

HUNGARY & SLOVAKIA

Hortobágy, Zemplén &
Ore Mountains

Sat 2nd-Sat 9th May 2015



*Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): A female **Red-footed Falcon** looks out from its nestbox... • while the male **Red-footed Falcon** perches in a bare tree looking on • A tight squeeze as a **Tengmalm's Owl** pops its head out of its hole • A fine view in the daytime of a roosting **Nightjar** • A sleeping **Long-eared Owl** near the hotel at Hortobagy • **Squacco Herons** are always a crown-pleaser © Tour leader Colin Bushell, Limosa*

**report compiled by tour leader:
Colin Bushell**

TRIP DIARY

Tour Leaders: Zoli Ecsedi & Colin Bushell

with Steve Cooper, Brian & Ann Hague, Lesley Knight, Mac Mackereth, Sheila Nash, Linda Pridmore, David Richardson, Jane Uttley, Ros Wade, Grahame Walshe and Simon Yates

Our superbly situated hotels in Hungary enabled us to see birds from the minute we stepped outside the door. Singing Wood Warblers and Nightingales in Hortobagy with Little Bittern, Savi's and River Warblers a stone's throw away in nearby wetlands. In the Zemplén Hills we were treated to Golden Orioles from the veranda while Hawfinches flew overhead with their emphatic 'tipp' call. In Slovakia our hotel in being surrounded by coniferous forests had less to offer for 'doorstep birding', but quality in the form of Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, Tengmalm's Owl and Nutcracker were not far away!

We enjoyed favourable weather in both countries. After a wet first afternoon (when we still saw Saker) days were generally fine and not too hot, although the afternoons sometimes became a little humid at times.

Highlights

- Saker making a late show on our first afternoon's birding and then two hunting Susliks while we watched Red-footed Falcons in a breeding colony.
- Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes in summer plumage side-by-side with three 'marsh tern' species dipping over the fishpond.
- The successful quest for Great Snipe in Hortobagy with Jack and Common Snipes seen for comparison.
- Ural Owl in the canopy of beautiful Oak woodland with Collared Flycatchers and Wood Warblers singing in the background.
- Black and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers seen in Debrecen Great Wood – our first woodland birding of the trip.
- A pair of White-backed Woodpeckers at a nest site with European Honey-buzzard and Goshawk overhead at times.
- Seeing Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker and Tengmalm's Owl in the Slovakian forests of the Ore Mountains.
- Watching Hawfinches and Golden Orioles every morning in the Zemplén Hills.

Saturday 2 May

This morning most of the group met at T3 London Heathrow for the British Airways mid-morning flight to Budapest. Check-in went smoothly and after just over two hours in the air we landed in a damp and cloudy Budapest just after midday local time. Our expert local guide Zoli and Barna (our driver) were there to meet us as we exited a rather chaotic baggage collection area, but in no time we were on the road.

We headed east on the highway in very wet conditions indeed but at least a few birds appeared as we took our packed lunches on the go. Most were familiar to us like the Magpies, Lapwings and Kestrels, but Crested Lark and Hooded Crows suggested we were somewhere other than East Anglia as the fen-like landscape and typically British weather indicated! Nightingales sang from the small copses by the garage where we had a quick comfort stop and a male Golden Oriole perched in a bare tree briefly before diving into the cover of Poplars. Marsh Harriers became more frequent with Whiskered Terns, Black-tailed Godwits and Ruff seen on some of the floods.

We were not too far from our destination of Nádudvar when we stopped for some birding on the plains just outside town. Zoli has a Saker Falcon stake-out but there was no sign of the bird as we disembarked from the bus. Despite the drizzle and seemingly unfavourable conditions our birding tally was very good here at Puspokladny with male Red-backed Shrike, Black Redstart, a distant Red-footed Falcon and Cuckoos all seen. Then a Great Bustard flew across the horizon with our target bird – the Saker following soon after! The Saker perched on the pylon where we could watch it though the ‘scope at leisure.

Making our way into Nádudvar our check-in at the Hotel Trofea was delayed by a pair of roosting Long-eared Owls in an overhanging Willow over the lake, singing Great Reed Warbler, Black-crowned Night Heron and the sound of singing Wood Warbler and Nightingales in the grounds. 70 species on our first day on arriving in Hungary was a fine total for a ‘travel day’!

Sunday 3 May

What a day! Many of the group started birding early (some very early!) with the optional bird walk around the grounds of the hotel before breakfast. This proved very rewarding indeed with Long-eared Owls still active, Hawfinches, Golden Orioles, Savi’s and Wood Warblers and the Little Bittern on the lake all seen within minutes of leaving the hotel.

A stroll along a lane bordered by reeds and a belt of woodland produced Red-backed Shrikes and a very obliging River Warbler that sat on top of a small Willow, singing its heart out in the early morning sun. After spending some time watching the River Warbler through the ‘scope we headed back to the hotel for breakfast.

