

HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA & TRANSYLVANIA GT 2014
with SAKERTOURS
2-13 May 2014



Male Little Crake (János Oláh)

Leader: János Oláh

This three-country birding tour in Central Europe is one of the most productive birding tours available in Europe and now it is one of Salertours's classic tours. It is also linkable with our Danube Delta tour and for overseas visitors this combination is unbeatable! We have been running similar tours for many years but it was the third time that our GT tour was running with this very same itinerary and it was the most successful ever. We even broke a longstanding (13 years) record and saw a total of 230 bird species in a mere 10 days of birding (two species were heard-only). We covered almost all major bird habitats of the Carpathian Basin and the weather was typically variable spring weather. We encountered two extremely windy days which gave us some hard time but it did not affect our final results. This tour also gives a superb insight of the fantastic sceneries in the countries visited: Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. May is certainly a magical month to birdwatch in Europe and one of the most productive periods of the year when breeding and migrating birds are both present. This year's highlights were ten species of owls including Ural, Eagle, Scops, Eurasian Pygmy and Tengmalm's Owls, all the European breeding woodpeckers including superb views of the rare and declining White-backed Woodpecker and the enigmatic Three-toed Woodpecker; eighteen species of raptors including Pallid Harrier, Short-toed and Imperial Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Red-footed Falcon and Saker; Capercaillie, Great Bustard, Little Crake, Corncrake, Collared Pratincole, Wallcreeper, Red-breasted and Collared Flycatchers, Thrush Nightingale and a wide range of warblers including amazing views of singing River Warbler.

Friday, 2nd of May

The participants were arriving on several different flights so with the early arrival part of the group we decided to go birding for a few hours. It is only a short drive to the edge of the Kiskunság National Park where we were heading. A pair of Grey Partridges was spotted from our bus and we stopped to have a proper telescope views as it is an incrisingly rare bird nowadays so you must take your chance – and indeed we have not had any other encounters on the tour. Our next stop was on the edge of a gravel pit where Common Shelducks, Common Tern and Great Reed Warbler showed well while the nearby agricultural land produced four Mediterranean Gulls as they were following a ploughing tractor. Finally we arrived to this grassland national park where we were soon watching various goodies like Purple Heron, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Marsh Sandpiper, Black Woodpecker and a fine singing breeding plumaged Barred Warbler. We also had Spoonbill, Eurasian Teal, Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, Avocet and breeding, displaying waders such as Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank and Lapwings. Our little birding time was gone in a ‘blink of an eye’ and were back at Budapest airport to pick up the rest of the team and continue our drive to the Zemplén Hills in the remote northeast corner of Hungary.



White-backed Woodpecker in the Zemplén Hills (János Oláh)

Saturday, 3rd of May

This was a full day in the Zemplén Hills which is a fantastic area of rolling hills covered with oak-hornbeam and beech woodlands. We were targeting some secretive and difficult to find species today. After breakfast we started the day a walk in a oak woodland where our main target was the rare and declining White-backed Woodpecker of which we had superb looks! In addition to this, we got good views of bird such as Collared Flycatcher, Wood Warbler and Lesser-spotted Woodpecker. Our next port of call was a good observation site for raptors, where we saw several Honey Buzzards, the rare breeder Short-toed Eagle, a Lesser-spotted Eagle, two White-tailed Eagles, Black Kites and Black Stork. Following this very succesfull

raptor watching we tracked down a superb male Little Crake, a female Ural Owl and an adult Eastern Imperial Eagle. For the late afternoon we have visited an abandoned quarry where we located a family of Eurasian Eagle Owls. Other notable birds for the day included Eurasian Wryneck, and Black and Syrian Woodpeckers. To celebrate our first bird-packed day we had an enjoyable wine tasting with dinner in the World Heritage Tokaj region.

Sunday, 4th of May

After an early breakfast we left for the Érc Mountains in Slovakia. We had a few stops en route to look for various birds though the weather got extremely windy. Our first stop was still in the Zemplén Hills where we saw another Ural Owl but we had no luck with Eastern Imperial Eagle although it was a challenge even to stand right by our bus in the gale forced wind. By lunch time we arrived to the Slovensky Raj National Park. After a quick packed lunch we were on our way up to the mountains in search of Three-toed Woodpecker. After a nice walk we reached a fresh woodpecker hole and positioned ourselves to get good views of the hole. As a rather big surprise after a while a Great Spotted Woodpecker was peering out of the hole – which was excavated by Three-toed Woodpecker a few days ago. Our spirit was still up and we had excellent looks of Eurasian Nutcrackers and Sparrowhawk. The rest of the afternoon was spent in search of another key target bird, the enigmatic Tengmalm's Owl. After an adventurous ride and climb we were all looking at a female owl looking out from an old Black Woodpecker hole in an ancient beech tree. What an amazing bird to finish our second full day!



