

## Trip Report

### Little Crakes & Long-legs!

Sat 18th - Sat 25th August 2007

Leaders: Janos Olah

### Introduction

Hungary is well-established as one of the prime birding destinations in Europe with a great selection of exciting specialities like Great Bustard, Saker, Red-footed Falcon, both Eastern Imperial and White-tailed Eagles, nine species of woodpeckers and owls. This late summer date is particularly good time to see the elusive Little Crake and lots of raptors plus some of the scarce waders like Broad-billed Sandpiper and Dotterel! And we did so, not only had superb views of the previously mentioned species but this year we recorded 177 species on this action packed tour. This long list included 17 species of raptors, 26 species of waders and nine species of woodpeckers. The weather was unusually hot throughout the tour but all those wonderful birds were compensating us.

We started our tour in the Zemplén Hills based in the famous world heritage Tokaj area where we have tasted the remarkable Aszú wine which is "the wine of kings and the king of wines". This fascinating landscape with its rolling wooded hills and the Bodrog floodplain holds a host of exciting European species. We had no less than nine species of woodpeckers with two unbelievable encounters with the rarest and most shy forest denizen, the White-backed Woodpecker. First a fine female posed for us and later we found a male as it was going to roost so we had an exceptional 30 minutes look through the scope. We also had Eagle Owl, Eastern Imperial Eagle, several Hawfinches and already some migrant birds such as Thrush Nightingale and hundreds of Bee-eaters.

In the second part of the tour we visited one of Europe's best birdwatching destinations: the Hortobágy National Park. As usual it was superb birding here with magnificent Great Bustards, Saker, about hundred Red-footed Falcons in total, several Broad-billed Sandpipers, the just arriving Dotterels, Stone-curlews, Red-necked Phalarope and several Little Bitterns. The two headline species was performing very well. We had three encounters with the scarce Long-legged Buzzard and seen

not less than six different Little Crakes including a superb adult too! A very strong supporting cast with plenty of Pygmy Cormorants, Ferruginous Ducks, White-tailed Eagles, Lesser Grey Shrikes, Rollers, Hoopoes and Golden Orioles were appreciated. Also the unique domestic animals including the famous Woolly Pigs, Hungarian Grey Longhorn Cattle, spiral-horned Racka Sheep and Komondor, Kuvasz and Puli dog breeds were seen.

Day 1. The Malév flight from London was on time so not long after we were on our way towards Tokaj in the Zemplén Hill area. We had our first White Storks and both Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes. Best of all however was two splendid adult Eastern Imperial Eagle and three Sakers almost together! What an exceptional start of a tour to get the two most prized raptors on the first afternoon side by side. We just arrived to Tokaj early enough to have a quick look on the Bodrog floodplain which produced an unbelievable close view of a juvenile Short-toed Eagle. A magical raptor day was finished with a fine meal as we settled into our Hotel for the next three nights.

Day 2. An early morning walk to a nearby quarry was very productive as after a bit of sweat a fine adult female Eagle Owl was tracked down and it perched out in the open for us. In the same area three Syrian Woodpeckers put up a show as they were playing around with almonds. Still before breakfast we had another great bird, a migrant Thrush Nightingale. We heard it first then we obtained great views too. We also had several Golden Orioles and a few Hawfinches. Most of the day was spent with the guidance of Zoltán Petrovics, our local guide in different valleys of the Zemplén Hills where we managed to see Black, Middle-spotted and Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers but the rare White-backed eluded us on this occasion. In the afternoon we had European Honey Buzzard, a fine Tawny Owl, Black Stork and Lesser Spotted Eagle.

