all but finally we managed to see one of them, albeit from a fair distance.

The following morning was dark and windy after the overnight rain. Still before breakfast we walked up to the bare rocks, where at least two male and a female Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes were seen. The males were performing their display flights and were then singing on a prominent rock allowing superb views. We could also observe an adult Golden Eagle on a nearby nest and after some time the

adult eagle flew off. Despite much effort we could not locate any Rock Buntings but a few Wood Larks showed well. After breakfast we were still birding in the same Valley and had great views of Northern Goshawk, Great Grey Shrike and eventually found a singing male Rock Bunting in the gale force wind. Our next stop was Remete Gorge where we had four Crag Martins and several White-throated Dippers on the stream. Later we left for Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc) and had our packed lunch near Segesvár (Sighisoara) in mixed oak-hornbeam woodland with Wood Warblers and Collared Flycatchers for company. We also visited Dracula's Castle for a short while, where the real Dracula, Vlad (the impaler) Dracul, spent 5 years in his youth. The only new bird in the park around the citadel was a singing male Common Redstart. Later we arrived at our comfortable hotel in Székelyudvarhely and we soon were ready to leave for the Brown Bear hides. After a quick discussion with the local forester and then a 20 minutes walk we found ourselves silently sitting in a hide and patiently waiting. It was a lovely afternoon in the coniferous forest and we had six different Carpathian Brown Bears turn up in the clearing in front of us still at daylight. This action packed travelling day was followed by a lovely local dinner and blueberry brandy!

Next morning we left fairly early and drove to the Bucsin Pass in the Görgényi Mountain. Upon arrival we transferred into the 4WD car of the local forester and then after another ten minutes drive we were all distributed in different parts of a Western Capercaillie lekking area. The dawn air was fresh, then after 20 minutes it was cold and by sunrise it was flipping cold. There was no sign of any capercaillies for any of us so we soon gathered at a so called 'lekking house' and discussed the different experiences of the early morning in the Carpathians with a local 'pálinka' to warm us up. According to the local forester this year the lekking was very inactive and because of the unusually warm spring the snow has already gone and the display was mostly finished (about ten days earlier than usual). We all had a wonderful dawn in this superb habitat however with absolutely brilliant views of a drumming male Three-toed Woodpecker. Later in the morning we corresponded with another forester and he suggested another lekking area on the highest peak of the region where there was still substantial snow cover. After our packed breakfast we continued to Békás Gorge. Our one hour drive was interrupted by another very tame Lesser Spotted Eagle and a few more Great Grey Shrikes. As soon as we arrived to the most scenic gorge of the Carpathians we started to scan the immense rock face for our main target, the magical Wallcreeper. We soon picked up one as it was flying between the walls and after landing he was creeping up the rocks with continuously flicking wings. This is certainly a very unique bird species in several ways. The habitat, the feeding method, the appearance, the flight action and even the breeding period is unusual for a passerine. We enjoyed several prolonged views of at least three different Wallcreepers while bird watching in the gorge. Overhead Alpine and Common Swifts crossed the sky and we even located another Crag Martin, which only occasionally breeds in this area. All satisfied with the Wallcreeper experience we drove to the Csalhó (Ceahlau) National Park. This is a really ancient beech and coniferous forest with a great selection of birds. Our prime target was a breeding Tengmalm's Owl or with luck a Eurasian Pygmy Owl. Unfortunately the staked out owl nest was abandoned (probably destroyed by Pine Martin) and our search for the Eurasian Pygmy Owl was unsuccessful. The only consolation was an adult male Red-breasted Flycatcher. We drove back to Székelyudvarhely and settled for a relatively early dinner after a long day under the Transylvanian sky.

On the next day we had the option to try another Western Capercaillie lekking place but it was only Kurt who decided to go for it with our local guide Zoltán and a local forester. The rest of us had left after breakfast. We were slowly driving up into the higher coniferous zone. We flushed a Hazel Grouse by the roadside and then had a Black Woodpecker in flight. As soon as we got out of the car we were feasting our eyes on the drumming male Black Woodpecker a really special treat for Allan! Birding was slow but we had excellent looks at a pair of Nutcracker, several Ring Ouzels and a few Water Pipits. We also meet up the early rising team and were delighted to hear that Kurt saw a Western Capercaillie, a much wanted bird for him! In the afternoon we visited the only fish ponds in the region, where besides the common waders we saw two Jack Snipes, a Temminck's Sandpiper and no less than 60 Wood Sandpipers. There were plenty of migrant marsh terns and we counted over

220 Black Terns as well as 15 Whiskered and White-winged Terns and a few Little Gulls mixed in. It was amazing to find about 25 Red-throated Pipits walking on the grazed lake edge all in superb breeding plumage and also the different forms of Yellow Wagtail notably the Transylvanian '*dombrowski*' and the near Black-headed type '*superciliaris*' amongst them. After this bird-filled afternoon walk we had a short stop along the Küküllő River on our way back to the Hotel. Here we saw the breeding pair of Kingfishers and had absolutely outstanding views of a very responsive singing Thrush Nightingale! After our farewell dinner in Székelyudvarhely we took a short walk in a nearby park and finally spotlighted a fine Scops Owl.