Tengmalm's Owl in the Érc Mountains in Slovakia (János Oláh)

Monday, 5th of May

Our pre-breakfast walk produced White-throated Dipper, Fieldfares, Mistle Thrushes and Crossbills. After a quick breakfast we left the hotel for some more birding in the Érc Mountains. The first destination was a mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland where we

had amazingly good views of Eurasian Pygmy Owls – yet another owl for the tour! The forest was quiet and birding was still difficult despite the wind was not as strong as the previous day. A nice Willow Tit and Grey Wagtail was seen in streamside vegetation. The weather was not very kind with us however we still had a very successful short stay in Slovakia but it was time to leave for our next destination: the Hortobágy National Park in Hungary. Our drive was through the Zemplén Hills again and a short stop here produced several displaying Barred Warblers and a fine Corncrake. We reached the Hortobágy area by late afternoon where a wetland area produced Pygmy Cormorants, breeding plumaged White-winged Terns alongside with the other two species of marsh terns, Ferruginous Ducks, Common Crane and various herons. Our final stop was in the last half an hour of daylight by a soda lake where breeding plumaged Spotted Redshanks and Temminck's Stints were seen plus we also watched two adult Long-eared Owls as they were bringing food to the chicks in the nest. Yet again we had a superb day of birding with a long list of exciting species! Exhausted we settled into our lovely Trófea Hotel near Nádudvar.



Eurasian Pygmy Owl in Slovakia (János Oláh)

Tuesday, 6th of May

This was our first full day in the World Heritage Hortobágy National Park! We started our day with a pair of Saker falcons – which is THE national bird for Hungarians hence very special! Our next port of call was a breeding colony of Red-footed Falcons where we could enjoy up to 30-40 birds as they were calling, mating, chasing each other, displaying and occupying nesting places. A fine Long-eared Owl was also spotted on one of the trees and we were also very lucky to get superb looks of another localised raptor, the ginger-coloured Long-legged Buzzard. Just as we were watching some breeding Black-tailed Godwits and a few summer plumaged Ruffs we spotted a very low flying raptor which was approaching us. As it got closer we could identify a lovely Honey Buzzard as it slowly circled right above us for the delight of the photographers! After this raptor-packed morning we moved to a hidden wetland location to look for waterbirds. In 2014 spring the Hortobágy was extremely dry and

the few suitable wetlands held lots of birds. In Vókonya wetland we had a Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Ferruginous Duck, Marsh Sandpiper, Wood Sandpipers, Jack Snipe and several breeding plumaged Red-throated Pipits. After a tasty lunch at Tiszacsege Fish Csárda we drove to another marshland where we got superb looks of Bluethroat while several nice drake Red-crested Pochards showed well on nearby fishpond. The late afternoon destination was a vast grassland area where we saw Montagu's Harrier and nine male Great Bustards. We could watch them doing the full 'foam-bath' display - it was a fantastic experience! It was something hard to leave behind but we had to drag ourselves away as it was close to sunset and we still had something to do. After a short ride we arrived to a Short-eared Owl breeding area where we located both adult birds within a few minutes as they were already hunting. Going back to our hotel we also spotted a Barn Owl perched on a fence-post allowing excellent scope views. This was the fourth species of owl for the day and the ninth for the trip!



Eurasian Honey Buzzard in Hortobágy region (János Oláh)

Wednesday, 7th of May

While having breakfast a report on the local birdline came in that a trip of Dotterels were seen in flight in the southern Hortobágy. So after breakfast we had short drive to look for these special waders but our search was not succesfull. It was time to leave for Transylvania as we had some distance to cover. Another small detour just before the boarder produced fantastic looks of a male Pallid Harrier attacking a juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle. Something not every day people can see in Europe! Not much later when we crossed the border to Romania and soon stopped at the Élesd's reservoirs where we saw several new birds for our list. We had five Black-throated Divers, five Red-throated Divers, counted 680 Great Crested Grebes, eight Red-necked Grebes, a few Black-necked Grebes and Little Grebe too. The reservoir was also full with terns, marshterns (Whiskered, Black, White-winged and Common) and there were 230 Little Gulls. Nearby we got very good looks of several singing male Ortolan

Buntings. After this stop we continued towards Torockó where we arrived for dinner. While having dinner however two Eurasian Scops Owls were heard by the restaurant so between courses we had great views of two birds. This was the tenth species of owl on the tour, certainly a record for us but probably for any Central European tour!



Juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle fighting with male Pallid Harrier (János Oláh)

Thursday, 8th of May

We had a fantastic morning birding in this scenic limestone area. We got all our target species and actually more! We started with a climb up along a scree slope and had great looks of Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and a singing male Rock Bunting. Some of managed to get a glimpse of a fast-moving Sombre Tit and a fine Golden Eagle majestically glided through the valley below us allowing superb looks. While descending down from the limestone outcrops we had Woodlark and heard both Green and Grey-headed Woodpeckers. After a bit of strategical positioning we soon were looking at a male Grey-headed Woodpecker on the top of a walnut tree. Excellent! We drove to the nearby Kőköz area where Peregrines and more Golden Eagles were seen and also located about ten Eurasian Crag Martins and eight Red-rumped Swallows. Both of these species are on the most northern border of their distribution range and were very welcome additions to our growing list. We continued our drive towards the Hargita Mountain and had our picnic lunch in a lovely beech woodland with Collared Flycatchers. A nice bonus was the location of a very tame Ural Owl which allowed prolonged views and lots of photographs! In late afternoon we arrived to our final destination and were soon off to two different bear hides. We got rather different results as there were 11 Carpathian Brown Bears at one of the hides while only one at the other. We still had more chances in the coming days to see more bears and yet again finished a very exciting day!



Carpathian Brown Bears in Transylvania (János Oláh)



Red-rumped Swallow in Transylvania (János Oláh)

Friday, 9th of May

We started early and drove towards the Görgény Basin. En route we had excellent views of Lesser Spotted Eagles and then climbed to a higher elevation area to look for the rather localised Three-toed Woodpecker yet again. It was only a few days ago we were searching for this bird in Slovakia unsuccessfully. We were walking in a territory where our local help has located a pair a few days earlier and this time we got lucky as a fine male appeared close to us. It was a great moment and we certainly enjoyed it as long as we could, following the bird around as it started to feed and flew from tree to tree. After about 20 minutes it finally disappeared and we made our way back to the bus adding Firecrest and Siskin to our morning list. Now it was time to drive to the fabulous Békás (Bicaz) Gorge. This is a fantastic location – apparently the most scenic of all Carpathian Gorges – and one of the easiest to see the sought-after Wallcreeper. It is not only easy to get to (by car) but holds several pairs of these unique birds. We were not dissatisfied because after some work we located two Wallcreepers. Additional birds in the gorge included Alpine Swifts, White-throated Dippers and Grey Wagtails. On our way back we have visited a marshy, boggy area where we tracked down singing Marsh Warbler and Garden Warbler. We also found a Great Grey Shrike hunting and as we watched the bird it flew into a nearby tree where four almost fully grown juveniles were begging for food from the nest. We watched the family for a while then drove back towards the bear hides where we got in position again for another evening of bear watching!



Male Three-toed Woodpecker in Transylvania (János Oláh)



Breeding plumaged Wallcreeper in Transylvania (János Oláh)

Saturday, 10th of May

Our pre-breakfast walk in the town park produced a male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, a female Syrian Woodpecker, a family party of Long-tailed Tits and several Collared Flycatchers. After a substantial breakfast we drove to the highest peak of the Harghita Mountain. We slowly worked our way up towards the high elevation though unexpected roadworks slowed us down and destroyed our hopes of any game birds along the dirt track. As we got to the top we had a walk around and located Water Pipits, Common Redstart, Crossbills and also had our first male Ring Ouzels. We left our bus behind and made a walk through the coniferous forest where we had excellent look of Eurasian Nutcracker, Crested Tit, Bullfinch, Siskin. We also had a female Capercaillie on the track but as soon as we spotted it she also spotted us and flew off into the dark woodland. We had similar experience with Hazel Grouse not much later but only a few of us managed to get some views. We arrived back to our hotel for a nice lunch. In the afternoon we drove to the Szentpál Fishponds. Along the way we had superb singing Whinchats, Hoopoe and about 12 Bee-eaters close to a breeding sand quarry. At the fishponds we had a nice selection of waterbirds which included Ferruginous Ducks, Black-crowned Night Heron, Hobby, Little Stint, Dunlin, breeding plumaged Curlew Sandpipers, Wood Sandpipers, Little Gulls and a Mediterranean Gull. Some of us finished the day with tracking down Thrush Nightingale while others went to see Carpathian Brown Bears for the last time.