Day 3. Next morning, again before breakfast we did some birdwatching in a different quarry where warblers were plentiful. We also visited a bushy meadow where a perched Hawfinch and a brief Wryneck was the best. After a substantial breakfast, we travelled to the Central Zemplén and had a walk through the beech and hornbeam forested valleys near Erdöbénye. Not even entering the forest we had flight views of a male Grey-headed Woodpecker which showed us a few minutes later in the forest too. We had Marsh and Willow Tits and as we penetrated further into the forest we finally heard the "skük" call of the White-backed Woodpecker. It took us some time to locate this splendid bird but eventually we all had excellent views of the rarest European woodpecker. We had our picnic lunch in the open so we could scan for raptors. This produced White-tailed and Eastern Imperial Eagles, Ravens and several Common Buzzards. Most afternoon was also spend in the forest where we looked for Ural Owl but luck was not on our side (neither the severe drought). We had another fantastic White-backed Woodpecker which was a male this time and we certainly disturbed him from

his roosting hole but he did not fly far and settled on a wild cherry tree allowing a 30 minutes scope view. This superb sighting also helped this species to be voted for the bird of the trip. In the evening we went to a family run wine cellar and had a wonderful selection of the best Tokaj wines!

Day 4. Our usual morning birding before breakfast gave two Pied Flycatchers. Unfortunately it was time to leave the magical Zemplén area behind so after packing up we watched another Lesser Spotted Eagle and then drove towards the Hortobágy National Park. We had a short stop at Debrecen Great Wood where we had a Short-toed Treecreeper and another Middle-spotted Woodpecker. After checking into our Hotel near Nádudvar and a quick lunch we headed to the northern section of the park. Soon we have found one of our target species in the form of an orange-tinger coloured Long-legged Buzzard. Really nice views of this fine raptor which was followed by six Red-footed Falcons of different sex and age. Great! We had a brief but very productive visit to the Hortobágy-Fishponds where we had our first Pygmy Cormorants, two juvenile Broad-billed Sandpipers (interestingly on this year tour we had this scarce species daily), several Little Bitterns and as a surprise two adult Collared Pratincoles. This was an excellent introduction to the bird-rich Hortobágy area in just a short afternoon birding.

Day 5. Today we visited Biharugra Fishponds in search of the elusive Little Crake. After arrival we soon located not less than four different juvenile birds and had really nice looks at them. It was just the icing on the cake to see a fine adult walking on some floating vegetation later in the day. This year with plenty of drained fishponds the area was very productive. We had hundreds of Spoonbills, three Black Storks, three different Broad-billed Sandpipers and a juvenile Red-necked Phalarope too. As we continued scanning through the thousands of birds we found several Ferruginous Ducks, more Little Bitterns perched, Curlew Sandpipers, Temminck's and Little Stints, Marsh Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilts, three juvenile Mediterranean Gulls and a perched Kingfisher for Val. A nicely perched Osprey in dead tree. Driving along the dry puszta we also spotted our first Rollers on the wires. In the afternoon we had our first attempt to locate the lovely Dotterels which use the Hortobágy as a moulting stop-over area in the autumn migration. They usually arrive in late August and leave with the first frosts in November. Numbers vary greatly year to year mostly depending on the conditions of the puszta. This year everything being exceptionally dry, we expected a good migration. And YES we were lucky on our first attempt already and located three of these strange high arctic breeders at Angyalháza Puszta. We enjoyed a prolonged good look of two males and a female as they still had traces of their decorative summer plumage. What a way to end a good day birding!

Day 6. After our usual early morning birdwatching around the lodge we set off for the Hortobágy-Fishpond complex to look for some migrant and resident passerines. We had a nice walk along the

willow bushes amongst the reedbed with Bearded Tits and Penduline Tits around us. We also saw a fine male Golden Oriole, Reed and Great Reed Warblers plus a Wryneck. As it was really warming up we decided to visit a nearby drained fishpond to look for some gulls and waders. This short visit before our lunch in the Hortobágy Csárda yielded our only White-winged Black Tern of the tour plus yet another Broad-billed Sandpiper. After a nice siesta in the shade and a good "gulyás" we headed southwest towards Nagyiván. Still scorching hot we visited an artificially flooded area where hundreds of Wood Sandpipers, Spotted Redshanks, Snipes and Ruffs were in evidence plus we saw another migrating Wryneck. After a little search we also located five Stone-curlews as they were panting in the heat allowing us superb views. Our main target bird however was the Great Bustard this afternoon and with the help of Dr. Gábor Kovács we finally found eight birds feeding on a stubble field with a splendid big male. After we all had great views we drove back to our lodge and this short drive was notable for a flock of 34 Cranes and some 50 Red-footed Falcons.

