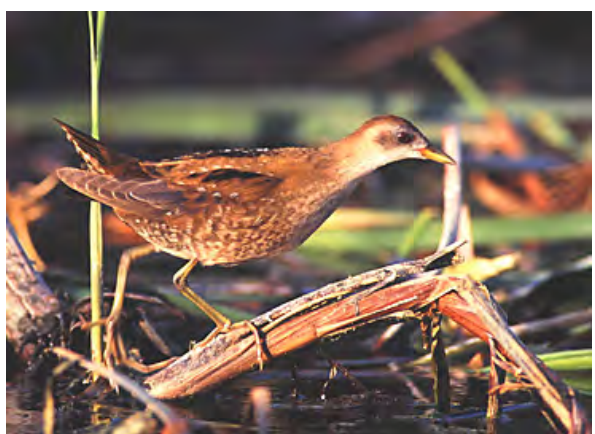


Hungary:

Late Summer in the Hortobagy

Sat 20th-Sat 27th Aug 2011



Photos (clockwise, from top left): Hortobagy highlights... juvenile **Red-footed Falcon** • **Saker** • **Juvenile Dotterel** • **Common Cranes** • **juvenile Little Crane** • **Broad-billed Sandpiper** © kind permission Janos Olah, and Agoston Pacsz (Cranes).

report compiled by tour leader:
Gabor Simay

Trip Diary

Tour Leaders: Gabor Simay, and Zoli Petrovics (Zemplén)
with Malcolm Smith !

Late August in Hungary is among the most exciting periods of the year, when one can find a wonderful mix of breeding and migrating birds, plus lots of specialities such as Great Bustard, Little Crane, Dotterel and Broad-billed Sandpiper. This year, we experienced unusually hot weather, and thus had to concentrate mainly on birding in the mornings and evenings. The tour was also unusual in that a run of unexpected cancellations meant that it set a new *Limosa* record, being both the smallest ever group size (1) and the first trip to run with more guides than participants!! Despite the heat, we recorded an excellent tally 174 different species during the week.

We started our tour in the Zemplén Hills, where we stayed in the small village of Komlóska, surrounded by wooded slopes and a peaceful rural landscape. This region is world famous for its white wine and we also had the opportunity to visit a cellar and taste the legendary Tokaj wine. The birdlife is also very rich, both in the hills and on the surrounding floodplain of the Bodrog river. The timing of our tour was perfect for raptors and other soaring birds, and we enjoyed amazing views of **Eastern Imperial** and **Lesser Spotted Eagles**, along with big flocks of migrating **White Storks** and many encounters with **Black Storks**.

After the three days in the Zemplén, we continued the tour in the Hortobágy, spending four nights there in a small hotel near Nádudvar. The Hortobágy is one of the most famous birdwatching destinations in Europe. Its extensive grasslands, together with the many different types of wetland, create an ideal bird environment. We focused our attention mainly on the natural wetlands of the “puszta” – as the Hungarian steppe-like grassland is called – and the drained and half-drained fishponds which act as a magnet to thousands of waterbirds. We also spent some time visiting the short grass, sheep-grazed areas, searching for **Dotterels**, and checking the southern puszta for **Great Bustards**, one of the flagship species of the area.

Day 1, Sat 20th Aug.

After arriving early afternoon at Budapest Liszt Ferenc Airport, we began the three-hour drive towards the Zemplén Hills. Our first stop was at a petrol station beside the motorway. Here, while we had our packed lunch, we found a couple of **Crested Larks**, a typical bird of the concrete parking plots. As we finished our lunch, we noticed a big bird sitting on the top of a distant pylon. It proved to be an adult **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, which, shortly after we noticed it, dropped down and flew directly towards us. Suddenly, we were enjoying very close flight views of this magnificent bird! Next stop was a small grassland, close to the Zemplén Hills. Here we found our first Red-backed Shrikes and another, more distant, Eastern Imperial Eagle. We drove on to our hotel and checked in. Later, we walked out into the nearby forest where we recorded our first **Black Woodpecker** and a family of three **Short-toed Eagles**, with two adults and a juvenile. It was a great start to the coming week!

Day 2, Sun 21st Aug.

