

# HUNGARY IN AUTUMN

31 OCTOBER – 6 NOVEMBER 2010

## TOUR REPORT

**LEADER:** JÁNOS OLÁH

There are not many places in the World where you can see the endangered Red-breasted Goose and the vulnerable Lesser White-fronted Goose within a short bird watching break, but Hungary in November certainly offers this possibility! Our 2010 'Hungary in Autumn' was a great success as we managed to track down both of these rarities and had a very fine supporting cast as well. Prior to our tour some genuinely cold weather brought hordes of Greater White-fronted Geese from Russia but in terms of weather we were lucky as almost the whole tour was blessed with sunny, clear days, which aided our goose observations. In the Zemplén Hills we saw seven species of woodpeckers including the enigmatic White-backed and managed to find both Ural and Eurasian Eagle Owls. Ural Owl was so popular that it became the Bird of the trip! Hungary is a well-established European destination to witness the autumn spectacle of tens of thousands of Common Cranes. Although November is getting a little late for Cranes we still managed to see about 16,000 of them! Other trip highlights were magnificent Great Bustards, a Long-eared Owl roost of 86 birds, Pygmy Cormorants and Ferruginous Ducks and many raptors, including: Saker; Long-legged and Rough-legged Buzzards as well as both Imperial and White-tailed Eagles. In short the 2010 trip was the most successful Birdquest Hungary in Autumn ever!

After everybody gathered at Ferihegy Airport in Budapest we headed straight for the small but famous town of Tokaj. A short roadside stop produced a pair of magnificent adult Eastern Imperial Eagles along the motorway and also a juvenile Long-legged Buzzard. After little more than three hours driving we arrived in the Zemplén Hills just in time to look for Eurasian Eagle Owl. Unfortunately the owl failed to show but we soon enjoyed some Hungarian pálinka and also had our first taste of the famous Tokaj wine at dinner in the lovely village of Komlóska. The Zemplén Hills are a rounded chalk landscape cloaked in ancient deciduous forest with the occasional peculiar volcanic outcrop on which there is invariably a castle, most of them ruined in the war of independence in the sixteenth century. These rolling hills are the foothills of the mighty Carpathian Mountains and are famous for their birdlife, especially having the highest density of the rare White-backed Woodpecker in Europe as well as being the best place in Hungary to see the sought-after Ural Owl.

In the first morning we had a quick breakfast and then started our forest birding with the guidance of Zoltán '*Woodpeckerman*' Petrovics, our local guide. We visited a fantastic area of the northern Zemplén. The beautiful autumn leaf colours of the forest provided a great atmosphere and it was a lovely windless and sunny morning, perfect conditions for woodpeckers! Our first thrill, however, came in the shape of a most spectacular Ural Owl! We all had brilliant views of this large owl as it quietly perched by the roadside and peered down his yellow 'nose' from on high. It ended up being the 'Bird of the trip' despite many other avian goodies seen throughout the week. The rest of our morning forest walk produced a selection of six woodpecker species. We started with Great Spotted and Middle Spotted, the latter showing his candy-pink vent and red crown on a nearby treetop. Not much later a fine Grey-headed Woodpecker came into view and then a pair of the shy White-backed Woodpeckers showed well too. The quiet forest floor, carpeted with yellow leaves, resounded with tapping and pecking – woodpeckers were all around us! Next we had good flight and brief perched views of a male Black Woodpecker and a perfect look at a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. While having a nice picnic lunch in the Aranyos Valley we tracked down a female Syrian Woodpecker, bringing us close to acquiring the full suite of Hungarian Woodpeckers, only the Green was heard and not seen. Fantastic! Other goodies included Eastern Imperial Eagle and Northern Goshawk. Late afternoon found us in a two different quarries in the Tokaj area and after some searching we finally managed to locate a stunning Eurasian Eagle Owl. This memorable day ended with a lovely dinner and some wine tasting in a world heritage wine-cellar!

The next day was spent deep in the Zemplén Hills close to Regéc Castle. A very picturesque walk through the autumn forest yielded another Grey-headed Woodpecker and a fine male Hawfinch. On our way back to Tokaj we had Eurasian Sparrowhawk and a brilliantly close flight view of an adult Imperial Eagle such that we could even see the white epaulettes and yellow mane. The adult eagles are usually resident in Northern Hungary as their favourite food, hamsters, stay active throughout all but the coldest weather. However, the juveniles move further south to spend the winter in the Balkans and Middle East. Our Zemplén visit finished with a nice lunch at the Lebujs Csárda. Leaving the golden hills behind us we drove out onto the flat lands of the Great Hungarian Plain. We did not have much time for birding in the short afternoon but still managed to locate a Saker Falcon before we occupied our rooms in the Trófea Lodge, our base for the next four nights.