It was non-stop birding this morning with Icterine Warbler seen just before leaving the hotel for the fabulous Hortobágy National Park where our first stop was Magdolna where there was a colony of Red-footed Falcons nesting in False Acacia trees. They were using nest boxes in a Rookery but appeared to be tolerating their noisy neighbours. We spent quite some time appreciating these most graceful of falcons, catching insects on the wing, males interacting with females as they returned to the colony. But these beautiful falcons were not the only raptors on show this morning. A pair of Long-legged Buzzards quartered the meadows in search of the unfortunate Suslik (a type of ground squirrel frequenting open areas) that was also prey to the two Sakers marauding above. One of the Sakers made several stoops in an attempt to catch Susliks but to no avail. These powerful falcons put on quite a show for us, drifting off at times only to return a few minutes later but like the Long-legged Buzzards were out of luck this morning. Indeed the buzzards began harassing a Kestrel ‘skua-fashion’ in order to get a meal.

It was tough to leave but after several attempts to board the bus we were finally on the road again. Not for long though as a nearby pool held Wood Sandpiper and a Garganey to add to the Temminck’s Stints seen earlier. Heading into the village at Balmazújváros, we saw the first of our woodpeckers – a pair of Syrian at a nest hole in a low roadside tree stump. There was Lesser Whitethroat singing here too. Back out of town we checked out a Thrush Nightingale found earlier this morning but only a lucky few of the group saw this retiring bird. It wasn’t a waste of time here though with Spoonbills, Grey-headed and Blue-headed Wagtails on the drying marshes and great views of a Nightingale.

After a tasty Hungarian lunch in Hortobágy with White-tailed Eagle and a passing Roller as distractions, we were out across the plains to the fishponds at Fentes, primarily for Red-crested Pochard. They were indeed present but hardly got a mention due to the incredible

variety of birdlife at these ponds – Squacco Heron, Black Storks, Caspian Gulls, Purple Heron, Pygmy Cormorant, Bearded Tit and Marsh Warbler all seen within minutes of arriving. The ponds were full of birds – three species of ‘marsh terns’ and Little Gull dipping over the surface of the water, Ferruginous Ducks with the Common Pochards, summer-plumaged Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes all logged from the bank without wandering far from the bus at all.

Another wetland at Boca Lapoz was extremely good for birds with Marsh Sandpiper a good find as it mingled with Spotted Redshanks, some resplendent in their dusky summer dress. Black-winged Stilts, Avocets, Greenshanks and Little Ringed Plovers fed at the water’s edge and who knows what lurked with that distant flock of Dunlin frustratingly out of range even for our ‘scopes. A good selection of ducks included Gadwall, Teal and Eurasian Wigeon as a few flocks of Common Crane flew in unison over distant trees. Yellow-legged Gull was added to the day’s rapidly growing tally at the eleventh hour at this site before we moved on again.

Last stop on this very full day’s birding was in search of Great Bustard. A Hoopoe flew alongside the bus briefly and a Bluethroat sang from a bank of reeds before we eventually located our first ‘standing’ Great Bustard of the trip. We found six in all and although none of the closer birds performed their ‘turning inside out’ display we left for the hotel very satisfied indeed with 121 species recorded today!

Monday 4 May

Another busy day with most of the group out and around the hotel grounds birding before breakfast. A small arrival of migrants was evident with Pied Flycatchers most noticeable in the canopy this morning. Perhaps one of the morning’s highlights was the roosting Nightjar on a Willow branch over the lake - a good record for here, according to Zoli. It was hard to hear other species with the high density of singing Nightingales in the scrub and wooded edges of the lake but Wood Warblers and a few Lesser Whitethroats announced their presence. The Icterine Warbler remained hidden but two Hawfinches showed well with their sharp, emphatic ‘tipp’ call note.

The usual selection of raptors and open country passerines were seen on the drive to the Hortobágy Fishponds this morning and despite being the warmest morning of the trip thus far there was still plenty of bird activity. Once again Wood Warblers and Pied Flycatchers were moving through the wooded borders with the odd Lesser Whitethroat but the high pitch call of a Penduline Tit had us searching the Willows more thoroughly. A bird nest building was located and we enjoyed ‘scope views of this attractive little bird above its nest before our attention turned to the sky with two White-tailed Eagles overhead. Squacco Herons flew up from the ponds as distant Pygmy Cormorants passed by with a few pristine Blue-headed Wagtails dotted here and there over the meadows. Our first Willow Warbler of the tour was heard here too.

We took lunch at the excellent Andaháza Lake with Gabor (the warden) waiting to guide us around the wetland that was full of birds. Apart from the now ‘usual’ large groups of Ruff and smaller numbers of Dunlin, Temminck’s Stints and Ringed Plovers there were some lingering White-fronted Geese with the Greylags on the opposite side of the lake. A change of focus saw us crouching by a gap in the reeds watching for Little Crake and after a successful ‘pass’ across the gap by this little ‘skulker’ we moved on for Moustached Warbler. Despite it not being the optimum time to locate this early breeder we were incredibly lucky, seeing three or

four individuals, sometimes at close range thanks to Gabor's skill and technique. An unsuccessful search for Great Snipe resulted in adding Lesser Grey Shrike and Red-throated Pipit to the trip list and the afternoon finished very well with four Bitterns in the air at once!