In the morning, we picked up Zoltán (Zoli) Petrovics, our expert local guide in the Zemplén Hills. We drove a circuit around the western part of the hills today, where our first raptors were two very close **Honey Buzzards**. Later we saw almost a dozen more. As we drove out of one particular valley, we noticed a big flock of migrant **White Storks**, emerging from their night roost and starting to ‘thermal’ right in front of us. We counted no less than 205 birds! Among them, we also spotted three Imperial Eagles, an adult and two first year birds. We again had fantastic views of this species. Later, we came across a further 125 White Storks. In the woods, we heard a couple of woodpeckers and saw our first **Grey-headed Woodpecker**. Driving to the southern part of the hills, we came upon two rather distant **Lesser Spotted Eagles**, and continuing further, found three different birds hunting in a small field, side-by-side and very close to us indeed. While we were watching them hunting, the first of 12 **Black Storks** for the day appeared ahead. Beside the Bodrog River, we added two immense **White-tailed Eagles**, the first of eight birds to be recorded during the day. Once, there were four birds - two adults and two juveniles - soaring together above a hill. It was a brilliant day for raptors!

Day 3, Mon 22nd Aug.

This morning we tried to find the resident Eagle Owls, but despite looking hard, we drew a blank. Perhaps, in the unusually hot conditions, they had deserted their usual roosting areas in the quarries and moved to the shade of the nearby forests. From here, we moved on to the floodplains of the Bodrog River, just south of the hills. Here we found at least 25 **Black Storks**, a nice adult **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Hobby** and a soaring **Black Kite**. On the wires, migrating flocks of colourful **Bee-eaters** were resting, and we chanced upon our first flock of **Common Cranes**, too. We took lunch in a nice and shady picnic place in the forest, where we also managed

to find **Middle Spotted, Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers**. In the evening, we went to a family-run wine cellar and enjoyed a wonderful selection of the best Tokaj wines - and a fine dinner as well!

Day 4, Tue 23rd Aug.

We spent our final morning in the wooded Zemplén Hills exploring a lovely forested valley near Erdőbénye. We saw some **Honey Buzzards** overhead, and many **Wood Warblers** and **Pied Flycatchers** in the trees. While we were walking a few hundred metres, we were treated to very good views of **Middle Spotted, Lesser Spotted and Grey-headed Woodpeckers**. After this, we started the drive towards a totally different habitat: the vast, flat grasslands of the Hortobágy National Park. Along the way, we made a stop near Debrecen, where we had chance to look for **Short-toed Treecreepers**, and enjoyed very close views of this hard-to-identify species. Soon after lunch we visited some areas a little to the south of the Hortobágy. Here, at a small muddy patch, we came across our first wader species - among them many **Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank** and also a juvenile **Water Rail**. Then we went to a large grassland, where we soon found our target species: two female **Great Bustards**, which were walking very close to us considering the usual shyness of this species. Fortunately, we had good cover behind some bushes, so did not disturb the birds at all. We also encountered our first **Purple Herons** and **Roller**. In the evening, we visited a traditional **Red-footed Falcon** roost site. Although there were plenty of falcons, this year was definitely not the best for the falcons in this region – curiously, despite the fact that they had enjoyed a very good breeding season. It was dark by the time we arrived at the Trófea Hotel, where we spent our next four nights.

Day 5, Wed 24th Aug.

We began the early morning in the hotel garden, seeing **Blackcap, Lesser and Common Whitethroats**, and **Garden Warbler** side-by-side. After breakfast, we visited a big flooded area near Tetétlen, and the small ponds at Kaba. Here we recorded two **Glossy Ibises** (a scarce bird away from its breeding grounds), all three species of marsh terns (**Whiskered, Black and White-winged Black**), **Little Gull, Garganey** and **Bittern**, plus at least 30 **Black-necked Grebes** and some beautiful **Ferruginous Ducks**. We had a nice party of **Penduline Tits** and then tried our luck in an open marshy area, where there were plenty of suitable areas for crakes to emerge from cover to feed. We chose the site very well, as we had extremely lucky to see four juvenile Little Crakes close and walking about in the open, together with three Spotted Crakes (among them one adult), and a nice adult Water Rail, too!

Next, we moved to an area for the two characteristic raptors of the Hortobágy. The first was easily found: two magnificent **Saker Falcons** were sitting on the top of a pylon close to the road and we enjoyed good views of this powerful and huge falcon. A bit further, perched on a small bush, we found the second species: a fine adult **Long-legged Buzzard**. At first, the buzzard was a bit far away but on walking a few hundred metres towards it, we managed to gain amazing close views. We also found some **Long-eared Owls**, which were tame enough to walk within 5 metres and photograph them. At the end of the day, we drove out to a more remote fishpond, where we found an adult **Caspian Tern** and our first **Pygmy Cormorants**. Not far away, on a freshly ploughed field, we added a superb adult and a juvenile **Collared Pratincole**, and a **Tawny Pipit** as well.