It was time to leave Transylvania behind and after breakfast we started our return journey to Hungary. We drove along the Maros River Valley and had a few stop at some roadside fishponds. Nothing new was added to the list but we had great looks of a male Syrian Woodpecker and counted 278 Night Heron nests. Later we briefly stopped at Élesd Reservoir again adding Eurasian Teal and Goosander to our growing list. We crossed the border in the late afternoon and visited Andaháza wetland in Bihar. A superb wetland managed by Water Buffalos and it was steaming with birds. We saw a flock of 73 Spoonbills, 50 Black-winged Stilts, 42 Avocets, 300 Dunlins and our only Grey Plover of the trip. Birds were everywhere and we could feel we arrived to Hungary's most celebrated National Park: the Hortobágy! The next three full days were spent exploring the various habitats of this superb park and seeking out the special birds of the area. Next morning we saw a fine male Little Bittern in the Lodge 'garden' and then we drove to the northern section of the National Park for the best raptor watching time. At our first stop we visited a Red-footed Falcon colony and had a magical hour with these very special raptors. Nearby we managed to find breeding Stone-curlews and had brilliant views of both birds. There was plenty to see still as Lesser Grey Shrikes were hovering all around us and a female Long-eared Owl gave excellent looks as she was sitting in a nest box with four chicks. The rest of the morning was spent in search of raptors in the steppe habitat where Souselks were abundant. We were not disappointed as our tally before lunch included a White-tailed Eagle, three Long-legged Buzzards, a female Montagu's Harrier, about five Sakers and a flock of 118 Common Cranes. While having our lunch the bird line news came in that the breeding plumaged Dalmatian Pelican had been relocated at Hortobágy Fishponds. We finished the nice local fish soup and then spotted a female Black Woodpecker feeding quietly by the bus, only a few meters away. The bird was not taking much notice of us and we could watch it for as long as we wanted. Arriving at the fishponds unfortunately we could not locate the pelican but added a few new birds to our list in the form of Common Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard and Icterine Warbler. We had to leave the fishponds without the pelican as we had an appointment with a warden to enter the restricted parts of the park. A breeding colony of the colourful European Bee-eaters en route was very welcome. Most of the afternoon was spent around Nagyiván with the help of Gábor Kovács, the birding 'Godfather' of the Hortobágy. Our first main target was to see the Great Bustards and quite frankly we got much more than we expected as not only we saw 10 bustards but the appearance of a female on the scene caused much excitement among the males and we saw a series of superb full displays. It is always amazing to see this huge bird pumping several litre of air into their inflatable neck sack and then turning absolutely inside out before dancing. It was certainly very satisfying and we had to move on to our next target. After a short drive we arrived at an endless meadow, where at least 5 male Aquatic Warblers were singing on the top of dead *Rumex* stems allowing excellent prolonged views. A few more boldly marked females were also seen skulking in the tussock grass. The important Hortobágy population is fluctuating but usually between 200-600 singing males. A singing Common Grasshopper Warbler was a bonus at this location. Next day was as action-packed as the first one in the Hortobágy area! We had a pre-breakfast walk around the Hotel garden but apart from a few migrant Wood Warblers and Golden Orioles nothing else showed up. Our first target was to see another localised or should I say, difficult-to-come-across warbler, the *typha* loving Moustached Warbler. They are the first '*acros*' to arrive back from the wintering grounds and also the first one to sing and breed. This means however that they finishing their first brood by early May or still feeding young so they are not very conspicuous. We went to the very best place of the park and were quickly rewarded with terrific views of at least three different Moustached Warblers. Our next port of call was Hortobágy Fishpond

again to give another try to the Dalmatian Pelican. It was not easy to locate the bird as it was feeding in a small lagoon in the middle of a vast reed bed but with some local help we had great telescope views of this rarity! Other notable birds in the Hortobágy Fishpond complex included Little Bittern, many Savi's Warblers and both Bearded and Penduline Tits. After a nice picnic lunch in the shade we drove to a nearby wetland which is managed by the Hortobágy Environmental Association ([www.hortobagyte.hu](http://www.hortobagyte.hu)) and is being grazed by all traditional livestock including Hungarian Great-horned Cattle, Racka Sheep, 'woolly' Mangalica Pigs, donkeys and Nonius Horses. The main idea is that different animals utilize different part of the marsh and hence create many different habitat types (this was an EU Life project). This wetland became the most reliable site for the migrant Great Snipes in the last five years and this bird was our number one target! In wet years we had as many as 27 birds at one time but even in such a dry year like 2009 there were a couple of observations. We quickly jumped into the well dug (by the pigs) part of the wet grassland and within a few minutes we were watching a Great Snipe. Late afternoon we drove to another closed area within the park, the tranquil Angel House (Angyalháza) Puszta where a flock of 18 Dotterels were reported. This superb bird is a fairly rare spring migrant in the Hortobágy area (where regular in the autumn period) but in the occasional very dry years they do turn up in slightly higher numbers and certainly this year was one of those. We quickly located the flock and had great looks of this summer plumaged flock which held a few absolutely superb females too! On our last day in the area first we drove to Debrecen Great Wood for a last bit of forest birding. We also visited a hide in this old oak woodland which was very productive. We had brilliant views of Hawfinches, Collared Flycatcher and several Middle Spotted Woodpeckers. This was the last species to complete the set of all European woodpeckers for the tour. We also had a Short-toed Treecreeper. After lunch we were back on the Hortobágy and drained Akadémia Fishpond gave us a few waders before we visited one of Europe's biggest heron colony where we saw hundreds of Spoonbills, Night Herons, Squacco Herons, Purple Egrets, Pygmy Cormorants and to our satisfaction three Glossy Ibises. They circled right in front of us as the sun was catching the glossy sheen on their plumage and then flew away. We had lots of Bearded Tits and a few Ferruginous Ducks too. Another star bird of the afternoon was a pair of Little Crakes which was playing hide and seek with us but with patience we all managed to get good look of these shy birds. On the way back to our hotel we saw several Rollers and a Barn Owl too.