Back at the hotel a Collared Flycatcher was seen briefly before it was time to set out again, this time returning to Balmazújváros. We searched for Scops Owl and heard one almost immediately as we arrived in the area. After a short time we located a bird close by, but still out of sight, only to see it fly across the canopy and out of view. Minutes later we were watching a fine Scops Owl staring at us from its nest hole. A superb end to another species-rich day with over 100 species recorded.

Tuesday 5 May

This morning there were fewer migrants around as we searched the hotel grounds for the last time before breakfast. There were of course the now customary Hawfinches plus River and Savi's Warblers to look at and the woodland borders of the lake were alive with the sound of Wood Warblers and Nightingales as usual. A female Redstart was a new bird for the trip however.

It was time to move on today so after breakfast we loaded up the bus for our second section of the trip to the Zemplén Mountains of northern Hungary. However we couldn't leave the Great Hungarian Plain without further stops, namely Vókonya where domestic breeds such as the 'woolly' Mangalica Pigs help to maintain the wetlands for birds. This is a prime habitat to search for Great Snipe and we were very fortunate indeed to encounter this retiring migrant bird on a couple of occasions during our birding session here. We even had the opportunity to compare this heavy wader (obvious white outer tail showing well in flight) with both Common and Jack Snipe this morning – an excellent tutorial indeed!

Other additions to the trip tally here included Tree and Tawny Pipits (the latter observed in its parachute display flight) and Yellowhammer which appears to be a forest edge species in this part of Hungary at least, rather than the farmland species we are used to at home. We returned to the forest strip where we tried for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker earlier, but could not improve on our 'heard only' status for this species. The Short-toed Treecreeper seen briefly in the canopy proved to be a valuable Hortobágy record though, as breeding was confirmed for the first time in the National Park by observers following up on our initial sighting of this bird.

We had lunch by the Tisza River, adding Serin to our trip list before driving towards Debrecen Great Wood for our last birding of the day. A different 'phase' of the trip started here with forest-based birding to the fore. Numbers of species fell but the quality remained very high indeed as Middle Spotted and Black Woodpeckers were seen in the first 15 minutes. A Green Woodpecker showed well and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and Collared Flycatcher could be heard in the depths of the old Oak woods.

Hitting the road once again we drove to Zemplén, checking into our comfortable hotel in Komlóska for the night. Once again we recorded over 100 species in a single day's birding in Hungary.

Wednesday 6 May

Waking up without the sounds of Nightingale songs was unusual this morning; instead they were replaced by singing Black Redstarts (common in the town of Komlóska) and Golden Orioles in the wooded Zemplén Hills above the hotel. Our early morning walk led to the

wooded slopes with Hawfinches ‘tipping’ from the treetops and a Stock Dove (scarce on this tour and the only likely place for this species) seen as we reached a Grey-headed Woodpecker’s territory. The Grey-headed Woodpecker showed, albeit rather briefly with a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker flying overhead shortly afterwards. A search of the nearby forest produced views of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker as well as a Green Woodpecker with a male Collared Flycatcher appearing as a bonus before we had to return to the hotel for breakfast.

We took breakfast in the fresh mountain air this morning with Black Redstarts for company. Then it was time to leave Komlóska, the tour taking us to Slovakia and the Ore Mountains for an overnight stay. We lingered in Hungary a little longer however, stopping first at Mád for the Eurasian Eagle Owls that breed in a quarry there. In the rather hazy distance we saw an adult and four young. European Bee-eater, Short-toed Eagle and Wood Lark were all new for the trip as we made our way along the track to the quarry. A Golden Eagle at nearby Gönc (while we were actually searching for Eastern Imperial Eagle!) was a welcome addition too.

Crossing the border into Slovakia we took the opportunity to break the journey at the first service station; a stop that proved most fortuitous indeed. Many Common Buzzards were now taking advantage of the hot weather, riding the thermals above the forested hillsides. Suddenly a larger bird appeared, obviously an *Aquila* eagle with Eastern Imperial the main suspect! We boarded the bus, heading a few hundred metres along the road where a better vantage point rewarded us with Eastern Imperial Eagle, two Montagu’s Harriers and a Black Stork with a White Stork together. The eagle even managed some diving display as another individual came into view, one or other of the birds available long enough for the whole group to see this rare raptor with the ‘scope.

Our first lunch in Slovakia was a picnic and Zoli had a wonderful site lined up in a deep canyon at Zádiel by some gallery woodland. A Peregrine (our only record of the trip) appeared over the ridge, followed by another Eastern Imperial Eagle. Then a superb European Honey-buzzard, displaying all the classic features of this attractive raptor, flew overhead not once, but twice for the whole group to appreciate.