Day 6, Thu 25th Aug.

We left the hotel earlier this morning so as to reach the ideal habitat for **Dotterels** before the day got really hot and the birds would settle down and hide themselves away. It was a long drive through the grassland, travelling from one farm building to another until we reached the best site, where the grass was heavily grazed by a large flock of sheep. Here, we immediately found a cracking flock of 29 Dotterels – among them 3 juveniles and the rest still in breeding plumage. The birds let us walk within 30 metres, for fantastic and prolonged views. Here we saw also **Stone-curlew** and **Short-toed Eagle**. In a small bushy area, we picked up a migrating **Wryneck** and there was also an **Icterine Warbler**.

After adding two **Red-footed Falcons**, a **Roller** and two **Montagu's Harriers**, we then drove to the central area of the National Park. In the village, we found a **Syrian Woodpecker** and then stopped for lunch at a picnic site and visited the nearby ringing centre. Here we saw a first-year male **Bluethroat**, along with many other more common species. We visited a shallow, open pond to the north of the great Hortobágy Fishpond. Here - among many different duck species - we watched a juvenile **Red-necked Phalarope**; it was so delightful as this tiny wader was swimming and feeding in its characteristic manner. From here, we visited the famous Kondás pond which – as it was half drained – was full of birds. Many **Spoonbills, Common Cranes** and **Avocets** were feeding and resting in the deeper water. Among plenty of gulls, we found a juvenile **Mediterranean Gull**. On the mudflats, there were **Curlew Sandpipers, Little and Temminck's Stints**, and also a **Knot**; the latter is only a scarce migrant to Hungary. Our main target was Broad-billed Sandpiper but, unfortunately, just as the leader picked one out, it immediately walked behind a reedy island and was never seen again!

Day 7, Fri 26th Aug.

This morning, we started our birdwatching at the Hortobágy Fishpond. We didn't have to walk any further than the first two ponds, however, as they were both drained and the exposed mudflats had attracted thousands of birds. Among the ducks, we found our first **Pintail**. In the wader flocks, we could detect many different species and finally picked out two **Broad-billed Sandpipers**. Though they were not especially close, thanks to the good light conditions we had good enough views of this so special species. Among the many **Spotted Redshanks**, we also found a solitary **Marsh Sandpiper** (already in winter plumage), and in the surrounding trees - to our surprise - a **Black Woodpecker**! Out on the shallow water, where the Water Buffalo graze, there were plenty of **Squacco Herons** and **Pygmy Cormorants**. After lunch, we visited the Virágoskút Fishponds, where we saw a **White-tailed Eagle** (which was seen also in the morning and previous day as well), **Black Stork** and thousands of **Greylag Geese**. We found a spot where most the waders could be seen at very close range and in beautiful light - including a very close **Broad-billed Sandpiper**. In the evening, we again visited the Tetlten wetlands, where we had close views of small party of **Temminck's Stints** and **Little Gulls**.

Day 8, Sat 27th Aug.

On our last day we drove to a big bulrush and reed-covered marsh as we wanted to secure some good views of **Bearded Tits**, a species which had been heard many times but eluded us again and again. Within a few minutes we located a pair which was friendly enough to perch on the top of a nearby reed and allow us plenty of time to appreciate their beauty. We had some good views of a pair of **Montagu's Harrier**, too. We then paid a final visit to the Hortobágy Fishpond - where we located most of the usual wader, heron and duck species - before making the two-and-a-half hour drive back to Budapest Airport at the end of a hot but very successful bird and species rich trip.

Gabor Simay

Systematic List of Species

(A total of 174 species was recorded by the group. Of these, 3 were heard only).

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Seen almost every day, mainly in small groups beside the roads.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

It was heard a few occasions, both in the Zemplén and the Hortobágy.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Very common in the Hortobágy region, while we saw them in small parties around the Zemplén Hills as well. These birds were of the eastern race *rubrirostris* with pink bills. In some of the fishponds, more than 2000 birds were gathering during the day to drink.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Small groups were seen in some of the visited fishponds.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Only one individual was seen on the 25th in the half-drained Kondás pond within the Hortobágy Fishpond system.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Observed at different fishponds, but most numerous at Hortobágy Fishpond, especially at the Kondás pond.