Day 7. Our first stop this morning was the Kaba Sugar beet factory ponds which was as good as usual and gave a few new birds to our trip total even on our last full birding day. Amongst the hundreds of ducks we spotted a Pintail and counted 34 Ferruginous Ducks. A nice, buffy coloured juvenile Peregrine Falcon was eating a juvenile Spotted Redshank which was a great experience. Waders were a prominent feature of Kaba with another Marsh Sandpiper, over 30 Black-winged Stilts and both Temminck's and Little Stint again. A neatly patterned juvenile Little Gull was new for us to and another much better view of a juvenile Mediterranean Gull was nice. Still before lunch we visited the Long-eared Owl roost in Balmazújváros where 13 birds were counted as they were panting and dropping their wings because of the heat. We also made a brief stop at Nagy-Vókonya wetland with all those traditional domestic mammals plus great views of an immature White-tailed Eagle. Lunch was a delicious bowl of fish soup taken at the riverside Csárda at Tiszacsege. Most of the afternoon was spent at Hortobágy-Fishponds with fine selection of waders and gulls.

Day 8. After breakfast we drove to Hortobágy-Fishponds where an adult Great Black-headed Gull was seen this morning but unfortunately the roosting gulls left by the time we arrived but six juvenile White-tailed Eagle in perfect morning sunlight was a nice sighting. Later we drove to Budapest to catch our afternoon flight back to London.

## Systematic list of species recorded

(A total of 177 species was recorded by the group. Of these, 2 were heard only).

### Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Seen nearly every day but not especially common away from our Hotobagy hotel.

### Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th. These birds were of the eastern race *rubrirostris* with pink bills. Maximum count was about 1500 birds on 24th.

### White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

One very early migrant was seen at Hortobágy-Fishponds on 24th.

### Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

A family of six were seen in flight over the Tisza river near Tokaj on 19th and about 10 in total in the Hortobágy area.

### Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

A juvenile was seen at Hortobágy-Fishpond on 21st and probably the same bird was seen again at Gyökérvíz Fishpond too on 23rd.

### Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Up to 150 daily from 21st to 25th in the Hortobágy area at various fishpond.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Three birds were seen at a recently flooded steppe area in the Hortobágy area on 24th.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Daily from 21st to 25th and in the Hortobágy area.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Up to 300 daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Just a single female was seen at Kaba on 24th.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Up to 200 daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

Up to 2000 daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

About 40 were seen at Kaba on 24th and some daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Several great views! The highest count was on the 24th at Kaba when 34 birds were seen.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Daily from 21st to 24th with at least 350 at Kaba on 24th.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Daily from 21st to 24th with at least 60 at Hortobágy-Fishponds on 24th.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

About 10 at Kaba on 24th all in a rather surprisingly early moult into something approaching a winter plumage.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Singles were seen from the roadside near Erdöbénye and over the Bodrog water meadows in the Zemplén on 19th and a few were recorded in the Hortobágy area too.

European White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Seen every day including many birds still at the nest in the villages at the end of this particularly late season.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th with a daily maximum of at least 300 on 25th at Hortobágy-Fishponds.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

Seen very well on several occasions both in flight and perched. About ten birds seen in total.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

A few seen around the lake at the Hortobagy hotel early in the morning and we had a roosting flock of 300 at Biharugra-Fishponds.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Seen daily in the Hortobágy area with a maximum of at least 10 on 22nd. Amazing how they look bright buff on the ground and almost pure white in the air.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Seen daily from 21st to 25th around the Hortobágy area but less common than the white egrets.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Seen daily from 21st to 25th around the Hortobágy area with a maximum of at least 30 on 22nd. Surprisingly common out in the dry steppe this year.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Seen daily from 21st to 25th around the Hortobágy area with a maximum of at least 250 on 24th.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Seen daily from 21st to 25th around the Hortobágy area with a maximum of at least 80 on 25th.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

Daily sightings of 10-15 in the Hortobágy area

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Maximum 300 in the Hortobágy area.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Quite common and seen almost every day.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

Family parties were seen nearly every day in the Hortobágy area with up to 50 daily. A magical bird to see!