Back on the bus and heading for the Ore Mountains a call of “Lesser Spotted Eagle” from the front of the vehicle had us all disembarking as fast as possible but only a few were fortunate enough to see the bird as it circled low over the forest before disappearing. Arriving at Regdova we walked a few forest tracks in hope of Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker but it was a little quiet in the mid-afternoon heat. Another European Honey-buzzard appeared, wing-clapping briefly before diving from view. Only a few Blackcaps and Wood Warblers broke the silence of the woods this afternoon. A Camberwell Beauty was a welcome distraction as the afternoon turned rather humid before it was time to leave for our hotel for the night at Stratena. As usual we enjoyed a fine meal reliving the day’s events and over 170 species seen so far on the trip!

Thursday 7 May

The cool Ore Mountain air made a change this morning as we boarded our bus for the short journey into the nearby hills for some pre-breakfast birding. Grey Wagtail and Willow Tit near the hotel were the first new birds for the tour today, but the cold morning air stifled bird activity a little on the hill and apart from a distant Hawfinch we saw very little.

Returning to the hotel in Stratena we packed the bus after breakfast and then made for the hills of the Nárdoný National Park near Regdova once again. A displaying Lesser Spotted Eagle performed in the early morning sunshine as we prepared to be away from our vehicle until midday at least. This time we climbed a little higher and had special assistance from a vehicle built for the tough terrain. Though less than luxurious it certainly did the job, climbing to 1100m and an area of clear fell created by severe storms in recent years. Playing a recording of Pygmy Owl attracted a tit flock, mostly Coal Tits but there were a few Cresteds too. Our time with these attractive little birds was curtailed by some drumming on a nearby hillside and our main target bird was seen early – Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker! This is the species we'd come to Slovakia for but a second drumming bird made life even more hectic for the group as it appeared to be a White-backed Woodpecker only metres away from the Three-toed! Quick scrutiny with the 'scopes confirmed that we had both our most wanted woodpeckers at once! The Eurasian Three-toed flew down the valley, continuing drumming lower and out of view, while the White-backed perched, but not in full view.

We continued to search for woodpeckers as we strolled downhill but to no avail. It was 'feast or famine' in these mainly coniferous forests, with quiet periods interrupted by a wave of birds every now and then. Bullfinch, Firecrest, Treecreeper and more Crested Tits were seen but the star bird was undoubtedly the Tengmalm's Owl at its nest hole in a Beech tree, poking its head out and posing nicely for the cameras. After another period of inactivity, a Nutcracker made an appearance, shortly followed by another as we travelled back to the village on the truck to meet up with our bus. It had been a very eventful but successful morning indeed. Once back in the comfort of our bus we drove for about an hour, taking lunch in the early afternoon sun with Whinchat and Tree Pipit on view.

We crossed back over the border into Hungary after a short stop for some roadside Fieldfares and with the rain pouring down we neared Gönc where we stopped to scan for raptors. Marsh and Montagu's Harriers quartered the crops and we could now see a female Eastern Imperial Eagle on the nest. The rain became heavier producing a magnificent rainbow as we headed towards Komlóska in the Zemplén Hills, where we would spend the rest of the tour. Golden Oriole and Short-toed Eagle from the balcony finished the day on a high note.

Friday 8 May

The early morning walk today saw us complete the 'woodpecker set': Wryneck being found singing from a patch of scrub not far from our hotel. The now customary Hawfinches, Black Redstarts and Golden Orioles all being appreciated before, or as we breakfasted, on the terrace.

The post breakfast excursion took us into the stunning sunlit Oak woodlands at Száva, not far from our base at Komlóska. We were in search of Ural Owl this morning and a track led us to a nestbox that was unfortunately deserted. Singing Wood Warblers and stunning Collared Flycatchers caught the eye from time to time in these beautiful forests, but we were indeed very lucky to find a superb Ural Owl roosting in the canopy; the alarm calls of Chaffinches leading us to its whereabouts. We viewed this most stately of owls for some time using the telescope in the morning sunshine, the Collared Flycatchers still showing intermittently until it was time to head for another site a short drive away.

At Szarkakút we bird walked in some more Oak woodland; noting Hoopoes and Whinchats sitting on the fence posts as we entered. Once again this woodland was alive with song and a particularly showy male Collared Flycatcher kept us busy before we entered the main arena

for the next attraction. A small clearing was the site of nesting White-backed Woodpeckers; a bird seen on our Slovakia adventure but only briefly and not by everybody. We were not kept waiting long before the pair appeared, one bird with food, and entered the nest hole. At one time both adults perched on the tree stump 'symmetrically' either side of the nest hole. What a treat to see this rare woodpecker so well at a safe distance without disturbing them. White-headed Long-tailed Tits passed behind us, Blackcaps sang their fluty songs and a Honey-buzzard drifted over the clearing. A Goshawk (new for the trip) appeared overhead just before we left to search for Tawny Owl and then enjoyed a picnic lunch overlooking the hillsides seeing Bee-eaters, Black Stork and even better views of a singing Wryneck than earlier this morning (including a pair at a nest hole in a wall).