Sunday, 11th of May

It was time to leave Transylvania behind and after breakfast we started our long return journey to Hungary. Later we had a quick stop at one of our stake-outs and we soon located a fine male Red-breasted Flycatcher which was ever so obliging and also had a Middle Spotted Woodpecker which completed the set of all European woodpeckers for the tour! We also had several singing male Collared Flycatcher and Marsh Tits as well. Later we stopped

for a quick picnic lunch at Radnót Fishponds where we had a scarce Oystercatcher and Mediterranean Gulls. A short stop at Élesd's reservoir produced a pair of Little Bitterns, lots of Tufted Ducks and still plenty of Little Gulls. Our last birding stop of the day was already back to Hungary where we have visited a wetland area on the Bihar Plains. This was a fantastic location and we saw masses of waterbirds and waders. There was a huge flock of cc. 2100 Dunlins, several Temminck's Stints, a big flock of Spoonbills, Common Cranes and lots of Spotted Redshanks, Wood Sandpipers, Avocets and Black-winged Stilts. There were some additions to our list as well like a lingering Tundra Bean Goose, several Common Ringed Plovers, Grey Plovers, Whimbrel, five summer plumaged Turnstones and we also had a fine Eurasian Bittern. We were certainly back to the very birdy Hortobágy region! It was late afternoon when we arrived to the familiar Trófea Hotel near Nádudvar.



Male Red-breasted Flycatcher in Transylvania (János Oláh)

Monday, 12th of May

Our last full day birding was spent again in the Hortobágy National Park though we made a little twist to the afternoon schedule and drove to the north again to look for the late arriving River Warbler which we did not see earlier on the tour – because of the very windy conditions. In the morning we were mainly looking for birds we have not seen previously and started the day at Hortobágy Fishponds. Here we had a great selection of species and some of them were new to our tour like four Greater White-fronted Geese, several punk Squacco Herons, a fast moving Water Rail, a Lesser Black-backed Gull, a showy Icterine Warbler, a female Pied Flycatcher, several Penduline Tits and Bearded Reedlings and best of all great views of the skulking Moustached Warbler. Other notable birds we had were Purple Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons, more Red-crested Pochards, Red-necked Grebes, White-tailed Eagles, another Little Crake and an unexpected singing immature Red-breasted Flycatcher (we just seen an adult on the breeding grounds the previous morning). After this very species reach morning we decided to go and try again for River Warbler as it was an important target

bird for most of our party. After an hour drive we arrived to a floodplain area where despite the weather threatening with a thunderstorm we walked into the scattered willow bushes and soon heard the first singing River Warbler. The first bird was not very cooperative but we located another one which allowed very satisfying scope views for everybody. We also tracked down another Corncrake and on the way back to our hotel we added the localised Short-toed Lark to our ever growing list.



Red-footed Falcon in the Hortobágy area (János Oláh)

Tuesday, 13th of May

After breakfast we had to say goodbye to the Hortobágy and started our drive towards the Liszt Ferenc Airport of Budapest. We had one stop en route on the paddyfields of Kisújszállás where we had good looks of the lovely Collared Pratincole. This was the last new bird to our list so the grand total settled on 230 species on the tour. This was a truly memorable, record breaking tour through the transect of the Carpathian range from the steppes of the Hortobágy to the high mountains! It was a true insight of the birdlife and great natural heritage of three Central-Eastern European countries.



Collared Pratincole (János Oláh)

SYSTEMATIC BIRD LIST

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

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Eurasian Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*: One female was flushed off the forest track in Transylvania.

Hazel Grouse *Bonasa bonasia*: One was seen by some as we were walking on a forest track in Transylvania.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*: A pair was seen for the early arrivals in the Kiskunság National Park. It's such a rare event to see this declining bird nowadays.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H): It was only heard on one occasion in Transylvania.

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

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*: It was numerous in the Hortobágy area with up to 300 daily. This is the eastern *rubrirostris* race in eastern Hungary.

