

Hungary & Romania: Birds & Brown Bears

1st - 9th May 2010



Highlights from our spring 2010 tour included *Ural Owl* (top), *Red-throated Pipit* (bottom left) and *Wallcreeper* (bottom right) © János Oláh. For a further selection of photos taken on our Hungary & Romania tours check out our online Gallery feature at www.limosaholidays.co.uk

**report compiled by tour leader:
János Oláh**

Tour Leaders: János Oláh and Zoltán Baczó (Transylvania)

with Rob Dobson, Mark & Karen Elliott, Geoff Nelson, Roger & Margaret Smith

Trip Diary

Hungary and Romania together combine into a fantastic tour of eastern Europe, which offers excellent opportunities to see many of the special birds of central and eastern Europe. In fact, there is perhaps no other European tour where it is possible to see over 200 bird species of birds within such a compact 9-day itinerary! In 2010, we enjoyed a classic 'Carpathian Basin transect tour', visiting all of the important birding habitats. We also experienced relatively good weather throughout the tour, despite the fact that Hungary experienced its wettest spring for 50 years!

After arriving in Budapest just after lunch, we headed east to the Hungarian Hortobágy. Along the way to our hotel we enjoyed good views of an Eastern Imperial Eagle and a Saker. In the late afternoon we visited a small wetland managed by 'mangalica' woolly pigs, and watched a lovely pair of Ferruginous Ducks, Black-winged Stilts and many White-winged Black Terns. This year, due to it being a very wet year, the three species of marsh tern were a special feature of the Hortobágy, with large numbers breeding. We spent one whole day in the Hortobágy, starting the morning with a splendid Little Bittern in the hotel garden. Throughout the day several characteristic Hortobágy species, including Red-footed Falcon, Montagu's Harrier, Long-legged Buzzard, White-tailed Eagle, Saker, Great Bustard, Stone-curlew, Roller, and both Moustached and Aquatic Warblers were seen one after another, and we had amassed an impressive total of 110 species by the end of the second day!

Our next destination was Transylvania (Romania), and here we visited a wide cross-section of habitats, ranging from the lowland wetlands to the Carpathian foothills and mountains. In some places we even encountered patches of snow, reminding us of the past hard winter. Some of the specialties of the region we saw here included Capercaillie, Grey Partridge, Corncrake, Goshawk, Lesser Spotted and Golden Eagles, Little, Scops and Tawny Owls, Lesser Spotted, Syrian, Black and Three-toed Woodpeckers, Alpine Swift, Red-throated Pipit, Ring Ouzel, Rock Thrush, Thrush Nightingale, Collared and Red-breasted Flycatchers, Nutcracker, Crested Tit, Wallcreeper, Great Grey Shrike, Dipper, Rock Bunting and Ortolan Bunting. Quite a haul! And we will surely never forget the three Brown Bears watched in full sunlight in the dark Transylvanian pine forest. Transylvania was simply amazing, with its intact habitats and traditional landscape-friendly environment. It was a pleasant surprise to find that in the last two years many minor roads had been rebuilt, which also contributed to an even more convenient and enjoyable tour.

Having arrived back into the Hortobágy, we spent the last full day of the tour on the Great Hungarian Plain, devoting our time to finding those species we missed earlier (one week before). Fortunately the weather was still good and a lot of migrating shorebirds had now arrived. Here we watched a selection of sandpipers including four Broad-billed Sandpipers, plus Red-necked Grebe, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, a lovely pair of Long-eared Owls, a splendid male Bluethroat, Moustached and Marsh Warblers, several Icterine Warblers and Lesser Grey Shrike. On our final day we were still adding some birds to the ever-growing list. We opted to make a short detour to the southern Zemplén Hills and were rewarded with a superb White-backed Woodpecker and a fantastic Ural Owl to round off this memorable tour. Our final tally of 209 bird species recorded in just eight days of birding is outstanding by European standards. Add to this the many special experiences such as staying in the World Heritage village in Torockó, and this tour must rate as one of the finest in Europe.