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Seen only one day, near Tetétlen at the big flooded area.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Seen daily in big numbers in the Hortobágy area, but small flocks were also seen around the Zemplén Hills.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Recorded most days in the Hortobágy area in several fishponds and at Rókás and Tetétlen wetlands.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

Just a single bird was seen at Hortobágy Fishpond, on the 26th.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Recorded regularly in big waterfowl flocks, but most – about 50 individuals – were seen at Tetétlen flooded area

Teal *Anas crecca*

Recorded every day in big numbers from 23rd to 27th, but numerous - more than 1000 individuals – were seen at Tetétlen flooded area

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

About 50 were seen at Kaba on 24th but a few more individuals were seen elsewhere in the Hortobágy.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

We saw about 15 birds on the 24th at different sites (mainly at Kaba) but seen in lower numbers in other days as well.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Seen only on the 24th at Kaba, where about 10 birds were observed.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Daily from 23rd to 27th with a few individuals at almost every wetland site.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Seen from 24th to 26th in various wetland sites, with the biggest numbers at the Hortobágy Fishpond.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

About 30 at Kaba with only 2 individuals still in breeding plumage.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Seen on four days. Quite frequent encounters in the Zemplén Hills, where we saw about 25 birds on the 22nd. Some excellent close fly-over views.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Seen every day, including a few birds still at their nest in the villages. On the 21st we saw 330 birds in the Zemplén Hills, including a migrating flock of 205 in the morning, emerging from their night roost.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Daily in and around the Hortobágy from 23rd to 27th with well over a hundred birds on 25th at Hortobágy Fishpond.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

Two juveniles were seen on the 24th at Tetétlen, feeding in a swampy area. Another two were seen briefly on the 25th at Hortobágy Fishpond, flying to roost into the Kondás pond.

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

It was well seen on the 24th at Tetétlen flooded area.

(Black-crowned) Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Mostly juvenile birds were seen in smaller flocks around the different fishponds.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

The first bird was seen near Földes on the 23rd standing still and close to our car in a small wet area. Later a couple of more individuals were recorded in the Hortobágy.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Seen daily from 23rd to 27th around the Hortobágy area but also around the Zemplén Hills in much smaller numbers.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

A few were seen every day in and around the Hortobágy area from 23rd to 27th.

Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

Commonly seen from 22nd to 27th with quite big gatherings at some of the drained fishponds, but also good numbers were seen in freshly mowed lands.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Seen daily from 23rd to 27th around the Hortobágy area, with a few dozen individuals every day.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

It was first recorded on the 24th, then recorded every day in the Hortobágy area.

(Great) Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Several birds were seen around the fishponds and – in much smaller numbers – around other wetlands.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Quite common and seen every day.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

Surprisingly scarce this year, which is interesting after an otherwise excellent breeding season. Only two birds were seen in the Hortobágy on the 25th, while on the 24th we visited a night roost site at Sáp, a bit south from the Hortobágy. Here we had good views of several individuals.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Just one bird was seen at Györgyarló on 22nd.

Saker *Falco cherrug*

We had good views of two individuals in the Hortobágy area on the 24th near Balmazújváros.

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Very good views both on the 21st and the 22nd in the Zemplén Hills with several soaring birds in good lights.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

A single bird was seen soaring close to Sárospatak, in the Zemplén area, on the 22nd.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Surprisingly this year, it proved to be more common in the Zemplén Hills, with a daily max. of 8 birds... although we also had great views in the Hortobágy!

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

On our first evening we got excellent views of three soaring above us, very near to our hotel in Kimlóska. We had close views on the 25th of a bird perched on the top of a well in the Hortobágy.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

A really common raptor throughout the country, especially in the Hortobágy.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

Four birds, all in the Hortobágy area: one adult male and female were seen both on the 25th and 27th.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Just two birds were seen in the Zemplén.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Common and seen every day.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

On the 24th we saw one bird near Balmazújváros. At first it was quite distant, but as we walked closer eventually we had a great view of this beautiful raptor which was later voted one of the top birds of the trip.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*

On the 21st we saw two rather distant bird soaring above the hills, but on the 22nd we had three birds hunting in a grassland just by the road - sometimes only 100m away.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

We noticed an adult perched on a pylon by the M3 motorway on the 20th, driving from the airport. Next day, we saw 5 different birds. It was amazing to see an adult and two juveniles – probably a family group – soaring among more than 200 White Storks. On the 22nd we had another adult.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

We had unusually close views of these usually shy birds on the 23rd. Near Földes, we noticed two females walking and feeding just about 200m from us. In the afternoon light – although the birds were partly hidden in the high vegetation – the beautiful colours made it a memorable encounter.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

We saw well a juvenile near Bakonszeg on the 23rd, and the next day a stunning adult full in the open near Tetétlen.