Tundra Bean Goose *Anser fabalis/serrirostris rossicus*: A very late individual was seen on the Bihar Plain.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*: We had a party of four birds at Hortobágy Fishponds between Greylag Geese.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: Up to 68 were counted in the Hortobágy area. A rapidly spreading and increasing species.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: We had a flock of 14 in the Kiskunság with the early arriving part of the group and later 10 more were seen on the Bihar Plain.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: It was regularly seen on the fishponds of the Hortobágy region.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*: We had several individuals at Hortobágy-fishpond and Andaháza wetland.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: It was very common throughout the tour in Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: Small numbers recorded in Hungary and in Transylvania too.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*: Just three birds were seen in the Hortobágy National Park.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*: Three sightings this year, three in the Kiskunság National Park and the other in the Hortobágy area.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*: We had several individuals on various parts of the Hungarian lowland.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*: We saw a few birds in Transylvania and large flocks in Hungary.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*: About 50 were seen at Élesd's Reservoir in Romania.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*: Regular encounters with this globally threatened species on the tour with most sightings in the Hortobágy area. Around 130+ birds were seen in total.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*: We had very good looks of fine males in the Hortobágy area..

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*: We saw an amazing 6 individuals on our outbound journey in Romania at Élesd's reservoir and there was still one present on the way back a few days later.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*: This was our first ever May sighting on any of our tours! We saw an amazing 5 individuals on our outbound journey in Romania at Élesd's reservoir. We had 11 divers on the lake with the blackthroats.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: We had several individuals almost every wetland during the trip.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: We saw eight breeding plumaged individuals on our outbound journey in Romania at Élesd's reservoir. Later we had a few more in the Hortobágy area.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: It was common on the fish ponds in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy area. We have counted 680 individuals at Élesd reservoir on the 7th May.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*: About 15 birds were present at Élesd Reservoir in Romania and later we saw many more in the Hortobágy area.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*: It was recorded in all three countries we have visited. The best looks were obtained in the Zemplén Hills.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*: Still a very common breeder in villages in Transylvania and Hungary.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*: We regularly saw little flocks in the Hortobágy area typically 10-50 individuals.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*: We had two sightings of this skulking species in the Hortobágy area.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: Great looks of a pair and then singles beside of the Hotel Trófea in the Hortobágy.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: Small flocks were recorded in the Hortobágy area.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: Six were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Small numbers were recorded nearly at all the visited wetlands both in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Up to eight birds were seen daily on the Hortobágy.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*: It was very common everywhere during the tour near the wetlands.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: Small numbers were recorded nearly at all the visited wetlands both in Hungary and in Transylvania. Particularly common in some parts of the Hortobágy.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: Up to 50 birds were seen in the Hortobágy area daily.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Small numbers were regularly seen on the tour.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Fairly common throughout the tour.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*: Daily sightings of these very special colonial breeders on the Hortobágy. Sometime we had up to 30 circling together or occupying their abandoned rook nest or an artificial nest box for breeding.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: We had five different sightings throughout the tour.

Saker *Falco cherrug*: We had excellent looks of a pair in the Hortobágy area.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: Two birds were observed near Torockó in Transylvania.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*: Two individuals were seen in the zemplén Hills.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: The first observation of two birds were in the Zemplén Hills and later five more were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: Small numbers were seen throughout the tour. It was very common in Hungary, especially on the Hortobágy, where the daily maximum number were up to 20 individuals.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*: A male gave us prolonged great looks on the Bihar Plains. When a juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle appeared in the sky the male harrier attacked it. It was one of those magical highlights of the tour!

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: We had six different sightings of both sexes on the tour.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: One bird was seen in Slovakia and later another on the Hortobágy.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: It was very common throughout the tour in all three countries.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*: We had good views of one on the Hortobágy Plain.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: We saw 5 birds in Zemplén Hills but our very best experience was on the Hortobágy when one slowly flew overhead!

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*: A total of 17 were seen, but the best view were obtained in Transylvania – especially our roadside friend near Zetelaka. The flagship bird of the Carpathians with over 2000 breeding pairs!



Lesser Spotted Eagle in Transylvania (János Oláh)

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*: The first immature bird was seen in the Kiskunság National Park which was followed by two adults in the Zemplén area and the best of all was the juvenile bird on the Bihar Plain being chased by Pallid Harrier.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: Four birds were seen near Torockó in Transylvania.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: We had an amazing view of one bird in the Zemplén Hills.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*: We had great views of several displaying birds in the southern section of the Hortobágy National Park. A total of 10 were seen.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*: One was seen at Hortobágy Fishponds.

Little Crake *Porzana parva*: We had superb looks on two occasions in Hungary.