Sunday 1st May

In sunny though slightly windy weather, we left the airport but within an hour we had stopped by the roadside to look at an adult Eastern Imperial Eagle. What a start! The first stop in the Hortobágy area produced a Saker and our only Cranes of the tour. In the well-known Hortobágy area we visited a wetland area which is managed by the woolly Hungarian 'mangalica' pigs, which create open wetland habitat for shorebirds while foraging. In the superb afternoon sunlight we watched a lovely pair of Ferruginous Ducks, some Black-winged Stilts and many breeding plumaged White-winged Black Terns. The star birds, however, were the breeding plumaged Ruffs which danced at their lek. We counted about 400 birds in a great variety of breeding finery, ranging in colour from snow white to ginger and black. It was difficult for us to leave this lovely wetland, so we didn't arrive at our hotel until 18:30.

Monday 2nd May

Our pre-breakfast birding in the hotel garden brought us a beautiful male Little Bittern and several singing Nightingales. After breakfast we visited the nearby Angyalháza puszta (Angel-house steppe), where we managed to see a fine Stone-curlew, a rather localised bird this year because of the extremely wet conditions. Other notable birds here included two Rollers and Little Owl. After this short diversion we set out for the northern parts of the Hortobágy National Park. Soon we arrived at Magdolna-puszta, where we enjoyed watching the Red-footed Falcon colony. About 20 pairs were busily occupying the disused Rook nests as well as the nest-boxes provided for them. Next we visited Darassa-puszta in search of raptors - and they did not disappoint, with an adult White-tailed Eagle, two Long-legged Buzzards, a fine male Montagu's Harrier and two splendid Sakers! After this action-packed morning we had delicious lunch at an inn near the Tisza River. Our post-lunch walk in the gallery forest produced Black and Syrian Woodpeckers plus a nice Hawfinch. Most of the afternoon was spent in the western part of the National Park in search of the shy Great Bustards. Eventually we managed to see nine birds and we even enjoyed great views of a displaying male! We finished the day in a wet meadow where we had great looks at a singing Aquatic Warbler. This highly localised species breeds at only a handful of sites in Europe and is globally threatened due to drainage of its breeding sites, making it Europe's most endangered migratory passerine. All in all our first full day of the tour was a classic day birding in the famous Hortobágy with 99 species recorded!

Tuesday 3rd May

In the early morning we left the Hortobágy and began our journey into Transylvania. Our first brief stop was at the Hungarian/Romanian border and then at the Élesd Reservoir. Here, among the many Great Crested Grebes we found two Black-necked Grebes and a flock of migrating Black and White-winged Black Terns. On one of the islets an adult Yellow-legged Gull was loitering. Other notable birds here included a male Grey Partridge, a very late male Goosander and six male Ortolan Buntings. Later we had a picnic stop near Körösfő at an oak forest edge. After the picnic we searched through the scattered oak woodland and found a migrating Honey Buzzard, an obliging Wryneck and a singing Great Grey Shrike plus many Yellowhammers and Hawfinches. Having completed our walk, a big thunderstorm arrived and we had to leave in a hurry. We continued on the newly built highway to Torda, then a few hours later arrived to the Kalonda tető near our final destination. Here we took a pleasant walk in the beech forest but could find no sign of the much hoped for Ural Owl. Just after dusk we arrived to Székelyudvarhely (aka Odorheiu Secuiesc) for a nice dinner and our first taste of the region's famous Blueberry brandy!