Little Crake *Porzana parva*

Amazing views of four juveniles on the morning of our first full day in the Hortobágy. We saw these birds in a grassland which was flooded last year near Tetétlen. The Little Crakes walked out several times from the bulrush cover to the surrounding mudflats while they were busily feeding.

Spotted Carke *Porzana porzana*

Together with the previous species, we saw three birds full in the open, among them a brightly coloured adult.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Small groups were seen, mainly juveniles at different wetland sites. One family was seen every morning in the garden of our hotel in the Hortobágy.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Recorded daily in the Hortobágy area where it was most numerous at the Tetétlen site, where nearly a thousand were seen in a flock.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

We saw 26 birds landing on a field in the floodplains of the Bodrog River on the 22nd. Later, we had very good views of a couple of hundred birds roosting in the evening in the half-drained Kondás pond on the 25th.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

One seen very well at the Dotterel site on the 25th.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

On the 24th we found an adult and a juvenile in a freshly ploughed field near Kisújszállás.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

We recorded these beautiful and increasingly common birds in the Hortobágy area on three dates. Maximum numbers were seen near Tetétlen, where about 15 birds were seen together.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Recorded from 25th to 27th with the biggest flock - which was around 20 birds - at Hortobágy Fishpond.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Common from 22nd to 27th.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Recorded in every suitable habitat in and around the Hortobágy. In some of the drained fishponds, more than 20 birds were feeding on the dry surface of the mudflats.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Common in and around the Hortobágy area, with several dozen at the suitable sites.

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

Really excellent views of this key species! On the 25th we met a flock of 29 birds in a remote corner of the huge southern grasslands of the Hortobágy. They were tame enough to walk as close as 20m to them! Most were still (at least partly) in their colourful breeding plumage, while three juveniles were also recorded among them.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Common at every wetland in and around the Hortobágy. Well over a hundred birds on the 24th near Tetétlen.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Recorded first near Tetétlen on the 24th and later seen in smaller numbers daily in the Hortobágy.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Small flocks were noted every day spent in the Hortobágy.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Recorded every day in and around the Hortobágy, with flocks close to a hundred at some of the sites. Some of them were still in partial breeding plumage.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Only one was recorded on a small puddle near Balmazújváros. This species leaves usually very early the Carpathian-basin, so it is generally rather scarce from late August.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

Just one was seen on the 26th at the Hortobágy Fishpond, and which was already in winter plumage.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Recorded a couple times in and around the Hortobágy. Mainly singles were recorded.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Recorded first at Bakonszeg on the 23rd. Later seen daily, but only lone individuals.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Very common migrant both on fishponds and flooded grasslands. More than a hundred seen at some of the sites.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Small parties and lone individuals seen daily in and around the Hortobágy area.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Good and frequent views of smallish flocks which usually contained about a dozen birds, mainly juveniles. At Virágoskút-fishponds, we had very close and good views of several birds.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Several sightings daily from the 25th. The best views were gained on the 26th at Hortobágy Fishpond.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Maybe the commonest *Calidrid* at certain wetland sites, with more than a dozen birds in the Hortobágy fishponds. On 26th at Virágoskút Fishpond, we had stunning close views both of juveniles and moulting adults.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Small and middle-sized flocks were recorded daily from the 23rd.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

A scarce migrant, one was recorded on the 25th at the Hortobágy Fishpond (on Kondás).

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Another superb tour for this sought-after species! First, we tried to find it on the huge mudflats of the Kondás pond. Unfortunately, right after the tour leader noticed a bird, it walked behind cover and never turned up again. On the 26th we eventually found two birds which showed well in a *Calidris* flock at the Hortobágy Fishpond. Later the same day, at Virágoskút Fishpond, we had an amazingly good view of a lone but very close individual in perfect light!