Corncrake *Crex crex*: Several birds were heard in the Zemplén foothills and we managed to see two individuals.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: We saw several birds along the tour.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: Commonly seen in most wetlands we have visited throughout the tour.

Common Crane *Grus grus*: We saw several flocks in the Hortobágy area – the largest was around 250 individuals.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*: One was seen in Transylvania at the Radnót Fishponds. This is a scarce migrant in Central Europe.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: It was seen in the Kiskunság National Park and also in the Hortobágy area. The largest numbers were observed on the Bihar Plains where up to 60 were counted.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: It was seen in the Kiskunság National Park and also in the Hortobágy area. The largest numbers were observed on the Bihar Plains where up to 50 were counted.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: We stopped on the way back to airport at the paddy fields near Kisújszállás to see this now much localised bird. We managed to get excellent looks of two and it was a great ending of the tour!

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: Fairly common near the wetlands and grasslands in Hungary and Transylvania too.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: Several were seen on the various wetlands, reservoirs and fishponds both in Transylvania, Kiskunság and Hortobágy area.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: We saw six individuals on the Bihar Plains.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: We saw four individuals on the Bihar Plains.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: Two were seen at Vókonya wetland in the Hortobágy area while looking for other snipes.

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*: One was seen at Vókonya wetland in the Hortobágy area while looking for Great Snipe.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*: Good numbers were seen in the Kiskunság National Park and on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*: A few were seen in the Kiskunság National Park and on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: One was seen on the Bihar Plains.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*: Usually difficult to see by early May but this year we had several sightings at various wetlands.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*: Good numbers were seen in the Kiskunság National Park and on the Hortobágy.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: One was seen in the Hortobágy area.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*: One was seen distantly in the Kiskunság National Park and later another one in the Hortobágy area.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: We regularly had flocks of 5-25 birds on most visited wetlands in the Hortobágy area.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: We observed this species on the shingle islands of Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and a few birds were also seen on the Hortobágy.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Five summer plumaged birds were located on a wetland site in the Bihar Plains.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: Up to 15 were seen on the Bihar Plains.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*: Superb close views of 8 breeding plumaged birds near Balmazújváros on a soda lake. Later we had more on the Bihar Plains.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: Regularly seen on the various wetlands and up to 2100 were seen on the Bihar Plains.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: Just two in breeding plumage were seen at Szentpál fishpond in Transylvania.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: Up to 600 were seen daily on the various wetlands we have visited. Some different breeding plumaged males with great ruffs were also observed.

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

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*: Four birds were seen in the Kiskunság National Park and later a singleton at Szentpál Fishponds and two more at Radnót Fishponds in Transylvania.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*: Unusually high numbers were seen this year especially at Élesd Reservoir in Romania where we counted 230 birds.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michaellis*: Small numbers were seen at Élesd Reservoir and the Hortobágy area.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*: We saw several individual at the various wetlands we have visited on the tour.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*: A single bird was seen on the Hortobágy Fishponds.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Up to 50 were counted at Élesd Reservoir in Romania and we also had a few birds in the Hortobágy and Kiskunság.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*: It was very common on the Hortobágy with up to 200 seen daily.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: Small number of migrants were seen throughout the tour. The biggest count of 50 birds were at Élesd Reservoir in Romania.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*: Small number of migrants were seen throughout the tour. It was especially common on the Hortobágy with up to 50 seen daily.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: A very common resident throughout the tour.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*: A few were seen in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*: Fairly common in Transylvania and in Hungary too.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Still a fairly common sight in most parts of Hungary and Transylvania. We had our biggest numbers in the Zemplén Hills.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*: Very common in the villages.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: A very common bird throughout the tour from the flat Hortobágy to the top of the Carpathian Mountains. The total number came to 69 individuals if we add up the daily totals!

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*: We had excellent looks of one in the Hortobágy area as it was starting to hunt at dusk, allowing great looks as it was perched on a fence-post.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*: One was seen close to our accommodation the Zemplén Hills.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*: We saw two sightings in the Zemplén Hills but our best views were obtained in Transylvania.



Ural Owl in Transylvania (János Oláh)

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*: One female bird with two chicks were seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus*: We had to work for this bird but finally we all got to see a female in Slovakia. What a bird!

Eurasian Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum*: Absolutley superb views of a pair in Slovakia!

Long-eared Owl *Asia otus*: We saw a family party of two adults and two chicks on our first afternoon on the Hortobágy. We could watch the adults as they were bringing food to the chicks – excellent! Later we saw another one as well.