The following morning we had a nice breakfast and our plan of the day was to search for one of the largest flocks of Great Bustards present in a farmland area of the Hortobágy, followed by a goose hunt in the afternoon on the Virágoskút Fishponds. We drove to Nagyiván where the local warden, Dr. Gábor Kovács (the 'Godfather' of modern Hungary birding) was waiting for us. Gábor guided us through endless dirt tracks before stopping the bus near an oilseed rape crop. The last few hundred meters had to be walked as the road conditions were muddy. In 2010 we had the wettest year in Hungary since the 1934 with 100 cm of precipitation in many parts of the Hortobágy, which is usually the driest part of Hungary. Anyway we soon found several Great Bustards and with a bit of positioning and stalking, we all got excellent looks at these fine birds. Our count ended with 15 birds but to our surprise they were all females. Not that the females are not fantastic birds but we would not have minded one or two huge males (which did materialize on another morning!). There were plenty of Hen Harriers and about 500 Cranes around as well as a perched Great Grey Shrike too. After an action-packed morning we drove to the Virágoskút ('*Flower Well*') Fishpond to look for geese. We just arrived in time, as a few thousand geese were already in the drained fishponds but many more thousands were just pouring in right over us, a magnificent spectacle! The total number was estimated to be around 10,000 geese on fishpond number one and as we were watching them the local warden assured us there were another 25,000 on fishpond four as well! The search for the target geese has begun and not much later we were all watching Red-breasted Geese. We stayed with the geese for about three hours and we gradually got better and better views of Red-breasted as well as tracked down Taiga Bean Goose too. The much-wanted Lesser White-fronted did not show so we left the area but as usual just as we were getting into the bus the local warden located two Lesser Whitefronts. So we were all back in minutes and after much persistence everybody managed to see

these rare geese. Another spectacle was the number of White-tailed Eagles at this location and at one point we saw as many as 16 birds together on a muddy island of the pond. We got off to a great start on the Hortobágy seeing both of our main targets plus Great Bustard!

Next day we began our birding at Elep Fishponds where we had a nice walk along the fishponds and managed to find the wintering Greater Spotted Eagle. It gave perched views allowing us to study the crest and the yellow bill base. Several Fieldfares were flying around us and even a Black Woodpecker put in a brief appearance. Still before lunch we had another goose-quest as Lesser White-fronted Goose had been seen at Csécs Fishponds in a smaller group of Greater Whitefronts. When we arrived at the site the same number of geese was already on the drained pond and it did not take long to find a superb male Lesser White-fronted Goose. This time it was much closer and the bird was more or less separated from the main flock allowing prolonged views. This was our finest view of the stunning goose and this time its golden eye-ring was seen by everybody! A short lunch in Hortobágy village where we had some of Hungary's famous gulyás soup and poppy-seed and sour cherry pancake was followed by a fine stroll at Derzsi Fishponds where we managed to see four Ferruginous Ducks, a threatened bird in Western Europe but still relatively easy to find in the Hortobágy, plus 10 Pygmy Cormorants. We also enjoyed fantastic views of Bearded Reedlings and Eurasian Penduline Tits. On a drained fishpond we found some gulls and waders, which included Eurasian Curlews, a single Spotted Redshank and Ruff plus many Caspian Gulls. In the late afternoon we drove to the Southern Hortobágy and walked to a place where the predicted flight-path of the cranes flying to roost would be. As dusk approached more and more lines of loudly bugling birds appeared. Flock after flock streamed overhead and the juveniles pursued their parents, with their insistent high-pitched cheeps audible above the trumpeting call of the adults. It was a magical sight and a great finish to another classic autumn day in the Hortobágy. The estimated number of Cranes was 10,000 but there were too many for us to count as we stood awestruck!

