

HORTOBÁGY - ZEMPLÉN SPRING TOUR

with **SAKERTOURS**

7-14 May 2016



Ural Owl in the Zemplén-hills (Sándor Borza)

Leader: Sándor Borza

In Hungary the Hortobágy – Zemplén tour combination has the best selection of habitats with a wide range of special birds. The Hortobágy National Park area is one of the most famous birdwatching destination in Europe which is Hungary's largest protected area, and the largest semi-natural grassland in Europe as well as part of the UNESCO World Heritage. The Zemplén-hills is the foothill of the Carpathians and holds superb oak and beech forests.

Our 2016 spring tour was another fantastic adventure to this amazing part of Europe with a really long list of goodies. One of the best thing in this tour that we only based at two locations and travelling is as minimum as possible on a birding tour in Europe. It was a really enjoyable trip with a lot of quality birding and simply just lots of birds everywhere! We recorded a total of 175 species during this 8 days trip (with six full days of actual birding) and only two of them were heard only. The weather was also on our side! There were only two short heavy downpours but most of the days had pleasant weather.

This year's highlights were Ferruginous Duck, Red-necked and Slavonian Grebe, Cattle Egret, Glossy Ibis, Red-footed Falcon, Saker, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Great Bustard, Collared Pratincole, Great Snipe, White-winged Tern, Ural and Eagle Owl, White-backed and Black Woodpecker, Willow Tit, Collared Flycatcher and some other great birds.

Saturday, 7th of May

After all the tour participants were picked up at the airport and some other locations we headed towards the Hortobágy. We had a short stop near Karcag where we were hoping to find the magnificent Collared Pratincole in a recently established colony on an arable field. This was a great start as we located several birds and had excellent looks of this delinquent European wader. It is such a special shorebird with its unique tern-like flight and rather dry habitat. Our next stop was not much further away where we successfully tracked down the mighty Saker Falcon. Later we have visited the southern part of the Hortobágy National Park 'where the sky touches the ground' motto of the park is evident as it is such a treeless and vast grassland. Here we managed to find yet another special dry habitat wader, the Eurasian Stone Curlew. We walked to the nearby wetland, where we observed Common Shelducks, Pied Avocets and Eurasian Wigeon. On the way back to our superbly located hotel we checked flood waters on the arable fields which gave us the first looks of Grey Plover and Common Greenshanks. This was a great start to an action-packed week in Hungary!



Collared Pratincole (Sándor Borza)

Sunday, 8th of May

After breakfast we drove to the center of the Hortobágy National Park. Before lunch we visited fishponds, as these artificial wetlands are a major habitat within the park. Our first destination was the biggest fishpond in the region, which is also the main area for visitors: the Hortobágy-fishponds. We took a pleasant two-hour walk in this very birdy area. The first big pond gave many good species for us, such as Red-necked Grebe, Black-necked Grebe, hundreds of terns (mainly White-winged and Black) and Tufted Duck. On the other side of the main trail, there was an unused pond bed which had a shallow water level. This special wetland had lots of waterbirds, including several Glossy Ibises. We observed the first White-tailed Eagle above us and on the way back to the bus we spent time for passerines in the extensive reedbed and on the

willow bushes. We had a good study of Sedge Warbler, Savi's Warbler and Icterine Warbler. Another smaller fishpond system on our way towards our lunch place yielded a few migrants on the mudflat of a fast drying fishpond such as Grey Plovers, Common Sandpiper and Common Redshanks as well as we had our first Golden Orioles.



Savi's Warbler (Sándor Borza)

We had a delicious lunch in the famous Hortobágy 'csárda' restaurant. After this nice meal a well deserved siesta would have been good but our time is limited so we continued birding at various other fishponds. The afternoon highlights were Cattle Egret, Slavonian Grebe, Red-crested Pochards as well as superb looks of the special Bearded Reedlings. Late afternoon we started our quest to find the magnificent Great Bustard in the western part of the Hortobágy. Unfortunately the weather was not very kind to us and we only got a quick look of a magnificent male Great Bustard when it started to rain. We also had our first Roller here. We finished the day with two owl species - Little and Barn Owl - in the nearest village.

Monday, 9th of May

We started the birdwatching in a park where we could observe Long-eared Owl in the nestbox. It is always great to start the day with an owl! Later we drove to a nearby wetland, and along the way we found the first Hoopoe in flight. At first we checked the wetland where we could see Common Shelducks, Spotted Redshanks, Curlew Sandpipers, Dunlins, big flock of Ruffs, terns and many waterfowls. The waterbirds were constantly harassed by raptors and we had good look of Saker again as well as a late migrant Peregrine as well. Later we took a short walk in the dry part of grassland where we saw a sub-adult Eastern Imperial Eagle overhead. Before the lunch we visited a Red-footed Falcon's colony where we enjoyed these very special raptors for as long as we wanted. They were on the peak of their mating season and noisily chasing each other around. We had a lunch overlooking another great wetland where we added Little Grebe, Common Tern and Little Ringed Plover to our list. Later we visited a new territory of Eastern

Imperial Eagle, but unfortunately we didn't find them. While we were waiting for the eagles to show up we had European Bee-eaters in flight, Red-throated Pipit, European Honey Buzzard, Black Stork and Bluethroat.