Short-eared Owl *Asia flammeus*: A pair was seen in the Hortobágy area.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: We had seven different sightings of this cute owl throughout the tour.

European Scops Owl *Otus scops*: Excellent looks of a pair near Torockó in Transylvania. This was our last owl species of the tour and it is the first time we had a clean sweep of all possible owls in Central Europe!

Common Swift *Apus apus*: Small numbers were seen above Rejdova in Slovakia and at Békás Gorge in Transylvania.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: About ten were seen at Békás Gorge in Transylvania.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: They were just arriving back from the wintering grounds but we had good looks at several individuals in Transylvania.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: Singletons were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: We heard one in the Zemplén and later saw several in the Hortobágy area.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: One was seen in the Zemplén and one near Székelyudvarhely in Transylvania.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: We had four different sightings in the Zemplén Hills.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*: At the beginning of the tour we had good looks of a female in the Zemplén Hills and later we had more sightings near our hotel in Transylvania.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*: Excellent views of this rare and declining species in the Zemplén Hills. A pair was seen at a breeding hole.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*: One male bird was seen near Szováta in Transylvania.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*: There were two sightings during the tour. First we had a female in the Zemplén Hills and later another female in Transylvania.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: Regularly seen in Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania throughout the tour.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*: We had a brilliant prolonged looks of a male bird in Transylvania.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: Several sightings of this largest European woodpecker throughout the tour.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: We heard it and seen it a few times but our best views were in Transylvania.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*: One bird was heard in the Zemplén Hills but later we got excellent looks of a male in Transylvania.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*: This lovely bird was commonly encountered on the tour. We estimated 52 birds according to our daily log.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*: We had a few birds in the Hortobágy area.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*: We saw 11 birds on this years tour. The best experience was seeing a pair feeding four juveniles in a treetop nest in Transylvania.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: It was commonly seen throughout the tour. Daily maximum were estimated to be around six individuals.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: It was commonly seen throughout the tour.

Common Magpie *Pica pica*: A very commonly encountered bird throughout the tour.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*: Great views of this often secretive breeding bird in Slovakia. Later one more was seen in Transylvania.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Very common in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: A very commonly encountered bird throughout the tour.

Hooded Crow *Corvus corone*: A very commonly encountered bird throughout the tour.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: A several individuals were seen in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania too.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*: A few were seen in Transylvania.

Willow Tit *Parus montanus*: A singleton was seen in the Carpathian Mountains in Slovakia and another one in Transylvania.

Sombre Tit *Parus lugubris*: A fast moving bird was seen by some of us near Torockó in Transylvania.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Fairly common in the Carpathian Mountains.

Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*: We had good view of this magnificent little bird at higher elevations in Transylvania.

Great Tit *Parus major*: It was common throughout the tour.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: It was common throughout the tour.

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*: A fairly common bird in the reedbeds of the Hortobágy but our best experience was a nestbuilding pair in the Zemplén Hills – in gale forced wind.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*: Small numbers at various locations but the biggest concentration was seen on the Hortobágy where up to 50 were counted.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*: Up to ten birds were observed near Torockó, Transylvania.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Very common throughout Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*: We had good views of eight birds in Transylvania. This is a rare breeder in the Carpathian Basin.

Northern House Martin *Delichon urbica*: Very common throughout the tour.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: A party of eight were seen in Transylvania. This is the lovely white-headed race here in the Carpathian Basin though there are some intermediate birds too.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: Small numbers were seen in Hungary and in Transylvania too. Mainly near to the roadside or around farm areas.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: A very common bird, especially numerous on the Hortobágy.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*: We had good views of one in the Zemplén Hills and another in Transylvania.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*: One bird was seen well in Hungary where it is a very localised breeder.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* (H): One of the two heard-only species on the tour. One was heard in the Hortobágy area but refused to show itself.

River Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: We had to work really hard this year as we had horrible windy weather in the Zemplén Hills but finally we had amazing views of several singing birds!



River Warbler in Hungary (tour participant John Lovatt)

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: It was commonly heard almost every wetland place throughout the tour and several gave good looks too.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: It was a fairly common bird on the Hortobágy.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*: A total of five were seen in the Hortobágy area including some prolonged scope views too!

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*: We saw it in wet places throughout the tour but it was particularly very common on the Hortobágy.