Early next morning we had our last pre-breakfast birding around the Hotel where we finally saw Marsh Warblers. There was not much left of this action and bird filled Central European tour just to drive back to Budapest. We decided to leave earlier however so we could still look for the increasingly rare Collared Pratincole around some paddy fields, which are the last stronghold of the species in Hungary. The activity was amazing around the paddy fields and in a short time we saw Glossy Ibis, several Great Bitterns, an immature Little Bittern and three Collared Pratincoles. A grand final to a great trip! Finally, as usual, we got to Budapest airport in time for our flights.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

### PODICIPEDIDAE

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: On our very first afternoon we saw two birds on a small oxbow lake on the Bodrog Floodplain in the Zemplén area. Later we also had one in the Hortobágy area.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: It was common on the fish ponds in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy. Most numerous was on the reservoirs of Élesd where up to 170 individuals were counted. This is a regular autumn gathering area with numbers up to 1500 in October but it was unusual to see as many as this in the height of the breeding season.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: We had two birds loosely associated with Great Crested Grebes at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and later a single bird at Andaháza wetland in Bihar.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*: Up to six birds were present at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and later a single bird was observed in our hotel side pool. This particular individual was fairly tame and allowed great views as well as great photo opportunities too!

### PELECANIDAE

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*: Every year we have one or two surprises on this tour as the migration is in full swing. This year we managed to see a summer plumaged Dalmatian Pelican in the Hortobágy area. We had the biggest ever influx of the species in early April in Hungary and some were lingering into May. The almost crimson throat sac was amazing!

### PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Up to 20 were seen on the Bodrog Floodplain in the Zemplén area and in the Hortobágy area.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: It was seen daily on the Hortobágy with a maximum of about 100 birds at the breeding colony. It was very interesting to see how this species recolonized Hungary and colonized the Hortobágy. The first pair has bred in 1992 on the Hortobágy after about 30 years of the last breeding in Hungary. Then the Hortobágy population doubled itself for many years with up to 250-350 pairs breeding nowadays. The Hortobágy population also started to spread out into other parts of Hungary in the late 1990's and the total Hungarian population is estimated to be around 500 pairs now.

### ARDEIDAE

Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*: It was a regular sound of the Pannonian wetlands throughout the tour. We heard it on the Bodrog Floodplain in the Zemplén area, in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy area too. Finally we connected with two birds on the very last day in the paddy fields around Kisújszállás on the way back to the airport.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: Several males and an immature were seen in the Hortobágy area. It was also seen regularly at our hotel side pool. A very charismatic small heron with a great call!

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: A fairly common bird throughout the tour. We counted 278 nests at a colony in Transylvania although we were not sure if all were occupied. Small flocks were recorded daily on the Hortobágy.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: It was seen every day in the Hortobágy area with a maximum of about 15 birds at the mixed heron and Pygmy Cormorant breeding colony.

- Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: Small numbers were recorded nearly at all the visited wetlands both in Hungary and in Transylvania. Particularly common in some parts of the Hortobágy and at the paddy fields of Kisújszállás.
- Great Egret *Egretta alba*: It was very common everywhere in Hungary near the wetlands but we only had a single bird in Transylvania.
- Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Small numbers were recorded nearly at all the visited wetlands both in Hungary and in Transylvania. We saw up to 15 in the Hortobágy area and up to 10 in Transylvania.
- Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: A few were seen at Szentpál (Saint Paul) fish ponds in Transylvania and up to 10 daily on the Hortobágy.

#### CICONIIDAE

- Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*: Regularly seen throughout the tour from the Zemplén region to Transylvania and the Hortobágy. The highest count was six birds at the Kisújszállás paddy fields.
- White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*: Still a very common breeder in villages in Transylvania and Hungary.

#### THRESKIORNITHIDAE

- Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*: Three were seen on the Hortobágy at the breeding colony and then another was spotted on the paddy fields near Kisújszállás.
- Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*: We saw a flock of 73 at Andaháza wetland in Bihar and then daily up to 50 in the Hortobágy area.