Wednesday & Thursday, 4th-5th May

From our base we enjoyed two great days birding around eastern Transylvania, blessed with excellent weather. Our main non-bird target was the European Brown Bear and one afternoon we were lucky enough to encounter three of these magnificent creatures! They came out early from the forest in full sunlight and were a very nice sight indeed. Our birding around the Hargita Mountain produced a fine Goshawk plus a selection of high altitude passerines. In the lower elevation beech woodland we found several Collared Flycatchers and a singing male Red-breasted Flycatcher. On the way to Békás Gorge we stopped in the Görgény Mountains, and with the help of a local forester we visited a high elevation pine forest, where some of us were lucky to flush a female Capercaillie. However, the star bird of the morning was Three-toed Woodpecker, particularly the superb sighting of two territorial males drumming on each side of a dead pine tree for several minutes. What fantastic birds! Other high elevation birds here included Nutcracker, Ring Ouzel, Water Pipit, Firecrest and lots of Common Crossbills. Moving on to Békás Gorge we were astounded to see at least three different Wallcreepers! A strong favourite for everybody and the winner of the 'Bird of the trip' competition. Additional goodies at Békás included four Alpine Swifts, up to seven Dippers (including a nest full of chicks), and several Grey Wagtails. On the way back from the fantastic Békás Gorge we stopped by at a riverine forest in search of Thrush Nightingales. The nightingales proved to be elusive but, finally, we all achieved brief views of one bird. Undoubtedly the best bird of the afternoon was a Corncrake which we managed to see well (and heard a few more). At dusk we took another forest walk but only János managed a glimpse of a Ural Owl.

Friday 6th May

Time to start our journey back to Hungary, but before we set off we made an early morning visit to a different riverine forest where we enjoyed stunning views of Thrush Nightingales and a fine River Warbler. A short visit to a nearby fishpond system produced Ferruginous Ducks, several marsh terns, three nice adult Lesser Spotted Eagles, a Hobby, several Curlew Sandpipers and Temminck's Stints, great numbers of summer-plumaged Red-throated Pipits and a fantastic selection of different forms of Yellow Wagtails. We broke our journey at Segesvár (Sigishora) where we visited the Citadel, infamous as Vlad the Impaler's (alias Dracula's) palace. We spent an exciting hour in the town (in the rain) seeing the sights as well as watching several Redstarts. Our next

port of call was the picturesque World Heritage village of Torockó (Rimetea), situated at the foot of the Székelykő Mountain. Here we saw a few Crag Martins on a breeding cliff, and as we entered the limestone valley our first stop was at Kő-köz where we watched two Golden Eagles and a perched Peregrine. There followed a short drive to our accommodation, situated in a very special, old style World Heritage House with a truly memorable and gripping atmosphere. After a delicious dinner here we went owling, and had a fine Tawny Owl in the church garden followed by good looks at Scops Owls. Another excellent day again!

Saturday 7th May

Before breakfast we found the nest hole of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker right in front of our guesthouse, and then went for a walk in the terraced fields below the crags. Here we managed to find two brightly coloured male Rock Thrushes, plus Tawny Pipit and Rock Buntings. The beautiful limestone Székelykő, the far-carrying ship bells in the distance, and the tiny village with only the rooftops visible, created a wonderful atmosphere. After a substantial breakfast we embarked on a fairly uneventful drive back into Hungary, mostly in rainy conditions. We again stopped briefly at Élesd Reservoir, adding a few new birds to our ever-growing list including Shelduck, Ringed Plover, Mediterranean and Lesser Black-backed (Baltic) Gull and a Turnstone. The flock of 300 Black Terns was a great sight, too. By the time we were munching on our picnic lunch we were back to Hungary, and in the mighty Great Wood of Debrecen. In this lovely oak woodland we found several Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, Short-toed Treecreeper and a Barred Warbler. In the last hour of the day we managed to get cracking views of a male Bluethroat and also watched a female Pallid Harrier – a rather late date for this species here.

Sunday 8th May

On our final full day of birding we awoke to foggy and rainy conditions, but finished in sunny weather. We first visited the main Hortobágy fishponds where we enjoyed a nice walk and managed to see Red-necked Grebe, several Pygmy Cormorants, three male Little Bitterns, four Red-crested Pochards, three White-tailed Eagles and up to eight Icterine Warblers. The main target here, Moustached Warbler, only gave fleeting views to some of us but another location finally produced good sightings of three Moustached Warblers and everybody was happy. During a rainy afternoon we first tracked down a Grasshopper Warbler to complete our set of three *Locustella* warblers, and then visited Kaba Sugar Factory ponds. The old ponds of the factory now only filled with rain-water but we encountered a fine selection of waders there including up to 40 Black-winged Stilts, several Avocets, Little Ringed Plovers, Temminck's Stints and four breeding plumaged Broad-billed Sandpipers. A more than adequate finalé to our birding in the Hortobágy!