By now it was hot and a little humid so some raptor scanning in open country around Erdőbénye was the order of the day. White-tailed and Short-toed Eagles were little more than hazy dots however so we tried nearby for Corn Crane, which we only heard but enjoyed European Honey-buzzard and Red-backed Shrikes before heading back to the hotel. This evening was very special indeed. A Pine Marten scurried across the road in front of the bus as we left the hotel and we were invited for wine tasting near Tokaj. Touring the cellars and sampling some fine wines of the region, as well as the best food of the tour, in delightful settings was indeed a fitting end to the last evening of the trip.

Saturday 9 May

It was our last full day of the trip and even after the previous night's festivities there were a few (admittedly fewer than usual!) takers for the early morning walk. The colder than usual air stifled bird activity somewhat and in the shade of the dense forest canopy there was little movement. Middle Spotted Woodpecker made a single appearance as we waited patiently watching the nest hole in a stump. Back at the hotel for breakfast there were the usual Golden Orioles on view across the meadow in the tall trees of the hill forest. As usual the 'scopes were set up and ready for anybody wishing to watch these enigmatic birds during breakfast.

Sadly we had to leave the Zemplén this morning but our early evening flight to London allowed us plenty of opportunities to sample the birdlife of this wonderful country one final time. Just outside the town of Olaszliska we watched Black Kites at a nest site with Hobby and a brief appearance of a Barred Warbler made up for the fact that the kite remained virtually static the whole time. A brief stop at our 'raptor watchpoint' at Erdőbénye once again produced great views of a perched Lesser Spotted Eagle as well as singing Tawny Pipit and Woodlark.

Reaching the River Bodrog floodplain we settled for a last extended birding session before lunch, taking a walk in the scrub and meadows there. Barred Warblers, sometimes in display songflight played rather hard to get, but capitulated eventually. Scolding Red-backed Shrikes, buzzing River Warblers, yet more Golden Orioles and some European Bee-eaters passing overhead kept our senses alive in the rather dull and humid conditions.

We took our final lunch of the tour in a local restaurant before driving to Budapest (just over two hour's journey) seeing Short-toed Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard and numerous Marsh Harriers along the route. At the airport we said our final farewells to Zoli, who had been a first class guide and Barna our driver. I can honestly say I have never felt safer with a driver abroad! I cannot thank our Hungarian hosts enough! We managed check-in for the British Airways flight to London with time to spare for a coffee or two before boarding the plane to Heathrow where the tour concluded with all our luggage accounted for.

My sincere thanks go out to the whole group. We enjoyed some incredible natural history experiences with great enthusiasm and a deal of good humour. I would like to wish everyone well and can't wait to team up again for another Limosa trip.

Colin Bushell

ANNOTATED CHECKLIST

(192 bird species recorded on the trip)

Quail *Perdix perdix*

Heard in Hortobágy and at Erdőbénye below Zemplén Hills.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Common and widespread in all lowland areas visited during the trip.

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Two individuals of the nominate race seen with Greylag Geese at Andaháza on 3rd. An unexpected appearance on our list for sure!

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Seen most days but more common in Hortobágy.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Recorded on five days on large water bodies.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Seen in Hortobágy on two dates.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Seen in Hortobágy on three dates.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Small numbers in Hortobágy on three dates.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Seen every day of the trip. Mainly in small numbers, only numerous in Hortobágy.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Seen on three dates but only numerous on one of the lakes in Hortobágy.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Small numbers of this attractive duck seen in Hortobágy on three dates.

Teal *Anas crecca*

Seen on three dates. Quite numerous on one grazing lake in Hortobágy.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A drake with Mallards on a flood between Budapest and Nádudvar on the first day of the tour and small flocks on fishponds of Fentes on 3rd.

Common Pochard *Aythya farina*

Quite numerous on Fentes fishponds. Small numbers elsewhere in Hortobágy.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Nice to see a few of this endearing duck on the fishponds at Fentes in Hortobágy on 3rd and smaller numbers the following day at Andaháza.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

A smart summer plumage bird on the Fentes fishponds on 3rd.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Several on Fentes fishponds. Small numbers elsewhere in Hortobágy and a couple seen as we drove by a large lake somewhere in Slovakia!

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

A bird in summer plumage on the Fentes fishponds on 3rd.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Two at Fentes fishponds on 3rd then several sightings over the next three days, including a few in Slovakia.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Common and widespread; seen every day with many nesting in towns.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Seen at a few sites in Hortobágy.

Bittern *Botaurus stellarus*

Great views of four birds at Andaháza on 3rd where one had been 'singing' previous to our sightings.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

One heard on the lake in the grounds of the Hotel Trofea on our first afternoon and subsequently seen on every morning we bird watched the hotel grounds.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

One over the lake in the grounds of Hotel Trofea on the first day and seen here most mornings of our stay.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Seen at two sites in Hortobágy.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Small numbers seen on most dates of the trip.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Several around the fishponds at Fentes on 3rd and many the following day at Andaháza.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

A few individuals seen most days.

Little Egret *Egretta garza*

Small numbers seen every day in Hortobágy.