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Just two birds were seen at Kaba on 24th.

Saker *Falco cherrug*

We had three birds on our drive from the airport on our first afternoon and later had another in the Hortobágy area on the 21st near Balmazújváros.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

A juvenile bird was seen eating a juvenile Spotted Redshank at Kaba on 24th.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

One was seen perched on a dead tree at Biharugra Fishponds as it was eating a fish on 22nd.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

One was seen on the 19th over the woods of the central Zemplén and others were heard on 20th above Erdőbénye.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Several good views in the Hortobágy area from 21st to 25th and an immature over the Zemplén Hills on the 20th. A super juvenile cruised across the wetland at Vókonya on 22nd. On our last morning we had six immature birds in the recently drained fishpond at Hortobágy-Fishponds.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

On our first afternoon we got excellent views of a juvenile bird in flight over the Bodrog floodplain and probably the same bird was seen again next day.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

A common raptor throughout the country especially in the Hortobágy where we saw at least 30 on 23rd.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

A migrating female was seen quartering the steppe in the Hortobágy on 22nd.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Three or four were seen in the Zemplén and a single bird on our return journey to the airport.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Only a brief sighting in the Zemplén on the 20th as we drove along the road but disappeared too fast.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Common and seen every day.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

The first one we saw on our first afternoon in the Hortobágy area at Magdolna. This bird was seen exceptionally well perched on fence and on the ground then in leisurely flight too. Much paler and longer winged than Common Buzzard. Two more sightings in the Hortobágy on different days but not as good as our first view!

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*

First we had distant views on the 19th in the Zemplén and a more acceptable view on the 21st near Erdöbénye.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

A superb pair were seen on our drive from the airport on our first afternoon. Later we saw another in the Zemplén on the 20th.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

One of the highlights of the trip, eight birds were seen near Nagyiván including a superb male as they were feeding on a field in the late afternoon.

European Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Heard daily in the Hortobágy area and a young bird run across the bank at Hortobágy-Fishpond on our last morning.

Little Crake *Porzana parva*

Absolutely superb views of this skulker on this year's tour at Biharugra Fishponds. About six birds were seen in total of which one was a lovely adult bird walking on floating vegetation right out in the open!

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Up to five daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Up to 500 daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

A flock of 34 birds were seen feeding on a stubble field near Nagyiván on 24th.

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

Five were seen very well near Dr. Kovacs's house on 24th near Nagyiván.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Flocks of up to 26 of these incredibly elegant birds were seen at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy on three dates.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Almost daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th, with the biggest count of 280 birds at Biharugra on 22nd.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Up to 500 were seen daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

A singleton was seen at Hortobágy-Fishpond on 21st.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Up to 20 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Up to 40 were seen daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

Another stunner! We were lucky on our first attempt at the regular stake out at Angyalháza Puszta and located three of these strange high arctic breeders still in the remnants of their spectacular breeding plumage on 22nd. Excellent!

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Up to 100 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Good numbers in and around the Hortobágy 21st to 25th with 580 counted at Biharugra Fishpond on 22nd.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Up to 50 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

One of the commonest passage wader in August. Up to 250 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Two juveniles were seen on two dates, one at Hortobágy-Fishpond and another at Kaba.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

Three sightings this year. The first adult was seen at Biharugra Fishpond on 22nd and another adult at Kaba sugar beet factory plus two juveniles at Hortobágy-Fishpond on 24th.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Up to 12 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Just two were seen in the Hortobágy area and three at Kaba.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Up to 200 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Up to 14 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Up to 21 was seen in the Hortobágy area but our best views were obtained at Biharugra fishponds on the 22nd.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Several sightings of up to seven birds at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Up to six were seen daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th. Most were adults moulting into winter plumage.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Up to 25 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Superb tour for this species with daily sightings at Biharugra and the Hortobágy area of two or three juvenile birds. We had really excellent views of a juvenile bird at Biharugra when we could study its plumage as it was very close to us!