#### ANATIDAE

- Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: The first one was seen on a small oxbow lake on the Bodrog Floodplain in the Zemplén area then we also had one in Transylvania. In the Hortobágy area up to 75 were counted. Amazingly this species was not breeding in the Hortobágy area until the mid 1990's.
- Greylag Goose *Anser anser*: A flock of 60 was seen in flight near Tokaj and then it was numerous in the Hortobágy area with up to 800 daily. This is the eastern *rubrirostris* race in eastern Hungary.
- Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: A pair was seen at Hortobágy Fishpond. It is a rather scarce migrant and a rare breeding bird in some parts of Hungary.
- Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*: We had a flock of 8 birds at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and a few were seen in the Hortobágy area too.
- Gadwall *Anas strepera*: Up to six were seen in Transylvania and up to 20 on the Hortobágy.
- Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*: A single male was seen at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania.
- Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: It was very common throughout the tour in Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania.
- Garganey *Anas querquedula*: On our very first afternoon we saw two drakes on a small oxbow lake on the Bodrog Floodplain in the Zemplén area. Later we had up to 20 in the Hortobágy area.
- Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: Small numbers recorded in Transylvania and in Hungary too.
- Red-crested Pochard *Aythya rufina*: Three males and a female were seen at Hortobágy Fishponds.
- Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*: We saw a few at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and it was common on the Hortobágy.
- Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*: Regular encounters with this globally threatened species on the tour with most sightings in the Hortobágy area.
- Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*: Eighteen were seen at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and one at Hortobágy Fishponds.
- Goosander *Mergus merganser*: Surprising observation of an immature male and a female at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania.

## ACCIPITRIDAE

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*: Single birds were seen twice in the Zemplén Hills near Bodrogolaszi.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: Great views of two adult birds on our very first afternoon by the small oxbow lake on the Bodrog Floodplain in the Zemplén area. Later a few juveniles were seen on the Hortobágy.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: We had a distant view of one bird in the Zemplén Hills.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: Small numbers were seen in Transylvania, and it was very common in Hungary, especially on the Hortobágy, where the daily maximum number was 25 individuals.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: Maurice saw a female and later we all had a fine male on the Hortobágy.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*: Singles were seen once in the Zemplén Hills and twice in Transylvania. The best view despite the very strong wind was just after we left Torockó. It was flying against the wind and we all had great views!

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: Singles were seen twice in the Zemplén Hills with the best views at Erdőbénye.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: It was very common throughout the tour in all three countries.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*: Magical views of three different individuals on the northern Hortobágy.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*: Absolutely cracking views of several birds this year. Our first showy bird perched about 25 meters for us in the Zemplén hills and later several more were seen in Transylvania too. The one after the frosty 'Capercaillie' morning on the way to Békás Gorge was also allowing very close approach.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*: Two were seen rather distantly along the motorway towards Tokaj but later we had wonderful views of one near to its breeding area in the Zemplén Hills.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: Two birds were seen near Torockó in Transylvania on the very windy and cold morning. One was sitting in the nest but later gave good flight views too.

## FALCONIDAE

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Fairly common throughout the tour.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*: Daily sightings of these very special colonial breeders on the Hortobágy. Sometime we had up to 20 circling together or occupying their abandoned rook nest or an artificial nest box for breeding. A very special raptor of which we have about 250 pairs in the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: Only a single bird was seen in Transylvania on the way back from Békás Gorge.

Saker *Falco cherrug*: The first one was seen in Slovakia near Torna where we popped in to see the Sousliks (*Spermophilus citellus*). I was just talking about that it is the main prey of Saker and one suddenly appeared on the scene. We even saw it going for the Sousliks, dropping from its perch and building up enormous speed just about a meter above the ground and going through the Souslik land. If one happens to be in the fly path...but not this time. Later we had a few more on the Hortobágy, once seeing a family together with two chicks and two adults in the same field of view in the scope. Magical experience!

## TETRAONIDAE

Hazel Grouse *Bonasa bonasia*: A very tricky bird to see in May. Our first encounter was in Slovakia when one was singing in the very dense spruce forest edge but it did not respond at all and when we tried to track down it flew. Later – still in Slovakia - we flushed another along the road which flew fairly long distance and also crossing the track so most of us had reasonable views. János also saw one in Transylvania flying up in front of the bus but most of us did not get on it as we were busily discussing a previous bird encounter.

Western Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*: Our quest to see this magnificent bird at its lekking area in the Carpathian Mountains did not materialize on the first occasion. The unusually warm spring was part of the problem as the snow has already gone and the display was mostly finished. We all had a wonderful dawn in this superb habitat however. Later we corresponded with the local foresters and they suggested another lekking area which is in the highest peak of the region so it still had big snow cover. Eventually only Kurt decided to go for it and he was pleased to see a fine female perching on a treetop in the early morning sun. We were all very happy for him as it was very high on his wish list!

#### PHASIANIDAE

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*: An increasingly difficult bird to see nowadays as it is getting more and more scarce in Hungary. We had a nice male on the Hortobágy when driving back from the Aquatic Warbler habitat.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H): We heard on several occasions on the Bodrog Floodplain in the Zemplén area and also on the Hortobágy but it did not show.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*: Common throughout the tour.

#### RALLIDAE

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* (H): We heard it once at Szentpál fishponds in Transylvania and many times on the Hortobágy but did not show.

Little Crake *Porzana parva*: A Central European specialty which is fairly common in the Hortobágy area. This was an unusually dry spring however and most of the temporary wetlands were dry. After a bit of sweat we finally managed to lure a pair in view and heard others!

Corn Crake *Crex crex*: Another one which gave us a hard time this year! They usually arrive in the last days of April but this year the first was heard on the very last day of our Zemplén stay. On our last morning however we managed to see this 'first arrival' and it was very fortunate as we never heard another one in Transylvania.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: A few sightings on the Hortobágy, usually right around our hotel pool.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: Common in most wetlands we visited throughout the tour.