Our last full day in the Hortobágy started at the old sugar factory ponds of Kaba. This was a great site as we enjoyed fantastic views of as many as 40 Ferruginous Ducks, a female Greater Scaup, a female Goldeneye and both Red-necked and Black-necked Grebe. Later we drove to a lovely grassland area where we had located a flock of 24 male Great Bustards. This was an absolutely superb sighting in the crisp early morning sunshine as they walked close by on a rape field allowing prolonged views – a trip highlight. We also had about 15 Hen Harriers, a female Merlin, a day-hunting Short-eared Owl and our only Corn Bunting of the tour. Our next port of call was Balmazújváros City where we visited a roosting group of Long-eared Owls that contained 86 birds. It was amazing to see them all around on the trees in the middle of the town. This roost has reached up to 280 in the hardest winters! Near Balmazújváros we had an unforgettable hour with raptors starting with a juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle, followed by two perched Saker Falcons on a hay-bale and a lovely adult Long-legged Buzzard. It was time for lunch now and we had a fish soup in a famous csárda close to the Tisza River. The whole afternoon (rather short in November) was spent in the Vókonya wetland. Because of the wet year it was not easy to get there and we had to walk a few kilometres but it was well worth it! As we were getting closer to the wetland horde of geese were already coming in and we spotted at least eight Red-breasted Geese flying in right overhead. It was a fitting final to our geese watching in the Hortobágy. We picked up a few other birds to our list such as Grey Plover, Greenshank and two Rough-legged Buzzards. A fine Peregrine was perched very close allowing superb views while eating its prey. As we neared the end of the day Common Cranes were arriving from every direction. We positioned ourselves at the three-cantilever well and started the crane-count and in about one hour just over 8,000 Cranes flew in to the wetland against the most spectacular sunset of the year! A horseman brought a herd of Hungarian Grey Cattle to drink from the three-cantilever well adding to the real puszta experience. We could probably not have planned it better and it was a fitting end to our last full day. Our walk back to the bus produced a brief Barn Owl and also a Eurasian Woodcock.

On the final day we drove to the nearby Debrecen Great Wood. This lovely woodland has some very old oak trees and a short walk produced a nice selection of birds. One of the main targets was the Short-toed Treecreeper and we soon located one just as we stepped into the forest, much to Pat's delight. We also had a pair of Green Woodpeckers and several Middle Spotted Woodpeckers. Hawfinches gave excellent views and a fly-by Crossbill was new for our list. Sadly we had to leave this area behind and start our drive back towards Budapest. Still en route we made a short visit to the Tisza Lake area where we had well over a thousand Greylag Goose, a winter plumaged Black-throated Diver, a female Red-breasted Merganser and a few goldeneyes. After our last picnic lunch, all that was left was to drive to the airport where this action- and bird-packed holiday ended. I am sure everybody enjoyed the spectacles Hungary can offer in late October and early November and most certainly this was the best ever Birdquest of its kind!

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

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

### GAVIIDAE

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*: A winter plumaged individual was seen at the Abádszalók bay of the Tisza Lake on our last morning.

### PODICIPEDIDAE

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: A single individual was seen at Csécs Fishponds in the Hortobágy area.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: Commonly seen on the Hortobágy at most fishponds.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: A single bird was seen at the old sugar factory ponds at Kaba.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*: We had six birds at the old sugar factory ponds at Kaba and two more individuals at the Abádszalók bay of the Tisza Lake on our last morning.

### PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Almost daily sightings in the Hortobágy area.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: Just ten were seen at Derzsi Fishponds in the Hortobágy area.

### ARDEIDAE

Great Egret *Egretta alba*: It was very common on the Hortobágy, with a maximum of 72 counted on one day.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: It was seen on most days in the Hortobágy area with a count of 150 at Virágoskúti Fishpond on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November.

### ANATIDAE

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: A total of 8 birds were seen in the Hortobágy area and up to 20 individuals at Tisza Lake.

Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*: We saw 5 birds in the huge geese flock at Virágoskúti Fishponds in the Hortobágy area.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*: We saw about 17,000 on the Hortobágy, the biggest flock of 10,000 at the Virágoskúti Fishponds.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*: We had two sightings of this very rare goose in the Hortobágy area. Eventually all of us had good views of the golden eye-ring of this very important target bird. This lovely goose at present is one of Western Palaearctic's most endangered bird species. The reasons for the negative population development are diverse, but the clearly most important single threat throughout its range is the high mortality owing to hunting and poaching. It is classified vulnerable by Birdlife International. The historical range of the Lesser White-fronted Goose covers the whole subarctic Eurasia, but nowadays the distribution is very patchy. The recent estimate of the mid-winter world population is 22,000-27,000 individuals. The world population is divided in two parts, a western and an eastern flyway population, with a geographic divide on the Taimyr Peninsula area in northern central Siberia. The western part of the world population (ca 15,000 individuals) migrates via north-western Kazakhstan to (still mostly unknown) wintering areas in the Caspian and/or Black Sea area, while the eastern flyway population winters mainly in China (especially in the East Dongting Lake Nature Reserve, where up to 16,000 individuals have been counted in recent winters). In the first decades of the twentieth century the Fennoscandian breeding population was estimated at more than 10,000 individuals. Nowadays the wild Fennoscandian breeding population is estimated to hold only some 20 breeding pairs at the moment (2009). More information