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Common in all types of wetland habitats from 23rd to 27th.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

A lovely juvenile was seen feeding in its classic style among ducks in a natural wetland site in the northern part of the Hortobágy.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

First seen at Kaba on the 24th but afterwards recorded daily, especially in drained fishponds.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

Recorded every day from the 24th. Sometimes numerous, with several hundred birds at Telekhalmi Fishpond.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Very common and seen daily from the 23rd.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

One juvenile bird was seen in the Kondás pond of the Hortobágy Fishpond on the evening of 25th.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

First seen - three birds - at Kaba on the 24th. Later seen in the Hortobágy and in Tetétlen as well.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*

Present in small numbers in and around all the visited wetlands. Biggish flocks of more than 30 birds were seen at Kaba and Hortobágy Fishpond.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

First seen at Tetétlen on the 24th. Later seen daily in small numbers, usually less than 5 individuals.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Three or four juveniles and an adult were seen at Kaba, within a mixed species “marsh tern” flock together with Little Gulls.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Seen only at Telekhalmi Fishpond on the 24th, where three birds were recorded.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

One adult seen with Black-headed gulls sitting in a mudflat at Telekhalmi Fishpond on the 24th

Feral Pigeon (Rock Dove) *Columba livia*

Seen every day mostly around human habitations and farm buildings.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Recorded every day.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Seen commonly in the Zemplén Hills and less often but still regularly in the Hortobágy area.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Seen every day mainly beside roads and in villages but literally everywhere.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Just one was seen, at Kaba on the 24th. This otherwise common Hungarian bird migrates early, so is less often encountered in late August than earlier in the season.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

One heard on the evening of the 21st in the Zemplén Hills.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

One perched up, first in a small farm building and later on a tree, near Györgytarló on the 22nd.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Three were seen very well just from a few metres in their traditional roost site in Balmazújváros. It's a winter roost but the first birds do usually appear in August. Later, the numbers will significantly increase.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Seen only on the 22nd in the Zemplén area, where we saw two migrating individuals.

Roller *Coracias garrulus*

One near Földes on the 23rd; later, on the 25th another one near Nádudvar, sitting on a wire.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One flying over a stream in Erdőhorváti on the 22nd. Later, we heard some in the Hortobágy area as well.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

In the Zemplén, we saw a couple of migrating flocks which were mainly seen flying overhead. We also found a couple of birds sitting on wires, which gave excellent views. Heard daily in the Hortobágy.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Only one was seen on the 25th, near the Dotterel site.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

We had good views of a migrating bird in a bushy area in the Angyalháza area of the Hortobágy.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

After hearing several calling in the Zemplén Hills, eventually we had excellent views of one individual feeding low down, under the canopy, in the Zemplén on the 23rd.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*

Because of the unusually hot weather, this species was more difficult to locate this time. But after a few were heard, we eventually saw one on the 22nd, followed by two birds very well on the 23rd in the Zemplén Hills, and another in the Great Forest near Debrecen.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

An adult female was seen in Hortobágy on the 25th.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

The most frequently recorded woodpecker in the Zemplén Hills.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

We saw one on our first evening near Komlóska. Later, very good views in the Zemplén on the 22nd and - surprisingly - at the Hortobágy Fishpond on the 26th.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Only heard on the morning of the 24th, in the hotel garden.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Seen daily in the Zemplén Hills between the 21st-23rd. Excellent and prolonged 'scope views of different birds.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Very common in all open and semi-open habitats, seen daily. Mainly juveniles but also some adult males.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

An early migrant. By this time of the year, a big portion of the breeding population has already headed south. However, we saw three individuals on the 25th near Nádudvar.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

One seen well on the 26th at Hortobágy Fishpond.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Common in the Zemplén Hills, but heard and seen elsewhere as well.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Common, seen daily.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

A few individuals were seen on a couple of occasions in the Hortobágy.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Common in the Hortobágy, where huge flocks were seen. The biggest flock – about 3500 birds – was seen on the evening of 23rd, near Sáp.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Seen every day.