#### GRUIDAE

Common Crane *Grus grus*: They migrate through the Hortobágy fairly quickly in Spring with no large gatherings like in the Autumn period. We only saw a single flock of 118 birds. We saw

#### OTIDIDAE

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*: A great tour for this species as not only we saw 10 birds on the Hortobágy which included a female but we saw the males displaying too. The unusually dry spring caused very short grass and probably there were still some 'available' females around so we were very lucky to see several males in full display. It was incredibly to see the absolute white 'foam bath' balls dancing.

#### RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: Up to 50 were seen at the Andaháza wetland in Bihar and about 20 on the former Kaba sugar factory ponds.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: We counted 42 at the Andaháza wetland in Bihar and about 80 on the former Kaba sugar factory ponds plus a few more on the Hortobágy.

#### BURHINIDAE

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*: A pair was seen on the Hortobágy very well. We were informed that their first brood was destroyed by a storm and they were just preparing for a second.

## GLAREOLIDAE

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: This most elegant and special wader was one of the very last species we added to our list. We stopped on the way back to airport at the paddy fields near Kisújszállás to see this now much localised (up to 500 pairs bred in the Hortobágy in the early 1910's) bird. We managed to see three birds and it was a great ending to a bird-filled tour!

## CHARADRIIDAE

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: Several were seen on the various wetlands, reservoirs and fishponds both in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: Just two were seen at Szentpál fishponds in Transylvania but up to 8 were seen almost daily in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*: This superb bird is a fairly rare spring migrant in the Hortobágy area (where regular in the autumn period) but in the occasional very dry years they do turn up in slightly higher numbers. This year was one of those and we managed to see a lovely summer plumaged flock of 18 birds which held a few absolutely superb females!

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: A single bird was observed on the Andaháza wetland in Bihar.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: Fairly common near the wetlands and grasslands in Hungary and Transylvania too.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: The first one was seen on one of the shingle island of Élesd Reservoir and later up to ten were observed in a grazed wetland on the Hortobágy.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*: We already had really good views of one at Szentpál fishponds in Transylvania and later several more were seen in a grazed wetland on the Hortobágy.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: A single bird was seen on the former Kaba Sugar Factory ponds (or what is left of those).

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: We saw two in Transylvania and up to 400 on the Hortobágy.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: Up to 350 were seen daily on the Hortobágy. Some different plumaged males were also observed.

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*: We flushed two from a grazed lake edge in Transylvania and we could perfectly see the 'butterfly' like flight, the short bill and the creamy stripes on the back. This bird was write-in for this fairly well established Birdquest tour!

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: Just two were seen in Transylvania and a few on the Hortobágy.

Great Snipe *Gallinago media*: Just to complete our snipe set we had repeated great views of a single bird in a grazed wetland in the Hortobágy area. It is only a migrant but in the last few years this sought-after species got pretty reliably staked out in the Hortobágy area. This was another write in for the Birdquest list.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*: Up to 30 were seen on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*: Only three were seen at Andaháza wetland in Bihar and another on the Hortobágy.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*: Up to 12 summer-plumaged birds were seen on the Hortobágy.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*: We saw 11 birds on the Élesd Reservoir and up to 20 on the Hortobágy.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: Singles were seen in Transylvania and a few on the Hortobágy.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: We regularly had flocks of 20-60 on most visited wetlands both in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy area.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: We only observed this species on the shingle islands of Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania where up to 8 were seen.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: A single summer plumaged bird was seen at Akadémia Fishponds on the Hortobágy.

## LARIDAE

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*: Several encounters with this lovely gull on this year tour. We had three birds on two occasions at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and a few more on the Hortobágy too. The number of breeding pairs increased in the last ten years in Hungary but it is still a relatively scarce breeder in the northern part of the country where tours mainly focus.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*: We have seen this species in Transylvania and in Hungary too. The biggest flock was six at Szentpál fishponds.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*: Common, mainly in the Hortobágy.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*: Up to 25 a day in the Hortobágy area, where we could study its identification.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*: We saw the first ones at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania. Later regularly in the Hortobágy area but distinctly less common than Caspian Gull.

## STERNIDAE

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Up to 30 were counted at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and we also had a single bird at the Hortobágy Fishpond.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*: We saw the first one at Élesd Reservoir and later a few more in Transylvania. It was very common on the Hortobágy later on the tour with up to 200 seen daily.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: Small number of migrants were seen throughout the tour. The biggest count of 220 was at Szentpál Fishpond at Transylvania.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*: We saw the first 20 at Élesd Reservoir and later a few more in Transylvania. It was also seen on the Hortobágy.

## COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: A very common resident throughout the tour.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*: A few were seen in the Zemplén Hills and some in Transylvania. Our best vies were obtained at Szentpál Fishpond where they were feeding on agricultural fields.

Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*: Fairly common in Transylvania and in Hungary too.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*: Very common in the villages.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Still a fairly common sight in most parts of Hungary and Transylvania. We had most of our sightings in the Zemplén Hills.

## CUCULIDAE

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: A very common bird throughout the tour from the flat Hortobágy to the top of the Carpathian Mountains. We had up to 25 daily in the Hortobágy area where it is numerous because of the amazing number of warblers they parasite.