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Up to 200 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

A lovely juvenile bird was seen feeding in classic style in a small pool at Biharugra Fishponds on 22nd.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

A real surprise as we spotted two adult birds on the dry mudflat of Hortobágy-Fishpond on the 21st. A great bird to see!

Common Gull *Larus canus*

A singleton was seen at Hortobágy Fishpond on 24th.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Up to 500 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

Again, up to 250 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th. Recently split, this bird is slimmer and less compact than *michahellis* with a thinner bill and longer legs and, in the adults, less sharply defined black wing tips and a paler mantle. Both are, of course, a split from Herring Gull. Caspian Gull is the commoner of the two in the Hortobágy at this time of year though we had a big flock of 500 yellow-legged so it would not be evident from the numbers.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Up to 8000 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th and another 20 in the Zemplén area.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

Three juveniles were seen in total at Biharugra Fishponds on the 22nd and another juvenile at Kaba on the 24th. The latter gave excellent views in the perfect morning light!

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

A single juvenile was seen at Kaba on the 22nd.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*

Up to 300 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th. The best numbers and the best views were at the remaining puddles at the drained Gyökérkút fishpond on the 23rd.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

As above. There were 40 Black Terns in a variety of plumages at Kaba on 24th.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

A single juvenile was spotted amongst the whiskered Terns at Gyökérvíz fishpond on 23rd.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Up to 20 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Seen every day mostly around human habitation.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

About eight in total in a stubble field and on wires in the Zemplén area.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Seen every day.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Seen almost every day with up to 20 on sunflower fields both in the Zemplén and in the Hortobágy.  
What a pleasure after the decline in the UK!

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Seen every day.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Just two were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*

A superb adult female in a quarry west of Tokaj on the morning of 19th.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

One flushed from its roost in a natural tree cravice perched up prominently in the surrounding trees west of Erdöbénye on 19th.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

One perched up in a small farm building on our way to Biharugra on 22nd.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Thirteen at a roost in two trees in Balmazújváros on 24th were a real highlight and the forerunner of the much bigger winter roost. A few were seen almost daily around our lodge hunting after dark.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Up to 30 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*

15 altogether on three dates in the Hortobágy area.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Heard a few times before we had one in scope for Val and Rog at Biharugra on 22nd.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Up to 60 were seen daily in the Zemplén area from 19th to 21st.

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Just two sightings this year, one at Biharugra Fishponds and another at Kaba.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

At least one above Tokaj on the morning of 20th and two migrants in the Hortobágy area on 23rd.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

A super male on 19th in the Zemplén and others were heard.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*

Excellent prolonged views on several occasions in the Zemplén and Debrecen Great Wood too.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*

First we tracked down a nervous female in the Zemplén which finally gave good views to all of us on 20th. Later the same day we had a fantastic experience with a male as we disturbed him from his roosting hole but he did not fly far and settled on a wild cherry tree allowing a 30 minutes scope view. Amazing!

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

A great show by a family party of three birds on our first morning at Tokaj as they were gathering almonds. Another two or three seen both in the Zemplén and the Hortobágy.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Twenty on six dates.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

A pair of this spectacular species eventually showed well in the woods of the northern Zemplén on 19th and others were heard.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Singletons were seen daily in the Zemplén area from 19th to 21st.

Grey-faced Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Two birds were seen in the Zemplén near Erdöbénye on 20th. First a male flew over us in the open woodland above Erdöbénye and a few minutes later we located the pair inside the forest too.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Very common in all open and semi-open habitats and seen every day. Up to 50 daily in the Hortobágy area.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

Up to 10 were seen daily around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th where it was about half as common as the previous species.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Seen or heard nearly every day with a good view of a fine male eventually obtained at Hortobágy Fishpond on 23rd.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

In the Zemplén area on 19th and 20th.

Common Magpie *Pica pica*

Seen nearly every day.

Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

About 15 near Nádudvar on 22nd.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Good numbers in the Hortobágy area. Up to 4000 counted on 22nd.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Seen nearly every day.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

At least six from 19th to 21st.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Recorded on 19th and 20th in the Zemplén.