Monday 9th May

Although essentially a travel day, our final day of the tour still had a few surprises in store! We decided to leave early and drive back to Budapest via the Zemplén Hills. Time was short but we managed two fairly short forest walks in the southern Zemplén. This is a remarkable area and one that we regularly visit on several of our Limosa Hungary tours, but due to time constraints it isn't generally an area we visit on the Hortobágy & Transylvania tour on a regular basis. Even this year the only decisive factor was a readily accessible White-backed Woodpecker breeding hole, which János felt we could try for. Our first stop was to see this enigmatic woodpecker and we were quickly rewarded with great looks at the male bird. This is such a rare species in Europe nowadays that the Zemplén Hills, with its 150 pairs, surely ranks as the best place to see it! We also came across Grey-headed Woodpecker nearby so completing our set of all the European breeding woodpeckers on the tour. A second walk took us to see a magnificent Ural Owl, a bird which was to come second in the 'Bird of the Tour' contest. An absolutely amazing bird and the sighting was outstanding, too! This was our official last bird of the tour, although two Eastern Imperial Eagles were also seen on the way to the airport. A brilliant ending to an amazing trip, one on which most 'target birds' were seen very well! All the group members worked hard and their great company made the trip a delight to lead. I hope that everyone had a great time with many memorable and exciting birding and non-birding experiences, and found Hungary and Romania an interesting destination in which to travel.

János Oláh/Limosa Holidays

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(A total of 209 species was recorded by the group)

Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*

A female flushed in the Görgény Mountains, but gave only the briefest glimpse for some of us.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

This usually scarce bird was seen three times; a male then a pair at Élesd Reservoir, and one on the Hortobágy.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H)

We heard about five in the Hortobágy.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Common in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Flocks of 50–200 were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

One in Transylvania at Szentpál fishponds, and the 25 were seen at Hortobágy fishponds.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

A flock of eight was seen on our second visit to Élesd Reservoir.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Just a few were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Very common in Hungary and Transylvania.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Small numbers recorded in Hungary and Transylvania.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Small numbers recorded in Hungary and Transylvania.

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

A pair was seen on our second visit to Élesd Reservoir.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Four birds at Hortobágy Fishpond on our last day, where it has recently started to breed.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Common in the Hortobágy and in Transylvania.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

We had great looks of this declining species in the Hortobágy area and also at Szentpál fishponds in Transylvania.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Only recorded at Élesd Reservoir where up to 60 birds were present.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

A fine male was seen at Élesd Reservoir. This is a very late date for this winter visitor.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Just two were seen in the Hortobágy area, and two on the Szentpál fishponds in Transylvania.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

A single bird on our last day at Hortobágy fishponds.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Common in Transylvania (Élesd, Sinpaul fishponds) and on the Hortobágy. Up to 80 were counted on Élesd Reservoir.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Just two were seen at Élesd.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Two of these magnificent birds circling overhead on our last day in the Zemplén Hills.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Still a very common breeding bird in villages in Hungary and Transylvania.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Up to 40 were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* (H)

A few heard in different wetlands in the Hortobágy and in Transylvania.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

A nice male showed perfectly on our first morning by the hotel pool. Later, three males on our last day at Hortobágy fishpond.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Up to 15 in the Hortobágy area, and even some in the garden of Trófea Lodge.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Only three individuals seen in the Hortobágy area.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Common in Transylvania and Hungary.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Noted daily in small numbers in the Hortobágy and a few seen in Transylvania.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Common near wetlands throughout Hungary, and some also seen in the dry grasslands. Just two were seen in Transylvania.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

A few were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

About 30 were seen on our last day at Hortobágy fishponds.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Common in the Hortobágy area.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Seen every day of the tour, a fairly common bird in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

About 30 birds in the colony at Magdolna-puszta in the Hortobágy, and eight birds in Transylvania. One of the special birds of the tour!

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Three seen in Transylvania where we also found a nest.