## TYTONIDAE

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*: A fairly common but secretive species in Hungary. We saw a fine adult in the Hortobágy area and surprisingly this was another write-in for the Birdquest list!

## STRIGIDAE

European Scops Owl *Otus scops*: We had several bird calling in the village of Torockó in Transylvania but our search after dinner produced only fleeting views as the birds 'were in the village library' or at least sounded like it but and it was closed. Later we had up to 8 birds calling in Székelyudvarhely where we had superb views of while spot lit on roof.

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*: A very fine female was seen with two chicks in the Zemplén Hills.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: Surprisingly we only had a single sighting on the Hortobágy on this year's tour.

- Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*: A nice rufous morph bird was seen in the Zemplén Hills as it was perched high in a hornbeam tree. Later another was seen by Allan and Anita in Torockó.
- Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*: Magical walk away views of a male and female bird in the Zemplén Hills. Certainly one of the very best experiences of the trip!
- Long-eared Owl *Asia outs*: We saw a family party of 5 birds all jammed into a nest box on the Hortobágy. The female and the four chicks were just about to leave the artificial breeding place.

#### APODIDAE

- Common Swift *Apus apus*: Up to 40 were seen in Slovakia near Rozsnyó and fair numbers in Békás Gorge in Transylvania and in Hungary.
- Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: After we could not find any in the Bihar Mountains we saw up to 26 in Békás Gorge in Transylvania.

#### ALCEDINIDAE

- Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: A lovely pair was seen feeding young close to Székelyudvarhely in Transylvania. Later we saw another one at Élesd Reservoir too.

#### MEROPIDAE

- European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: Only two were seen in the Zemplén Hills as they were just moving in from the wintering grounds but later on the tour at least 16 were studied well on the Hortobágy.

#### CORACIIDAE

- European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: Three birds were seen very well on the Hortobágy.

#### UPUPIDAE

- Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: We have only recorded this lovely bird on the Hortobágy where up to 3 were seen daily.

#### PICIDAE

- Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: Great looks of several birds in the Zemplén Hills and later it was regularly heard in Transylvania and in Debrecen too.
- Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*: A fine male was seen well near Székelyudvarhely in Transylvania.
- European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: This one was not easy to get for Kurt but finally on our way back from Transylvania we had good views of one at our picnic stop. Needless to say the rest of the group had several before but the only one who needed it kept it missing.
- Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: We had gradually improving sightings on the tour. We saw a male and a female at a nest hole in the Zemplén Hills to start with. A fine male entertained us with drumming on the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania but our best look of a female was on the Hortobágy. This very obliging bird was spotted next to the bus after we finished our fine meal and we could watch it for minutes just a few meters away.
- Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: Regularly seen in Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania throughout the tour.
- Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*: A female on a roadside wooden telephone pole was seen in the Zemplén Hills. Funny enough we had superb views of a male in Transylvania again on a wooden telephone pole. Two more were seen on the Hortobágy.
- Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*: It was our 'last' woodpecker to complete all the European breeding woodpeckers on the tour! We spent a few hours in a hide in Debrecen Great Wood where we had amazing views of three different birds.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*: A surprisingly good tour for this most elusive woodpecker. We had really nice looks at both male and female at a nesting hole in the Zemplén Hills where they were busily feeding young and we could watch them as long as we wanted. Later we also bumped into another pair in Slovakia in almost entirely coniferous forest which was a bit of a surprise.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*: Two sighting in the Zemplén Hills. We also found the nest hole of a pair and could watch them as they were feeding young.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*: Another 'star' woodpecker which is not always easy to see. This year however we had magnificent views on the Görgényi Mountains in Transylvania. Our Capercaillie quest was unsuccessful in this particular morning but a male woodpecker showed beautifully in the early morning sunlight!

#### ALAUDIDAE

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*: A single individual was seen in the very strong wind at the only Hungarian stake our near Újfehértó.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: Small numbers were seen in Hungary and in Transylvania too. Mainly near to the roadside or around farm areas.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*: We had good views of one in the Zemplén Hills and one at Torockó in Transylvania.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: A very common bird, especially numerous on the Hortobágy.

#### HIRUNDINIDAE

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*: Small numbers at various locations but the biggest concentration was seen at Élesd Reservoir where up to 300 were counted.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*: After seeing 4 birds in the Bihar Mountains we also spotted a bird in Békás Gorge where it is an irregular breeding bird.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Very common throughout Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica*: Very common throughout the tour, huge flocks in Hungary.

#### MOTACILLIDAE

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: We saw the first one in the Zemplén Hills and later it was fairly common on the Hortobágy.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: A few were seen in the Zemplén Hills and Transylvania.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*: Absolutely amazing looks of a large flock of about 25 birds at Szentpál Fishponds in Transylvania. It was very nice and a rather rare sight to see them walking on the short, grazed grass by the lake.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*: Two were seen by the car park of the pass near Görgényi Mountain and later more were seen on the top of Hargita Mountain in Transylvania.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*: The nominate race was common in Hungary and in Transylvania. They were particularly numerous on the Hortobágy. On the Szentpál Fishponds we saw *dombrowski* and *superciliaris* forms too.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*: It was fairly common throughout the tour.

#### CINCLIDAE

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: We had a single bird in flight (like a missile) in the Zemplén Hills. It is a rather rare breeder in Hungary. Later we saw up to seven in the Bihar Mountains in Transylvania.