Pygmy Cormorant *Microcarbo pygmeus*

Many around the Fentes fishponds on 3rd with smaller numbers elsewhere in Hortobágy.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

A few at Andaháza.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Common and widespread with daily sightings.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

One at Púspökladány as we scanned for Saker on our first afternoon. Extremely good views of the birds around the colony in Hortobágy at Magdolna the following day. Surely one of the trip highlights, even on the first full day? A few individuals seen elsewhere in Hortobágy as we travelled around the park.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

One seen from the bus shortly after leaving the outskirts of Budapest on arrival in Hungary. We had to wait until our last morning for the next sighting at Olaszliska as we waited for Barred Warbler to appear.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

One in the gorge at Zádiel on our first afternoon in Slovakia.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*

A male finally came in on our first afternoon of the trip at Púspökladány. Two birds watched hunting for Suslik in Hortobágy the following day performed superbly, soaring for a while before stooping almost to head-height and at one time heading straight for the group as we stood spellbound.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

One or two daily in Hortobágy with just one, very distant bird in the Zemplén Hills on 8th.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

This 'snake-eagle' was seen on four dates and mainly in Zemplén where one was even seen from the hotel.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

The final raptor of the tour! A nesting pair was seen at Olaszliska on the final morning.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Fairly common in suitable fen-like plains east of Budapest, Hortobágy and the plains below the Zemplén. Fewer seen in Slovakia.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

Several seen during the tour including some atypically high up, circling around other raptors such as Eastern Imperial Eagles!

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Two seen in Slovakia.

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

One soared overhead briefly as we watched White-backed Woodpeckers in the Zemplén on 8th.

European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Two seen in Slovakia included a 'wing-clapping' individual in the Ore Mountains. Another individual appeared while we watched the White-backed Woodpeckers in the Zemplén, just after the Goshawk appeared!

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Small numbers seen every day.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Some super studies of this immaculate raptor in Hortobágy on 3rd and one seen as we drove back to the airport in Budapest on the final day.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina*

After a barren start to the trip we did well for this species towards the end of the tour. Our first appeared only briefly over the forested hills as we drove into Slovakia on 6th but we all enjoyed great views of this species in the Zemplén Hills, including a perched bird.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

Two seen as we travelled over the Hungarian border into Slovakia on 6th. Returning to Hungary we watched a distant female on a nest in the Zemplén and this species became one of the final birds of the tour before arriving in Budapest.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

One seen in the Zemplén at Gönc as we searched for the above species on 6th.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

One in flight at Púspökladány just before we saw the Saker on the first day. Not a bad start but we improved on this with six birds seen on the ground the following afternoon at Nagyiváni Puszta, including a male in full display.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

One at Andaháza on 4th.

Little Crake *Porzana parva*

One seen well as it scurried across a little channel in the reeds on a couple of occasions at Andaháza on 4th.

Corn Crake *Crex crex*

Heard at Erdöbénye on 8th.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Seen at a few locations in Hortobágy.

Coot *Fulica atra*

A few on wetlands in and around Hortobágy.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Several flocks of up to 50 birds in Hortobágy on 3rd and 4th. Mostly seen in flight but a few on the ground, including some displaying birds.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

A few at Boca Lapoz, Andaháza and Vókonya in Hortobágy.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Small numbers around Hortobágy 3rd – 5th.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Seen every day but not particularly numerous at any sites.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

A few small flocks were seen at Andaháza on 4th.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Small numbers on several wetlands in Hortobágy 2nd – 5th.

Great Snipe *Gallinago media*

One seen twice in flight at Vókonya on 5th thanks to Zoli's hard work and diligence.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

First recorded during the trip in Hortobágy on 4th but the following day we could compare them with Great and Jack Snipes at Vókonya.

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*

A couple seen as we searched for Great Snipe at Vókonya on 5th. Very nice to do 'the snipe hat-trick' on this tour.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Many seen during the first four days of the tour in Hortobágy.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Two at Andaháza were the only birds of the tour.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Small parties of this graceful wader, most in summer plumage at Boca Lapos, Andaháza and Vókonya.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Small numbers at Hortobágy.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

A few in Hortobágy on Boca Lapos and Andaháza.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

One, maybe two birds on Boca Lapos in Hortobágy.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

A flock of 15 flew over us at Púspökladány. Small numbers in Hortobágy on suitable pools.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Small numbers in Hortobágy.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Small numbers on most suitable wetlands in Hortobágy.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Large flocks at Boca Lapos and Andaháza evaded close scrutiny for other species.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Seen every day in Hortobágy including some displaying males.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Small numbers seen daily in Hortobágy.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

One or two in Hortobágy at Boca Lapos and Andaháza on 3rd and 5th.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

One at Boca Lapos on 3rd.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

A few at various sites in Hortobágy 3rd – 5th.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

On pools as we headed east of Budapest on our first afternoon of the tour and regularly seen thereafter in Hortobágy.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

Perhaps the least common of the ‘marsh terns’ seen during our stay in Hortobágy. Brilliant views at the fishponds at Fentes on 3rd in particular.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

This exquisite tern was seen on three dates in Hortobágy over many marshes and fishponds.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

A pair frequented the lake outside our hotel in Hortobágy.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Seen every day.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

The only site we saw any was in the Zemplén Hills including the hotel area at Komlóska.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Small numbers seen daily.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Small numbers recorded daily.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Seen daily throughout the tour.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Common and ubiquitous throughout the trip.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

An adult seen at Szarkakút as well as a chick in the nest box there.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*

One found in the canopy of the beautiful Oak woodlands of Száva. A word of thanks to those Chaffinches continuously mobbing this bird, allowing us to locate one of the birds of the trip!