Raven *Corvus corax*

More than a dozen were seen in the Zemplén Hills from 21st to 23rd.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Recorded on the 21st and 23rd in the Zemplén Hills, and later in the Great Forest near Debrecen.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

About five birds were seen on 23rd in the Zemplén.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Recorded daily from 20th to 23rd.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Recorded daily from 20th to 23rd.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

A small flock at Kaba on the 24th, later several good views at Hortobágy Fishpond.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Interestingly, we saw the first one of the trip as late as the 25th. But later it proved to be common, especially at Hortobágy Fishpond.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Common, seen daily.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Common and seen most of the days, though in smaller number than the previous species.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

We saw the attractive, white-headed Central European race a couple of times in the Zemplén area.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Our first was seen on the 20th when we first stopped at a petrol station. Later seen elsewhere as well.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Regularly, but mainly singles seen in the Hortobágy and surrounding area.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

Skulking reed dweller. Heard calling a few times at Hortobágy Fishpond, but not seen.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

Only one bird was seen, at the Hortobágy Fishpond on the 25th.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

First seen at the ringing station at the Hortobágy Fishpond on the 25th, but later seen in the reedbeds as well.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Common in the Hortobágy, after our first was recorded in the hotel garden on the 24th.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Appropriately, we saw migrant birds in the willow trees around the Hortobágy Fishpond.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Seen only in the Zemplén Hills.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

About 5 birds seen in the Zemplén Hills on the 23rd, plus a few more at Hortobágy Fishpond on the 26th.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

One bird seen on the 25th, literally in the same bush as the Wryneck, where we could enjoy extremely close and good views of this otherwise skulking bird.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Seen both in the Zemplén and in the Hortobágy.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Our first seen on the morning of 24th, in the hotel garden along with other three *Sylvia* species. Later seen at the ringing station at Hortobágy Fishpond.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Recorded both in the Zemplén Hills and the Hortobágy.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Recorded only on the 24th, in the hotel garden.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Several heard at Hortobágy Fishpond, but finally showed well in a marshy area on our final morning (27th).

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard regularly in the Zemplén Hills.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Commonly seen in the Zemplén area and also recorded in the Debrecen Great Woods.

(Eurasian) Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Heard daily in the Zemplén Hills, but seen only on the 23rd.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*

One was seen very well in the Debrecen Great Wood on the 23rd.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Numerous, seen daily. Sometimes thousands of birds in one flock.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Recorded most days.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Seen every day in the Zemplén area.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Heard daily, but seen only a couple of occasions in the Zemplén Hills.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Heard a couple of times, but - typically for this species - we never had an opportunity to see it.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica cyaneola*

One juvenile male – already with bluish throat – was seen at the ringing station at the Hortobágy Fishpond.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Reasonably common during the week.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Several in the Hortobágy, especially towards the end of tour.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Seen almost every day.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Several birds were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Very common, seen daily.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

We saw at least a few birds almost every day.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Common, seen daily.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Common and seen every day.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

We saw our first birds – the nominate “Blue-headed” (*flava*) race - near Györgytarló in the Zemplén area. Later many were noted in the Hortobágy.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

Commonly recorded, especially in the Hortobágy, where it was most numerous in and around drained fishponds.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

First seen at Erdőbénye, where three birds were feeding along a small stream on the 21st. Also noted on 23rd.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Recorded only on 24th, near Kisújszállás.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Migrating birds were very common, picked out by their flight call, but seen well only a couple times.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Commonest in the Zemplén, but seen elsewhere too.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Small flocks noted, especially in the Hortobágy area.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen nearly every day.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Seen quite commonly in the Zemplén area between 21st and 23rd.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Recorded daily from 21st to 23rd in the magnificent Zemplén woodlands.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Recorded only on 25th, when a small flock was encountered close to the Dotterel site.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Recorded regularly in the Zemplén.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Quite a few were seen in the Hortobágy.

MAMMALS

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Common in the Hortobágy and seen daily.

Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*

One ran across the road in front of our car in the Zemplén.

Stoat *Mustela erminea*

Seen on our first day close to the Zemplén, near Szerencs.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Encountered regularly in the Hortobágy area.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*

Seen a couple of times usually near water.

Yellow-bellied Toad *Bombina variegata*

Seen in puddles in the Zemplén-hills.

European Tree Frog *Hyla arborea*

Heard regularly.

Marsh Frog *Pelophylax ridibundus*

Most of the frogs we saw in aquatic habitats were probably of this species, but they are included in a difficult complex with Pool Frog and Edible Frog, *P. lessonae* and *P. kl. esculentus*, which are notoriously difficult to separate.

BUTTERFLIES

We chose to focus mainly on birds this year, but interesting butterflies seen included

Clouded Yellow sp. *Colias* sp.

Map *Araschnia levana*

Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*

Peacock *Inachis io*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides podalirius*