and up-to-date news on this declining species can be found on this website: <http://www.piskulka.net>. It took the second place on the 'Bird of the trip' competition.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*: Up to 1500 were seen at Tisza Lake but also daily sightings in the Hortobágy area. The form concerned is *rubrirostris*.

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*: A total of 18 individuals was seen on the tour. This was the other main target of our tour and we all got excellent views at the Virágoskút Fishponds and at Vókonya wetland. This stunning waterbird is now classified as endangered by Birdlife International. The main wintering sites for the species are along the Black Sea coast in Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria. In order to collect more information about the dynamic and size of the wintering population of the species simultaneous winter counts are conducted at wintering sites. The estimated World population is around 37,000 mature individuals. In Hungary the species become a regular visitor in the early 1990's and there is an increase in numbers throughout the last 20 years. By the winter of 2009/2010 a record number of 800 individuals was counted in Hungary on the autumn passage. It took the second place on the 'Bird of the trip' competition.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: A flock of 15 was seen at Virágoskút Fishpond in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas Penelope*: A few were seen in the Hortobágy area and at Tisza Lake.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: Just 35 birds were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*: Up to 2,000 were estimated in the Hortobágy area.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: It was commonly seen at the fishponds on the Hortobágy.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*: We only had three birds in the Hortobágy area.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: Up to 300 were counted on the Derzsi Fishponds in the Hortobágy area.

Common Pochard *Aythya farina*: Small numbers (up to 150) were noted on the Hortobágy.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*: Up to 40 were counted at the old sugar factory ponds of Kaba.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*: A flock of 50 was seen at the old sugar factory ponds of Kaba and a few more at Tisza Lake.

Greater Scaup *Aythya merula*: A female was seen at the old sugar factory ponds of Kaba.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*: A female was seen at the old sugar factory ponds of Kaba and a flock of 36 at Tisza Lake.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*: A female was seen at Tisza Lake on our last morning.

#### ACCIPITRIDAE

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: A most impressive raptor, which is fairly common in the Hortobágy area this time of the year. We had several sightings but the best was a flock of 16 together on a muddy island at Virágoskút Fishponds. A juvenile bird was also encountered in the Zemplén Hills.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: Just 4 were seen on the Hortobágy.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*: Up to 15 were seen daily on the Hortobágy.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*: We had two birds on our first birding day in the Zemplén Hills.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: A few were recorded both in the Zemplén and in the Hortobágy.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: Very common throughout the tour with up to 50 counted on our first day along the motorway as we were driving to the Zemplén Hills.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*: Great views on our first afternoon as we had a comfort stop on our way to the Zemplén. Following this juvenile bird we also had fantastic views of an adult on the Hortobágy puszta.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*: Two were seen at Vókonya on the Hortobágy puszta. They gave superb views in the perfect afternoon sunshine.

Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*: Several excellent views in the Zemplén Hills and also in the Hortobágy area. It is considered vulnerable by Birdlife International. The Hungarian

population recovered well in the last 20 years and nowadays there are almost 180 pairs breeding in the eastern half of the country.

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*: We saw one at Elep Fishponds in the Hortobágy area. This is a rather rare raptor in Hungary but almost every year we have a few wintering individuals. It is classified vulnerable by Birdlife International.

#### FALCONIDAE

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Fairly common all over Hungary.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*: A female type bird was seen on the Hortobágy puszta. It was on the fantastic morning when we had the superb flock of Great Bustards near Nádudvar.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*: Good views of three different birds on the Hortobágy. One of the key species to see in Hungary as the Central-Asian population is in heavy decline. Hungary is definitely the European stronghold of the species with about 200 breeding pairs. It is considered vulnerable by Birdlife International.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: We had two birds on the Hortobágy. Particularly excellent views were obtained at Vókonya wetland as it was eating some prey not far from us.