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*

Good views of an adult and four chicks in a quarry at Mád on 6th.

Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus*

One in a nest hole on our full day in Slovakia at Regdova on 7th.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

One at Púspökladány on the first afternoon of the tour.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Two at a roost in Willows over the lake outside Hotel Trofea and seen most mornings of our stay there.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

A roosting migrant bird on an overhanging Willow branch by the lake at the Hotel Trofea on 4th.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Small numbers seen on four dates during the tour.

European Roller *Coracias garrulous*

Apparently arriving in Hungary during our tour; we saw one or two individuals in Hortobágy on 3rd and 4th.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

A few seen in the Zemplén Hills during the last few days of the tour.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

A few seen but by no means numerous and often seen from the bus.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Wryneck was the last of ten woodpecker species seen on the tour when we found singing birds near the hotel in Komlóska on 8th. Even better views were obtained of a pair nesting in a hole in a building later that same morning.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor*

Seen briefly in the Zemplén Hills on 5th and on our last morning on the Bodrog floodplain.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus media*

One in the Debrecen Great Wood and one at a nest in a stump in the Zemplén the last morning.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopus leucotos*

One made a brief appearance at Regdova on our full day in Slovakia. Most of the team saw it through the 'scope before it disappeared, but it was a relief to see this species well in Zemplén at the end of the tour.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopus syriacus*

Regularly encountered near the Hotel Trofea and a few other localities in Hortobágy where we saw a pair at a nest.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*

Seen and heard in Debrecen Great Wood and in the Zemplén Hills in Hungary. Also present in Regdova in Slovakia but not searched for there.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*

One heard drumming and then seen well through 'scopes in Regdova on 7th. One of the main reasons for our excursion into Slovakia and well worth the effort!

Black Woodpecker *Drycopus maritus*

The excitement as a this huge woodpecker flew into view after only a few minute's searching the Debrecen Great Wood was electric! Another performed well in the Zemplén as we looked for Ural Owl on 8th. Also seen briefly at other Zemplén sites.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

One showed well in Debrecen Great Wood on 5th. Heard in the Zemplén Hills.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

We were fortunate enough to have a bird on territory walking distance from our hotel at Komlóska. On one fine morning it performed beautifully for excellent 'scope views.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

This handsome species was seen every day in small numbers. It was great to have these as 'garden birds' near our hotels in Hungary.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

One at Andaháza on 4th.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Common in the broad-leaved woodlands of Hungary. It always surprises me how tricky a bright yellow male can be to see, but it's true! We had our best views from the breakfast table at the hotel in Komlóska where we overlooked the forested Zemplén Hills.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

A few seen almost daily during the tour.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Small numbers daily.

Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Two of these enigmatic birds seen near Regdova in Slovakia on 7th.

Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

Regularly seen in Hortobágy only. Small numbers elsewhere on the trip.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Small numbers seen every day.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Rather common and widespread.

Raven *Corvus corax*

Small numbers seen every day during the trip.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Recorded in small numbers in Debrecen Great Wood and the Zemplén Hills.

Willow Tit *Poecile montana*

One near the hotel in Stratena, Slovakia.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Only really common in the Ore Mountains of Slovakia. One in Hortobágy on our first full day in Hungary was apparently a local rarity!

Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*

It was great to see a few of this delightful species in the Slovakian Ore Mountains.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Small numbers daily throughout the trip.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Seen every day but maybe not as common as Great Tit.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

One at a nest watched through 'scopes at Hortobágy fishponds on 4th.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Small numbers in Hortobágy.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen daily and very numerous.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Common and widespread.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Most frequently seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Common and widespread in open country throughout the tour.

Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*

Common in open country habitats.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*

It was a treat to hear and see this fabulous songster on two days in the Zemplén Hills.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

One heard at Vókonya on 5th was our only record.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

Seen at the lake outside the Hotel Trofea every morning. One individual in particular gave great views as it 'reeled' from a reedy fringe of the lake.