European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: A fairly common bird of the extensive reed beds of the Hortobágy with daily sightings there.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*: A total of seven birds were seen in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy area.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*: We had great looks of one bird at Hortobágy fishpond.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*: We observed a few birds in Slovakia and some late migrants on the Hortobágy.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: It was commonly encountered throughout the tour.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*: Fairly common in the beech woods of the Zemplén Hills and later we heard in Slovakia and Transylvania too.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: It was commonly heard throughout the tour and several were seen.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*: We saw about four different birds in Transylvania.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*: Good views of this striking warbler in the Zemplén Hills.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*: It was commonly heard throughout the tour and several were seen as well.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: We saw this species regularly in Hungary and Transylvania.

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*: It was common on the Hortobágy where we had several good views.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*: It was seen a few times in the coniferous forests of the Carpathian Mountains in Transylvania.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: Like the previous species, it was seen in the Carpathian Mountains both in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: It was regularly heard in the mountains but only seen twice.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*: Two were seen at Békás Gorge in Transylvania. Always a great bird to see!

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*: It was seen in the Zemplén Hills, in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: One of the most common species and was seen all along the tour virtually in every habitat.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*: We saw a total of five birds on the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania. This is the more scaly 'alpestris' race here.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*: Fairly common in Hungary and in Transylvania, rare on the Hortobágy.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*: The first two were seen in Slovakia, later we had plenty more in Transylvania.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: A common bird in the Zemplén Hills and in the Carpathians.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: A few were seen in Slovakia and Transylvania.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: Several sightings of this shy forest bird in the Zemplén Hills and in the Carpathians.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*: We saw one in Transylvania.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: It was very common in Hungary. We heard it daily and seen a few at various places.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*: Most of them were busily feeding young but we managed to see a fine male very well in the Hortobágy area. This is the 'white spotted' Central European race.



Bluethroat in the Hortobágy area (tour participant John Lovatt)

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: A very common birds of the villages al along the tour. We saw several at various places but usually in small numbers.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: One fine male was seen in Transylvania..

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: It was seen in small numbers in Hungary – we had up to 15 birds on a single day.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*: A fairly common bird in Hungary and in Transylvania too especially numerous on some parts of the Hortobágy.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: A few were seen in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: We managed to see a two fine males near Torockó in Transylvania.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Several were seen in Hungary and Transylvania.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*: A superb adult male was giving excellent looks in Transylvania and we also had a migrating young male on the Hortobágy.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*: One female bird was seen at Hortobágy Fishponds.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*: We had several excellent looks of different males of this very handsome species throughout the tour.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: We had about seven birds in Slovakia and a few more at Békás Gorge in Transylvania.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: It was common in or around human settlements.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills and on the Hortobágy but distinctly less so in Transylvania.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: Two were seen in Slovakia and singletons in Transylvania.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*: The nominate race was common in Hungary and we also had some nice males of 'dombrowski', 'superciliaris' and 'feldegg' races in Transylvania.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills, Slovakia and in Transylvania.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*: It was fairly common throughout the tour.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: There was one bird in the Kiskunság National Park for the early arrivals and later one was seen onthe Hortobágy too.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: Several birds were seen in Slovakia and on the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*: Ten were seen at Vókonya wetland in the Hortobágy area while sniping in the marsh.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*: Four were seen on the top of Hargita Mountain in Transylvania.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: A very common bird in most wooded habitat.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*: Fairly common in the Zemplén Hills and a few were observed in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy too.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*: It was seen frequently in human settlements.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: It was seen frequently in human settlements.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*: good numbers were seen this year on the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: It was fairly common in Transylvania and in the Zemplén Hills.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: Excellent looks of four birds in Transylvania.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: We saw lots of birds in the Carpathian Mountains throughout the tour.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: Regular encounters throughout the tour with this unobtrusive bird.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*: It was fairly common in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*: We managed to get good looks of a pair near Torockó in Transylvania.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: A total of nine birds were seen at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*: It was fairly common in suitable habitat on the Hortobágy and a few were seen near the Zemplén Hills.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: Fairly common in the Zemplén Hills and on the Hortobágy.

MAMMALS

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*: It was regularly seen throughout the tour but it was especially common on the Hortobágy.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: Several were seen all along the tour from the Zemplén Hills to the Hortobágy.

Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*: A total of 11 individuals were seen at two different hides. What a superb mammal!

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*: One individual was seen in Transylvania.

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*: It was regularly seen throughout the tour but it was especially common on the Hortobágy.

Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*: Several sightings in the mountains.

Coypu *Myocastor coypu*: One was seen on the Hortobágy.