#### PHASIANIDAE

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

#### RALLIDAE

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: It was common on the Hortobágy and also 150 were seen at the old sugar factory ponds of Kaba.

#### GRUIDAE

Common Crane *Grus grus*: Numbers were rather low for the season as the very cold weather made them move early. We still managed to see about 16,000 in total at two different roosting area. The roost flight at Vókonya with the most outstanding sunset and the Hungarian horseman with the three-cantilever well and a herd of Hungarian Grey Cattle were certainly a memorable sight! Apart from the roosting flights they were also seen in small flocks scattered over the surrounding farmland and puszta. The echoes of their trumpeting calls filled the autumn air and indeed it is one of the 'must-see' spectacles of Europe.

#### OTIDIDAE

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*: We had two encounters with the heaviest flying bird in the World. First we had a flock of 15 female birds on the Nagyiván puszta. They gave very good views but later we tracked down a flock of 24 males near Nádudvar. This was an absolutely superb sighting in the crisp early morning sunshine as they were walking close by on a rape field allowing prolonged views.

#### CHARADRIIDAE

Grey Plover (Black-bellied Plover) *Pluvialis squatarola*: A single juvenile bird was seen at Vókonya on the Hortobágy.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: Up to 400 were seen on the Hortobágy.

#### SCOLOPACIDAE

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: Just 13 were seen on the Hortobágy.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: Up to 13 were seen on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*: One was flushed on our way out from Vókonya in the dark.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*: Up to 50 were seen daily on the Hortobágy.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*: A singleton was seen at the Derzsi Fishponds.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: A single juvenile bird at Vókonya on the Hortobágy.

## LARIDAE

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

Mew Gull (Common Gull) *Larus canus*: We had up to 30 on the Hortobágy and about 40 at Tisza Lake.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*: Just three were seen on the Hortobágy and another 10 at Tisza Lake.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*: Common at the fishponds of the Hortobágy with up to 100 counted daily.

## COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: Common throughout the tour.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*: We had up to 30 in the Hortobágy area where these birds wintering.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*: Very common in the villages and up to 50 were counted on the Hortobágy.

## TYTONIDAE

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*: A single bird was seen in flight as we were walking out of Vókonya at dusk after the magnificent evening with the Cranes.

## STRIGIDAE

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*: Our first attempt in the Zemplén Hills on arrival failed to locate this huge owl but the second evening we got fantastic walk-away views of one.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: A single bird was seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*: Our first morning of the tour produced an excellent sighting of this much sought-after bird in the Zemplén Hills. It was the 'bird of the trip'.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*: An amazing 85 were counted at their regular roost site in the centre of Balmazújváros and allowed excellent views as usual.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*: We had a day flying individual in the Southern Hortobágy in bright sunshine. Depending on the vole population fair numbers spend the winter in the Hortobágy area.

## PICIDAE

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*: Stunning views of a male in a treetop at Erdőbénye plus two more in the Zemplén Hills.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: It was only heard in the Zemplén Hills but later two birds were seen at Debrecen Great Wood.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: One in the Zemplén Hills and two more in the Hortobágy area.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*: Very common in the Zemplén foothills and Debrecen Great Wood.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopus syriacus*: Good views of a female individual at our picnic site in the Aranyos Valley of the Zemplén Hills.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus medius*: Great views of one in the Zemplén Hills and another one in Debrecen Great Wood.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopus leucotos*: We had good views of a pair in a hornbeam and oak woodland in the Zemplén foothills on our first morning walk which produced no less than six species of woodpeckers! It took the fourth place on the 'Bird of the trip' competition.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor*: A pair was seen on our first morning in the Zemplén Hills.

#### ALAUDIDAE

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: A common bird in Hungary. We had four birds in a motorway car park on the first day plus another one in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (H): It is rather scarce on the Hortobágy puszta at this time of the year and we only managed to hear it twice.

#### MOTACILLIDAE

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*: Up to 25 were seen on the Hortobágy.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: A single bird was seen in the Zemplén Hills near Regéc.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*: A single bird was seen at Tisza Lake.

#### TROGLODYTIDAE

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: A few were seen in the Zemplén Hills and also in the Hortobágy area.

#### PRUNELLIDAE

Dunnock *Prunella modularis* (H): Heard only in the Zemplén Hills.