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*

One singing a short walk from the Hotel Trofia in Hortobágy allowed excellent 'scope views in the early morning. Many 'buzzing' at the Bodrog floodplain on the final morning.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

Singing at a few sites in Hortobágy and in the Zemplén. Birds in the reed bed on the lake outside the Hotel Trofea were particularly confiding at times.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

At least four seen at Andaháza.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Seen on four dates in Hortobágy.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Small numbers in Hortobágy.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Only one seen well enough to confirm identity - at the Fentes fishponds in Hortobágy on 3rd.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

Individuals around the Hotel Trofea and near Vókonya in Hortobágy but hard to see well.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

A few seen and heard in the Zemplén Hills.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Very few seen or heard and mainly in the same areas as the above species.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Common and ubiquitous wherever suitable habitat existed. Great to hear these in the sun-drenched Beech and Oak woodlands of the hills on this trip.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Common and widespread.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

One seen briefly as we watched Black Kites at Olaszliska on 9th. Later the same morning we watched singing birds (some in display flights) at the Bodrog floodplain which gave everybody a chance to see these large *Sylvias*.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Seen or heard most days but nowhere numerous.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

A few individuals seen on just four dates during the tour.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Seen at fishponds in Hortobágy on 3rd and 4th.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

A few of these 'jewels of the forest' seen in the Regdova forests of Slovakia.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Many in the Slovakian conifer forests on 6th and 7th.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Surprisingly scarce and only common in the clear fell areas of the Slovakian Ore Mountains.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Seen in Debrecen Great Wood and the Zemplén Hills in Hungary.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Seen in Regdova on 7th.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*

A bird located near Vókonya was a rare record from Hortobágy apparently. Others seen and heard in the Zemplén.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Seen every day.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

A few seen daily.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Five or six at one of our roadside stops near Sacá as we travelled back to Hungary on 7th.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Recorded every day.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Scarce (seen on just two dates) and only really numerous in the Ore Mountains of Slovakia.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Nowhere numerous but more readily seen in the Ore Mountains in Slovakia and the Zemplén Hills in Hungary.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Very common in all scrubby habitats of Hortobágy. Less common in the Zemplén Hills.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*

One seen by a few team members at Balmazús Varos on 3rd.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

Best seen in Hortobágy (even a few near the hotel) but also in the Zemplén.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochrurus*

A cracking male at Púspökladány on the first afternoon but eclipsed by the number of birds in the Zemplén Hills later in the trip.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

A female in wooded grounds at the Hotel Trofea on 5th was our only record.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

A few seen on four dates.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Seen daily in open country.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A few seen in Hortobágy on 3rd were the only birds of the trip.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Seen around the grounds of the Hotel Trofea in Hortobágy every morning but scarce in the Zemplén.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Found in small numbers in the woodland fringes near our hotel in Hortobágy.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*

One in the Trofea grounds in Hortobagy was the only one we saw until we reached Debrecen and the Zemplén Hills where they are readily found.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

One on the river near Stratena in Slovakia was our sole record.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Seen every day.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montana*

Seen every day.

Blue-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava flava*

Many seen in the Hortobágy wetlands.

Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava thunbergi*

A few seen in Hortobágy on 3rd but probably under-recorded on our trip.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

One outside the hotel at Stratena in Slovakia on 7th.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Seen daily in small numbers.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

After a few tantalising flight views in Hortobágy we finally saw this species well in the Zemplén Hills with a perched bird 'scoped on 8th.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

A few birds seen in Hortobágy and the Zemplén Hills.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

First seen at Andaháza but typically only in flight as they flew off calling. Better views were obtained on 5th at Vókonya with one observed along the track between the lakes there.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common. Seen daily.

Serin *Serinus serinus*

Not common in Hortobágy where we only saw one at Tiszacsece on 5th where we had lunch before heading into the Zemplén Hills where it is more numerous.

Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Seen daily.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Common.

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Seen on four dates in Hortobágy and Zemplén Hills but nowhere numerous.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

One seen above Regdova in Slovakia was our only record during the trip.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

What a treat to see so many of these! Easily seen near the hotels in Hungary and flying over nearby wooded valleys. Just the one in Slovakia.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Common in open country.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Appears to be a forest edge bird in Hungary where it was frequently heard and seen.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

A few in the marshes of Hortobágy.

MAMMALS**European Hare** *Lepus europaeus***Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus***Wild Boar** *Sus scrofa***Red Squirrel** *Sciurus vulgaris***Suslik** *Citellus citellus***Pine Marten** *Martes martes***Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes***BUTTERFLIES****Wood White** *Leptidea sinapis***Painted Lady** *Vanessa cardui***Red Admiral** *Vanessa atalanta***European Peacock** *Aglais io***Brimstone** *Gonepteryx rhamni***Camberwell Beauty** *Nymphalis antiopa***Orange-tip** *Anthocharis cardamines***Small Heath** *Coenonympha pamphilus***Scarce Swallowtail** *Iphiclides podalirius***Pale Clouded Yellow** *Colias hyale***Hungarian Glider** *Neptis rivularis***ODONATA****Blue-tailed Damselfly** *Ischnura elegans***Four-spotted Chaser** *Libellula quadrimaculata*

OTHER WILDLIFE

Fire Salamander *Salamandra salamandra*

Yellow-bellied Toad *Bombina variegata*

European Green Lizard *Lacerta viridis*

Edible Frog *Pelophylax esculentus*