Black Tern in flight (Sándor Borza)

Tuesday, 10th of May

Because of the last day's good experience we started the day near Balmazújváros again. We could add two new species to our tour list, which were Little Stint and Common Ringed Plover. After that we headed toward Tiszacsege town. En route we had a stop in the Long-legged Buzzard's territory where we were lucky to see one bird. Other birds of the morning included Black Kite, Barred Warbler and Saker again. We were very lucky on this tour seeing Saker every day so far! We were spending the hottest part of the day in the fisherman's 'csárda' near Tiszacsege where we had a delicious fish soup. When we left the restaurant we took a short birdwatching in the gallery forest of the Tisza River. We could add a migrant Pied Flycatcher to our list here. In the afternoon we made a successful visit of a European Bee-eater's colony where we could enjoy these beautiful birds as long as we wanted. We ended successfully the day in the Debrecen Great Forest. There was a good drinking pool in the forest which place gave a good possibility of looking the birds. We could observe Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Collared Flycatchers, Marsh Tits and Hawfinches here.



Hawfinch on the drinking pool (Sándor Borza)

Wednesday, 11th of May

After the breakfast we packed our all baggage as it was time to leave the Hortobágy region. The first destination was nearby Kaba. It had an old sugar factory's used water reservoir. This pond had a relatively big island which was used by gulls and terns for breeding. We could observe several Mediterranean Gulls and supporting cast included Black-necked Grebes, Common Moorhens, Gadwalls and a wide range of waterbirds we have seen on the previous days. In a nearby weedy spot we saw three Marsh Warblers. Our next target was to visit an area for the migrant snipes. Our main target was to find the elusive Great Snipe. Our stake out proved very succesfull and we soon had both Common and Great Snipe. Other birds in this extensive wetland area included many waders and thousands of waterfowls. The highlights were Peregrine Falcons, hundreds of Dunlins, Eurasian Wigeons, Garganey, Eurasian Teals, Spoonbills, Common Shelducks and breeding waders such as Avocets, Redshanks, Little Ringed Plovers and Black-tailed Godwits. Our ast stop before driving to the Zemplén was a small fishing lake where we were hoping to find the skulking Little Bittern. We were lucky here because we had to wait less then one minute to found one male bird in the reedbed. After almost two hours driving we reached the Zemplén region. We wasted no time and dived into an oak woodland in search of woodpeckers and owls. This time we could observe Black Woodpecker and Middle Spotted Woodpecker at their breeding holes. It was amazing to see how shy woodpeckers become in May near to their breeding places. At the other hand if you know the breeding hole as we did we had great looks as both species were feeding their chicks frequently. The next stop was in Ural Owl's territory where we found the female bird successfully. The bird was watching us constantly from one position near the top of the forest when we saw it with telescope also. This was undoubtedly a trip highlight! A nice Wryneck was seen on our way to our hotel where we finished this great day with an excellent dinner.



Black Woodpecker in its nest hole (Sándor Borza)

Thursday, 12th of May

Before breakfast we took a short birdwatching around our hotel. We saw Wood Warbler and Collared Flycatcher and heard Green Woodpecker distantly. We went back to the hotel and had a nice breakfast. Our first destination of the day was a rock face. Unfortunately we didn't find adult Eurasian Eagle Owl but we saw the chicks. We heard the first Woodlark here. Because of the warmer temperature the activity of raptors started in the late morning so we searched a good observation point but only Common Buzzards and Ravens were seen. A singing Woodlark gave us a fine look though.

We spend the warmest part of day in the local restaurant near Bodgorkerszetúr. The afternoon programme started with a visiting of other Eagle Owl's territory but we were unlucky again. However we saw a Northern Goshawk in flight right above us. The next stop was in the semi-natural oak forest where we could see a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. This was followed by an early dinner and we were out before dusk to look for Eagle Owl again. Fortunately for the last hour of the day the female Eagle Owl came to the chicks so we could notice it with telescope very well. We also tried for European Nightjar, but it was silent this evening – the weather was changing. Our last target species of the day was the Corncrake. We reached the perfect grassy habitat in the dusk when five birds were singing constantly. We walked to the closest one and had flight views. We got back to the hotel after this long day but very rewarding day!



Wryneck (Sándor Borza)

Friday, 13th of May

We had a leisure breakfast while it was heavy rain. Today our main target was to find the rare White-backed Woodpecker. So we decided to visit an area with an active territory. En route we saw a perched Lesser Spotted Eagle along the road. The rain stopped and we arrived to the woodpecker woodland. It took some time but finally we saw a fine male White-backed Woodpecker which is undoubtedly a star bird of this region.