Saker *Falco cherrug*

A female at a breeding site, followed by two at Darassa in the northern Hortobágy.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

A fine adult was seen in the K□-köz, near Torockó, perched on a ridge top.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

A distant adult was seen near Darassa in the northern Hortobágy, followed by three immatures on our last day at Hortobágy fishponds.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Small numbers seen in Transylvania, and very common in Hungary, especially in the Hortobágy.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

A fantastic male was seen flying alongside us at Darassa in the Hortobágy.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

Good looks of a female in the southern Hortobágy. A rather late bird as the peak of migration occurs in the first week of April.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

A single bird circling in the Zemplén Hills on our last morning.

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Just one was seen in Transylvania, but only by some of us.

Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Good views of a migrating bird in Transylvania just before a big thunderstorm at our picnic place.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Very common in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Two individuals performed well for us in the Hortobágy near Darassa.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*

Just four were seen in Transylvania. A great *Aquila* eagle and still numerous in the Carpathians.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

We recorded three adults near the M3 motorway on the first and last days of the tour. A magnificent creature!

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Two adults at the K□-köz in Transylvania.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

A total of 9 birds were on the Nagyiváni-puszta in the Hortobágy - two females and seven males. We were lucky to see one male in full 'foam-bath' display as he got close to a female bird! A fantastic experience!

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* (H)

Heard in the Hortobágy area and Transylvania.

Little Crane *Porzana parva* (H)

Despite much effort we only managed to hear one calling in the Hortobágy area.

Corncrake *Crex crex*

We finally saw one in Transylvania and heard others. A late migrant and just recently arrived.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Seen in small numbers in Hungary and in Transylvania at the fish ponds.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Common in Hungary and Transylvania.

Crane *Grus grus*

Just two over-summering birds in the Hortobágy area on our first afternoon.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

A difficult bird to see in wet years, but we managed to track down a single bird on the southern Hortobágy.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Up to 20 were seen in the Hortobágy area, and 38 at the old Kaba Sugar Factory Ponds.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Two at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and about 20 at the old Kaba Sugar Factory Ponds.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Fairly common near the wetlands and grasslands in Hungary and Transylvania.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

One at Élesd Reservoir and one in the Hortobágy area.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Five at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Fairly common at Élesd Reservoir and we also saw two on the Hortobágy.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Two in the Hortobágy area and two were flushed on Szentpál fishponds in Transylvania.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Only two were seen in Hungary.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Three on a drained fishpond in the Hortobágy area.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Two in breeding plumage on our first afternoon, and another next day at Élesd Reservoir.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Seen in small numbers in Hungary and on the Élesd Reservoir.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Just two were seen on the Élesd Reservoir.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Flocks of 10–30 seen in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

A few were seen in Transylvania and in Hungary.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Good numbers present on Szentpál fishponds in Transylvania, and in the Hortobágy area.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Excellent looks at ten birds in total, both in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy region.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Up to 60 were counted at the old Kaba Sugar Factory Ponds.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Eight at Szentpál fishponds in Transylvania, 13 at Élesd Reservoir and just one in the Hortobágy.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Four birds in superb breeding plumage, seen well at the old Kaba Sugar Factory Ponds.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Up to 400 on our first day in Hungary and a smaller number in Transylvania. It was great to see the colourful males dancing.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Two summer plumaged birds at Élesd Reservoir. This is a rather scarce migrant inland.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

We saw one adult near Élesd in Transylvania.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

A few in the Hortobágy area.

Lesser Black-backed (Baltic) Gull *Larus fuscus*

A fine migrant was seen on our second visit to Élesd Reservoir.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Common throughout the tour, both in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

Two adults and a second year bird seen well at Élesd Reservoir.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

Two on our first afternoon, followed by seven at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*

Small flocks seen in Transylvania, but common in the Hortobágy area.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

Small flocks of 6–50 birds in Hungary and in Transylvania, but also a flock of 300 on our second visit to Élesd Reservoir.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

A great year for this attractive species, with up to 400 daily and many breeding in the Hortobágy, and a few in Transylvania.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

About 50 pairs were breeding at Élesd Reservoir.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Common.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Just one bird, at our picnic stop in Transylvania.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Fairly common in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Fairly common in Hungary, and also a few in Transylvania.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Very common in villages throughout.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Common, especially in the wetlands of Hortobágy where 5–10 birds were seen daily.