Willow Tit *Poecile montana*

Two were seen near Erdöbénye in the Zemplén on 20th.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Ten birds in the Zemplén on 20th.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Recorded daily from 19th to 23rd.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Recorded daily from 19th to 22nd.

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

About 15 were seen at Hortobágy Fishpond on 23rd.

Common Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Up to 5000 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Common and seen every day.

Northern House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Common and seen every day.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Up to ten daily of the white-headed Central European race in the Zemplén area.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Roadside birds seen on several occasions.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Fairly common and seen on five dates.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

Heard a few times calling at various fishponds in the Hortobágy area but not seen.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

A single skulking bird was seen by some of us at Hortobágy-Fishpond.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Four in the reeds at the Hortobagy-Fishpond on our first afternoon on 21st.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Seen daily in and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

A few sightings in the Zemplén and five were seen on the Hortobágy.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

One above the hotel in Tokaj early on the morning of 20th and James saw one in the Hortobágy one morning.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Recorded on four dates and seen best behind the Hortobágy hotel.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Up to 50 were seen daily in the Zemplén area from 19th to 21st.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Seen both at Biharugra and the Hortobágy.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Commonly seen around Tokaj in the early mornings.

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*

Several heard and two birds seen very well as they were foraging just above the water on the reed stems.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Three were seen near Erdöbénye on 20th.

Northern Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Heard regularly and seen once in the Zemplén.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

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

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Three in the Zemplén on 19th.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*

One was seen in the Debrecen Great Wood on 21st.

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Seen every day.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen nearly every day.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Seen a few times in the Zemplén area.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Seen well a few times in the Zemplén woodlands.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*

One was heard and then seen very well on one of our pre breakfast birdings near Tokaj. We heard three more on a different morning but did not bother.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Heard several times but remained elusive.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica cyaneola*

A nice adult bird of the White-spotted race feeding along the track at Hortobágy-Fishponds on 21st.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Several sightings both in the Zemplén and the Hortobágy area.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Four active birds at the Bodrog water meadows on 19th and a very strong migration in the Hortobágy area with up to 50 daily.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Seen almost every day.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Up to 10 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Seen nearly every day.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Three sightings on our early morning birdings both in the Zemplén and the Hortobágy.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Seen every day.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Common and seen nearly every day.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Fairly common in the Hortobágy and recorded on four dates. All those seen well were of the nominate 'Blue-headed' race *flava*.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

Up to 10 were seen daily at Biharugra and around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Up to 4 were seen almost around the Hortobágy from 21st to 25th.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Seen on two dates in the Zemplén area.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen on four dates. Commonest in the Zemplén.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Just two were seen near Tokaj on the morning of 19th.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Seen nearly every day.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen nearly every day.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

About 10 near Erdöbénye on 19th.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Recorded daily from 19th to 21st. We had great scope views of a fine male one morning near Tokaj.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Just four were seen in the Hortobágy on 23rd.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Up to ten in the Zemplén area.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

A few in the Hortobágy area.

## Mammals

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Common in the Hortobágy and seen almost daily from 21st to 25th.

European Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*

One classic animal in the northern Zemplén on 11th.

Stoat *Mustela erminea*

Seen twice in the Hortobágy area.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Daily from 21st to 25th.

## Reptiles & Amphibians

Fire-bellied Toad *Bombina bombina*

Heard at the flooded area near Nagyiván. The lowland counterpart of the previous species.

Yellow-bellied Toad *Bombina variegata*

Seen in puddles in the Zemplén woods on 19th.

European Green Toad *Pseudepidalea viridis*

One west of Erdöbénye on 19th.

European Tree Frog *Hyla arborea*

Heard regularly.

Agile Frog *Rana dalmatina*

One in woodland west of Erdöbénye on 19th. This species, with its dark mask, is not particularly aquatic outside the breeding season.

Common 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 and Edible Frog, *P. lessonae* and *P. kl. esculentus*, which are notoriously difficult to separate.

The 'Bird of the tour' contest:

Species Points Nominations

1st White-backed Woodpecker 20 2

2nd Great Bustard 14 2

2nd Hoopoe 14 2

4th Tawny Owl 12 2

5th Kingfisher 10 2

5th Eurasian Dotterel 10 1