#### TROGLODYTIDAE

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: Several heard but only two were seen in the Zemplén Hills.

## PRUNELLIDAE

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: Several were seen in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

## TURDIDAE

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: Several sightings of this shy forest bird in the Zemplén Hills and in the Carpathians.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*: Mega views of one or two in Transylvania. It perched right out in the open for us and started to sing. Unusual and very nice experience!

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: It was very common in Hungary. We heard it daily and seen a few at various places. The best views were obtained right on the Hungarian-Romanian border perched up on a wire in full open at around 10:00 am.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*: Most of them were busily feeding young but finally managed to see one at Akadémia Fishponds. This is the 'white spotted' *cyanecula* race here in Central Europe.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: A very common birds of the villages al along the tour. We saw several at various places but usually in small numbers.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: The first male was seen at Segesvár near the citadel where we went to see Dracula's Castle. Later two more were seen in the Görgényi Mountains in Transylvania.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: It was seen in small numbers in Hungary and in Transylvania too.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*: A fairly common bird in Hungary and in Transylvania too especially numerous on some parts of the Hortobágy.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: A few were seen in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: Despite the murky and windy morning we managed to see two males and a female at Torockó in Transylvania.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*: At least three were seen in the Görgényi Mountains by half the group and then up to eight were studied on the top of Hargita Mountain in Transylvania. This is the very scaly *alpestris* race with very silvery wing.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*: Fairly common in Hungary and in Transylvania, rare on the Hortobágy.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*: A fairly common breeding bird in Transylvania and we had many great views.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: A common bird in the Zemplén Hills and in the Carpathians.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: We saw a few in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

## SYLVIIDAE

Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*: One singing male was seen at the 'Aquatic Warbler' site on the Hortobágy.

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*: We had good looks on two different occasions in the Zemplén Hills. This year they were also late like Corncrakes!

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: The first one was seen at Szentpál Fishponds in Transylvania. A fairly common bird on the Hortobágy where we heard it regularly and saw a few.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*: We had at least three different singing male at Zám Marshes on the Hortobágy.

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*: About 8 of these superb 'acros' were seen singing at the Nagyiváni-puszta on the Hortobágy. This is probably the best or I should say the most easy and accessible place in the World to see this enigmatic warbler on its breeding ground. We had nice views as they were in full display as they just arrived back from the wintering grounds. The Hortobágy population is fluctuating but usually between 200-600 singing males.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*: We saw it in wet places throughout the tour but it was particularly very common on the Hortobágy.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*: We recorded two or three on the Hortobágy.

European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: A fairly common bird of the extensive reed beds of the Hortobágy with daily sightings there. In fact it was also seen right by the hotel

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: On our very first afternoon we saw two birds on a small oxbow lake on the Bodrog Floodplain in the Zemplén area. Later we also had several in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*: We saw about three singing males on the Hortobágy.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*: Excellent views of this striking warbler in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*: It was commonly heard throughout the tour and several were seen as well.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: We saw this species regularly in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: It was commonly heard throughout the tour and several were seen as well.

#### PHYLLOSCOPIIDAE

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*: Fairly common in the beech woods of the Zemplén Hills but despite hearing many we always had bigger fish to fry. Later we saw a few in Transylvania and even a few late migrants on the Hortobágy.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: It was commonly encountered throughout the tour.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*: We saw only two birds in Slovakia.

#### REGULIDAE

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: It was seen in the Carpathian Mountains both in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*: Like the previous species, it was seen a few times in the coniferous forests of the Carpathian Mountains both in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

#### MUSCICAPIDAE

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Several were seen on the Hortobágy.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*: A gorgeous male was seen in the Csalhó National Park in Transylvania.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*: We recorded several males in the Zemplén Hills of this remarkably patterned flycatcher. Later we also had a few in Transylvania.

#### PARADOXORNITHIDAE

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*: A single bird was seen at Szentpál Fishponds in Transylvania. Later it was common on the Hortobágy where we had several excellent views.

#### AEGITHALIDAE

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: It was only heard in the Zemplén Hills and then finally two were seen on the Hortobágy.

#### PARIDAE

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*: A few were seen in Transylvania and in Debrecen Great Wood.

Willow Tit *Parus montanus*: A few were seen in the Carpathian Mountains both in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*: We had repeated good views of this magnificent little creature mainly at higher elevations in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Fairly common in the Carpathian Mountains.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: It was common throughout the tour.

Great Tit *Parus major*: It was common throughout the tour.

#### SITTIDAE

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: Common in the Zemplén Hills, in Transylvania and in Debrecen Great Wood.

#### TICHODROMADIDAE

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*: Minimum three of these stunning birds were seen at Békás Gorge in Transylvania. Although they did not come very close, we all enjoyed good telescope views. They were frequently flying however so it was very nice to see the remarkable 'butterfly like' flight action!

#### CERTHIIDAE

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*: It was seen several times in the Slovakia and in Transylvania.  
Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*: A single bird was seen in Debrecen Great Wood.

#### REMIZIDAE

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*: A fairly common bird in the reed beds of the Hortobágy, and we had several good looks of this 'tiny Red-backed Shrike'.

#### ORIOOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: Fairly commonly seen throughout the tour. In the Hortobágy area up to 20 were seen daily. Every morning we had several singing males from our hotel window on the Hortobágy.

#### LANIIDAE

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*: We had some in Transylvania though it was more common in the Zemplén Hills and on the Hortobágy.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*: Just two were seen on the Hortobágy this year.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*: Three were seen in Transylvania, on their breeding grounds.

#### CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: It was commonly seen in the Zemplén Hills and in the Carpathian Mountains.

Common Magpie *Pica pica*: A very commonly encountered bird throughout the tour.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*: Kurt had one while going for the Western Capercaillie and the rest of us had also had good views of a responsive pair in a very thick coniferous forest on the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania. This loud and conspicuous species can be very shy and skulking in the breeding season from April to June.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Very common in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy. We saw several individuals belonging to the eastern *sommeringi* race and showing very nicely the characteristic features like the white half collar on the side of neck.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: A very commonly encountered bird throughout the tour.

Hooded Crow *Corvus corone*: A very commonly encountered bird throughout the tour.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: A maximum of six were seen in the Zemplén Hills, and small numbers were common in Transylvania too.

#### STURNIDAE

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: One of the most common species and was seen all along the tour virtually in every habitat.

#### PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: It was common in or around human settlements.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills and on the Hortobágy but distinctly less common in Transylvania.

## FRINGILLIDAE

- Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: A very common bird in most wooded habitat.
- European Serin *Serinus serinus*: Fairly common in the Zemplén Hills and a few were seen in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy too.
- European Green Finch *Carduelis chloris*: It was seen frequently in human settlements.
- European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: It was seen frequently in human settlements.
- European Siskin *Carduelis spinus*: We only saw three birds in Slovakia in response to Pygmy Owl whistling. It was only heard in Transylvania.
- Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: It was fairly common in Transylvania and in the Zemplén Hills. A few were also seen on the Hortobágy.
- Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: It was surprising to see a lot in Slovakia in the middle elevation of the Carpathians and not to see any in the higher parts in Transylvania at all. Flocks of up to 150 were seen.
- Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: About six were seen in Slovakia and it was heard only in Transylvania.
- Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: A few were seen in the Zemplén Hills but by far our best views were in Debrecen Great Wood where we could study them from 6 meters from a hide.

## EMBERIZIDAE

- Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*: It was fairly common in the Zemplén Hills, in Transylvania and in Debrecen Great Wood.
- Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*: Despite the gale forced wind we managed to get absolutely great looks of a singing male near Torockó in Transylvania.
- Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: Three males and a female was seen at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania. The female was collecting nest material and we enjoyed superb views while having our picnic lunch.
- Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*: It was fairly common in suitable habitat on the Hortobágy, a few were seen on the Bodrog Floodplain in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.
- Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: Fairly common in the Zemplén Hills and on the Hortobágy.

## MAMMALS

- Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*: It was regularly seen throughout the tour but it was especially common on the Hortobágy.
- European Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*: We had three sightings. The first one was in Slovakia and then in Transylvania but our best views were at Debrecen Great Wood from the hide.
- European Sousek *Spermophilus citellus*: We saw 5 in Slovakia and another 5 on the Hortobágy. One of the prime foods of Saker, Long-legged Buzzard and Eastern Imperial Eagle.
- Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: Several were seen all along the tour from the Zemplén Hills to the Hortobágy.
- Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*: We had excellent views of six different individuals. Usually early May is not the best time but we were very lucky this year!
- Stoat *Mustela erminea*: One was seen by Allan in Transylvania.
- Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*: Only one was seen in the Zemplén Hills.
- Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*: It was regularly seen throughout the tour but it was especially common on the Hortobágy.



Ural Owl, Zemplén Hills



Lesser Spotted Eagle, Transylvania



Short-toed Lark, Újfehértó



Long-eared Owl with 3 chicks, Hortobágy



The group at Torockó



Black Woodpecker, Hortobágy



Red-throated Pipit, Transylvania



Thrush Nightingale, Transylvania



Three-toed Woodpecker, Transylvania



White-backed Woodpecker, Zemplén Hills



Black-necked Grebe, Hortobágy National Park



Bearded Tit, Hortobágy National Park



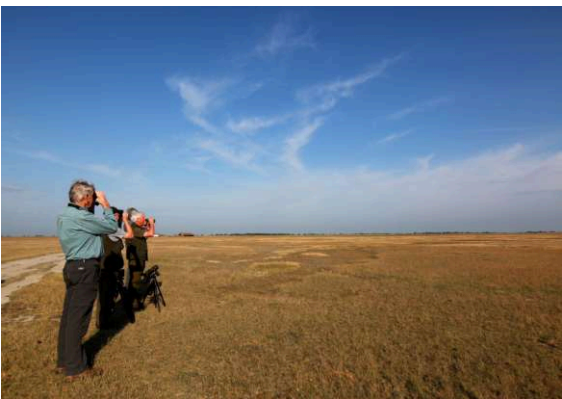
Hawfinch, Debrecen Great Wood



Aquatic Warbler, Hortobágy National Park



Moustached Warbler, Hortobágy National Park



The group on the Hortobágy



Brown Bear, Transylvania



Dotterel, Hortobágy National Park



Ortolan Bunting female, Transylvania



*Crocus heuffeliana*, Transylvania



Ortolan Bunting male, Transylvania