#### TURDIDAE

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* (H): This year we only heard this shy forest denizen in the Zemplén Hills and on the Hortobágy.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: A total of eight was seen in a quarry near Tokaj.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*: A very common bird throughout the tour.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*: We saw several flocks in the Zemplén Hills and in the Hortobágy area too. The largest gathering was around 80 birds at Elep Fishponds.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: Two single birds were seen at different locations in the Zemplén Hills.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: Common in the Zemplén Hills and we also had a few in the Hortobágy area.

#### SYLVIIDAE

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: Two were seen in the Zemplén Hills near Regéc and two more in the Hortobágy area.

#### TIMALIIDAE

Bearded Reedling (Bearded Tit) *Panurus biarmicus*: We all had excellent views around Derzsi Fishponds. This fantastic bird is very common in the vast reedbeds of the Hortobágy.

#### PARIDAE

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caedatus*: Several flocks of the white-headed continental form were seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*: We saw this species daily in the Zemplén foothills and also had a few at Debrecen Great Wood.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Only six were noted in the Zemplén Hills.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: A very common bird throughout the tour.

Great Tit *Parus major*: Slightly less numerous than the previous species but still common.

#### SITTIDAE

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: We saw this species daily in the Zemplén foothills and also had a few at Debrecen Great Wood.

#### CERTHIIDAE

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*: Three were seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*: We managed to locate two in Debrecen Great Wood for much of Pat's appreciation.

#### REMIZIDAE

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*: We had great looks of 4 birds at Derzsi Fishponds on the Hortobágy.

#### LANIIDAE

Great Grey Shrike (Northern Grey Shrike) *Lanius excubitor*: A total of six sightings of nine individuals throughout the tour both in the Zemplén Hills and in the Hortobágy area.

#### CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: It was regularly encountered in the Zemplén Hills.

Common Magpie *Pica pica*: Very common throughout the tour especially in the Hortobágy area.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Up to 20 on the Hortobágy. Some of the birds we saw were of the eastern *sommeringi* subspecies.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: Daily sightings in good numbers.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*: Common bird throughout the tour.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: A total of 20 were seen in the Zemplén Hills. The most memorable was seeing them below us from Regéc Castle.

#### STURNIDAE

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: Just small numbers were noted as the huge October gatherings ended with the cold weather.

#### PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Very common throughout the tour.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: Very common throughout the tour, perhaps even more numerous than the previous species.

#### FRINGILLIDAE

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: Common, up to 20 in the Zemplén Hills.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*: About 10 were seen in the Zemplén Hills and two more in Debrecen Great Wood.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*: Common throughout the tour.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: Small numbers daily on the tour.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*: Daily in the Zemplén Hills but not big numbers.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: A big flock of 100 birds was seen in the Zemplén Hills near Erdőbénye.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: We heard them in the Zemplén Hills on our first morning walk but the only sighting was a single individual in Debrecen Great Wood.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: A few were seen both in the Zemplén foothills and on the Hortobágy.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: A fine male was seen well near Regéc in the Zemplén Hills and a few more in Debrecen Great Wood.

#### EMBERIZIDAE

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*: Flocks of up to 35 were seen on the open areas of the Zemplén foothills and on the Hortobágy.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*: Up to 15 daily on the Hortobágy.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: Just two were seen on the Hortobágy when we were watching Great Bustards.

## MAMMALS

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: One was seen on the Hortobágy.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*: Two were seen in the Hidegpatak of the Zemplén Hills.

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*: Up to 12 daily on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*: One seen in Debrecen Great Wood.

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*: Two were seen on the Hortobágy.

Noctule Bat *Nyctalis noctula*: Four migrating individual were seen in the Zemplén Hills.

## APPENDIX: overall results of the 'Bird of the tour' vote

<i>Species</i>	<i>Points</i>	<i>Nominations</i>
1st Ural Owl	58	8
2nd Red-breasted Goose	50	7
2nd Lesser White-fronted Goose	50	7
4th White-backed Woodpecker	30	4
5th Common Crane	26	4



Red-breasted Geese, Hortobágy (tour participant Hugh Gallagher)



Cranes flying to roost, Hortobágy (János Oláh)



Ural Owl, Zemplén Hills (tour participant Hugh Gallagher)



Long-eared Owl, Hortobágy (János Oláh)



Bearded Tit, Hortobágy (János Oláh)



Hungarian 'puszta' feeling with csíkos, three-catilever well and Hungarian Grey Cattles



Grey-headed Woodpecker, Zemplén Hills (tour participant Hugh Gallagher)



White-tailed Eagle, Hortobágy (tour participant Hugh Gallagher)