Scops Owl *Otus scops*

Three were heard in Torockó and one showed nicely at the edge of the village.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Brief views of a family party including begging young near the Brown Bear hides in Transylvania.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*

After searching for one in Transylvania without success (only János got glimpses) we had a superb female in the Zemplén hills. Voted the second best bird of the trip!

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

One in Transylvania and another one in the Hortobágy area.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

A pair showed nicely in the Hortobágy area. Voted fourth best bird of the trip!

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

Four at Békás (Bicaz) Gorge in Transylvania.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Up to ten recorded in Debrecen city.

Roller *Coracias garrulus*

Two at Darassa-puszta in the northern Hortobágy area.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Just two in Hungary and one in Transylvania.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Super views of two in a lovely oak woodland in Transylvania while eating our picnic lunch.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

An elusive pair near Székelyudvarhely, then we found a nest hole in Torockó where a female appeared a few times.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopus leucotos*

Great looks at a male visiting the breeding hole on our last day of the tour in the Zemplén Hills.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*

Great views of three in the Debrecen Great Wood.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

A female at a breeding hole gave excellent prolonged view in Balmazújváros, Hortobágy. Later a male was seen in Transylvania.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Commonly seen in woodlands in Hungary and Transylvania.

Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*

Absolutely fantastic views of two territorial males, drumming each side of the same dead pine top in the Görgény Mountains in Transylvania!

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

One in the Tisza River gallery forest near Tiszacsege, and others heard in Transylvania.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

One seen in oak woodland near Körösfő in Transylvania, with others heard later in the tour.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Only heard in Transylvania, but a fine male was seen on our last day in the Zemplén Hills.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

We had many sightings with up to ten daily, both in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

Four on our first day in the Hortobágy and another three in Transylvania.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Six different birds seen in Transylvania, the first during our picnic stop near Körösfő.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Fairly common in Transylvania and Hungary, including the singing male at the Trófea Lodge.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Just a few seen in the Carpathians.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Common everywhere.

Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Five individuals were seen in the Carpathians including one pair collecting nest material.

Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

Very common in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy. In Transylvania we saw the 'white-collared' race *sommeringi*.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Very common in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy.

Hooded Crow *Corvus corone*

Very common in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy.

Raven *Corvus corax*

Up to ten seen daily in the Carpathians.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

A few recorded in Transylvania and in the Debrecen Great Wood.

Willow Tit *Poecile montana* (H)

Only heard in the Carpathians this year.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Fairly common in the Carpathians.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Common in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Common in the Debrecen Great Wood.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

A male seen at very close range at the Hortobágy fishponds.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

200+ at Élesd Reservoir on our second visit there.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Five birds nesting in Transylvania in a limestone area.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Very common.

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

Very common.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

A few were seen in Hungary.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Common in Hungary and Transylvania.

Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*

Common, especially in the Hortobágy.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*

Several seen at Kalonda Pass, and at Torockó in Transylvania.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

A singing male showed well in the Hortobágy area (during our only flat-tyre stop of the tour!).

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

Fairly common in the Hortobágy, and one was seen in Transylvania.

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*

We had good views of one singing bird in Transylvania, at the same spot as the Thrush Nightingale.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

Common in Hungary, plus a few seen in Transylvania.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

After only had fleeting views, everybody eventually saw it very well in the Hortobágy area.

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*

This very special warbler gave excellent looks to everyone on the Nagyváni-puszta, Hortobágy.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Very common in the Hortobágy and on the Szentpál fishponds.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Common in the Hortobágy area.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Three were seen in Transylvania near our Corncrake site.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

We recorded eight migrant birds during our morning walk at Hortobágy fishponds.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Just one bird, at Békás (Bicaz) Gorge.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Commonly seen and heard in Transylvania.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Good numbers seen in Hungary and Transylvania.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Fairly common in Hungary and Transylvania.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

About eight were recorded on their breeding grounds in Transylvania.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

One seen in the Hortobágy and one at Debrecen Great Wood. A great bird!