Lesser Spotted Eagle (left) and Short-toed Eagle (right) (Sándor Borza)

Later then we checked an occupied Tawny Owl's nestbox where we could see one of the adult birds. At noon we had positioned ourselves again to look for raptors and while we were munching on the packed lunch we found a hunting Short-toed Eagle. Before we reached the accommodation we visited an impressive creek valley where we observed Grey Wagtail and Willow Tit. The last programme for the day was a wine tasting dinner in Tokaj. This was a fitting final dinner for our tour with tasting the majestic 'King of wines and wines of kings'.

Saturday, 14th of May

Because of the early flights we had to go more or less straight to the airport. We had a Lesser Spotted Eagle along the road to say good by. We had such a great group and again this fantastic region gave us all the special birds and many unforgettable experience!

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING THE TOUR

Abundance scale

(max for any one day)

1 = 1 - 4

2 = 5 - 9

3 = 10 - 99

4 = 100 - 999

5 = 1000+

This list represents those birds seen by any of the party members of this tour.

H means in the last column, that species was only heard.

No.	Species	Scientific name	No. of days recorded	Abundance
1.	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	3	3
2.	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	2	1
3.	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	6	4
4.	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	4	2
5.	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	2	2
6.	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	2	3
7.	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	3	3
8.	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	5	3
9.	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	5	3
10.	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	3	3
11.	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	1	2
12.	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	4	3
13.	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	4	3
14.	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	2	2
15.	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	2	H
16.	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	7	3
17.	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1	1
18.	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	2	3
19.	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	1	1
20.	Slavonian (Horned) Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	1	1
21.	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	3	3
22.	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	2	3
23.	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>	1	3
24.	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	2	1
25.	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	1	1
26.	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	4	3
27.	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	1	2
28.	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	1	1

29.	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	4	3
30.	Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	7	4
31.	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	6	3
32.	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	4	3
33.	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	3	2
34.	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	7	4
35.	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	2	2
36.	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	4	3
37.	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	2	2
38.	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	1	1
39.	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	3	1
40.	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1	1
41.	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	7	3
42.	Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	1	1
43.	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	1	1
44.	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	1	1
45.	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	7	3
46.	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	1	1
47.	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	2	1
48.	Eastern Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	1	1
49.	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	7	3
50.	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	3	3
51.	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	2	1
52.	Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	3	1
53.	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	2	1
54.	Corn Crake	<i>Crex crex</i>	1	1
55.	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1	1
56.	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	3	3
57.	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	4	4
58.	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	1	1
59.	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	4	4
60.	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	4	4
61.	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	1	1
62.	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	1	1
63.	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	1	1
64.	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	1	1
65.	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	2	1
66.	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	4	3
67.	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	1	1
68.	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	1	1
69.	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	2	2
70.	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	2	4
71.	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	4	4
72.	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1	2
73.	Great Snipe	<i>Gallinago media</i>	1	1
74.	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	3	3

75.	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	1	1
76.	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	2	1
77.	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	3	3
78.	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	2	1
79.	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	5	4
80.	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	5	3
81.	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	1	3
82.	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	5	4
83.	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	2	3
84.	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	3	3
85.	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	2	3
86.	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	5	4
87.	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	5	4
88.	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	4	3
89.	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia f. domestica</i>	7	4
90.	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	7	3
91.	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	7	3
92.	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	6	3
93.	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	6	3
94.	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	1	1
95.	Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	1	1
96.	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	1	1
97.	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	2	1
98.	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>	1	1
99.	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	2	1
100.	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	1	3
101.	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	4	4
102.	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	2	2
103.	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	5	2
104.	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	1	1
105.	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	2	1
106.	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	4	2
107.	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	5	2
108.	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	2	1
109.	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	1	1
110.	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	2	1
111.	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	4	2
112.	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	1	1
113.	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	7	3
114.	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	2	2
115.	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	7	3
116.	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	7	3
117.	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>	1	1
118.	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	7	3
119.	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1	1
120.	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	7	3

121.	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	2	1
122.	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	4	2
123.	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	7	3
124.	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	2	1
125.	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	4	2
126.	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	2	1
127.	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	6	3
128.	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	2	2
129.	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	6	2
130.	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	4	3
131.	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	3	2
132.	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	5	3
133.	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	1	1
134.	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	2	2
135.	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	4	2
136.	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>	1	1
137.	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	4	2
138.	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	3	2
139.	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	4	2
140.	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	4	3
141.	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	5	3
142.	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	3	2
143.	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	2	1
144.	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	3	2
145.	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	2	1
146.	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	1	2
147.	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>	1	1
148.	Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>	1	1
149.	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	3	1
150.	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	3	2
151.	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	5	3
152.	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	4	2
153.	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1	H
154.	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	1	1
155.	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	5	3
156.	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	7	3
157.	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	3	2
158.	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	3	2
159.	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	7	3
160.	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	3	3
161.	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	5	4
162.	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	4	3
163.	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	3
164.	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	7	3
165.	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	7	4
166.	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	7	4

167. Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	5	3
168. European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	7	3
169. European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	7	3
170. European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	7	3
171. Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	2	2
172. Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	3	2
173. Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	3	2
174. Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	3	3
175. Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	7	3