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

A few in Hungary and Transylvania.

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Good numbers were noted everywhere in Hungary and Transylvania.

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*

A few seen in Transylvania, and regularly encountered in the Hortobágy area.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*

Up to ten daily in the higher regions in Transylvania.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

A single bird in the Görgény Mountains in Transylvania.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (H)

Only heard in the Carpathians.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Several in Transylvania and in the Debrecen Great Wood.

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*

A minimum of three different birds were seen in the Békás (Bicaz) Gorge. Another fantastic experience and voted the Bird of the Tour!

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*

Good looks at one in the Debrecen Great Wood.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Very common throughout the tour.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

A total of eight in the higher parts of Transylvania. These birds were of the well marked, and particularly scaly race *alpestris*.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Fairly common in Hungary and Transylvania.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

A few breeding pairs were seen in Transylvania.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Fairly common in the Carpathians.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Fairly common in the Carpathians with up to 20 seen daily.

Robin *Erithacus rubicola*

A few of these secretive forest birds were seen in the Carpathians.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*

We only had moderate views at the first location, but later one showed very nicely as it perched out in the open while singing near Székelyudvarhely.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Common in Hungary but scarcer in Transylvania. We had good views in the Trófea Lodge garden.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

A much wanted bird for everyone, and seen very well in the Hortobágy. It was voted the third favourite bird of the tour!

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Noted in small numbers in Hungary and Transylvania.

Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Just three were seen in Transylvania.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Seen in small numbers on passage in Hungary, and breeding in Transylvania.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Fairly common in Hungary and Transylvania.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A few in the Hortobágy and Transylvania.

Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*

Two superb males seen very well at Torockó. This species is in serious decline in Europe, mainly due to disappearing grazing systems.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Up to six seen daily in Hungary. A late arrival to the Carpathian Basin.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

One was seen by Rob in the Hortobágy.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*

Three in Transylvania, two in the Debrecen Great Wood and three in the Zemplén Hills.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

A great view of a stunning male in Transylvania.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

A total of 12 seen in the Carpathians and we even found a nest.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Common throughout.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Common.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Heard and seen in the Carpathians.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

The nominate race is common in Hungary and in Transylvania. On the Szentpál Fishponds we saw birds of other races including one *thunbergi*, four *feldegg* and several '*dombrowskii*'. We also recorded the form '*superciliaris*' in Transylvania. The forms '*dombrowskii*' and '*superciliaris*' represent intergrades between *flava* and *feldegg*.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

A few seen in Transylvania.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Fairly common in Hungary and Transylvania.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

One showed well in the Hortobágy area.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Common in Transylvania.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

About 20 seen well on the Szentpál fishponds in Transylvania, some being in superb breeding plumage.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

Two summer plumaged birds seen at higher elevations in the Görgény Mountains.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common throughout.

Serín *Serinus serinus*

A few seen in the Hortobágy and Transylvania.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Common throughout.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Common throughout.

Linnét *Carduelis cannabina*

Fairly common in Transylvania.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Up to 50 seen daily in the Carpathians.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

A total of four noted in Transylvania.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

A few seen in Transylvania and the Debrecen Great Wood.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Fairly common in Hungary and Transylvania.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Common in Transylvania and the Debrecen Great Wood.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

Two singing males in the Torockó area.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

At least six were seen at Élesd, in Transylvania.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Fairly common in the Hortobágy, a few also seen in Transylvania on the fish ponds.

MAMMALS

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Seen almost every day in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*

One was seen in Transylvania and about six in Debrecen Great Wood.

European Hamster *Cricetus cricetus*

One was seen by János only in the Hortobágy area.

Muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus*

One was seen in the Hortobágy.

Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*

Three were seen one afternoon in Transylvania. A superb experience.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Two were seen in the Hortobágy and one in Transylvania.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Seen almost daily in Hungary and Transylvania.