

HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA & TRANSYLVANIA GT 2016
with SAKERTOURS
4-15 May 2016



Eurasian Pygmy Owl in Transylvania (Nagy Zoltán Gergely).

Leader: Tamás Zalai

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 Sakertours'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 fifth time that our GT tour was running with this very same itinerary and it was a successful one again! We had the second longest ever bird list achieved on a trip with a similar itinerary, which means 228 species and only three of them were heard only. We covered a wide range of habitats in the Carpathian Basin and the weather was variable but generally good during the tour with sunshine on most of the days. However we also had three rainy days when light showers occurred. Our first three full days we encountered some extremely strong wind which gave us some hard time but it did not affect our final results. The temperature was pleasant, usually between 20 and 25°C. 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 nine species of owls including Ural, Eagle, Scops, Eurasian Pygmy and Tengmalm's Owls (the latter was heard only), ten species of woodpeckers (all the European breeding species) including superb views of White-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers; seventeen species of raptors including Eastern Imperial, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Red-footed Falcon and Saker; Great Bustard, Little Crane, Collared Pratincole, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Great Snipe, Wallcreeper, Thrush Nightingale,

Moustached and River Warblers and even some local scarce birds were found by the group, namely Slavonian Grebe, Black-winged Pratincole and Gull-billed Tern.

Friday, 4th of May

The participants were arriving on several different flights so after all of the members arrived started immediately our drive to the Zemplén Hills in the remote northeast corner of Hungary. On the way we saw two adult Eastern Imperial Eagles although a bit distantly. Along the drive we also had the first opportunity to see some common countryside birds as White Stork, Western Marsh Harrier and Crested Lark.

For the late afternoon we still had time to visit a rock face where we located a family of Eurasian Eagle Owls and our first Lesser Spotted Eagle. The owls gave us excellent looks and it was a great start to a first 'travellin' afternoon. Our luck was not over yet as just before we got to our hidden accommodation in the central Zemplén Hills we managed to find a superb and rather scarce Eurasian Nightjar.



Honey Buzzard (János Oláh)

Saturday, 5th of May

This was our only 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 woodland where our main target was the rare and declining White-backed Woodpecker of which we had superb looks! Before we reached a good observation site for raptors checked an old beech forest for the huge Black Woodpecker. At the raptor watching place we saw two European Honey Buzzards, a Lesser-spotted Eagle, three White-tailed Eagles, Black Kite, Northern Goshawk and Black Stork. After the tasty lunch in a riverside restaurant we tried for River Warbler, but due to the strong wind we only heard a single individual alongside with a Corncrake but Barred Warblers were plentiful at the floodplain. From here we moved to a

nice open oak forest were we quickly located a pair of both Lesser and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, a shy Grey-headed Woodpecker and glimpsed a Tawny Owl too, but failed to locate the much hoped for Ural Owl. Here we had our first encounter with Collared Flycatchers and Eurasian Treecreepers. To celebrate our first bird-packed day we had an enjoyable wine tasting with dinner in the World Heritage Tokaj region.



Ural Owl (tour participant Hector Galley)

Sunday, 6th of May

Before breakfast we made a short walk in the village, where we had Syrian and Green Woodpeckers. It was time to leave for the Ęrc 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 had fantastic views of an Ural Owl. By lunch time we made a stop near an abandoned castle where we had another European Honey Buzzard and a riverside stop produced our first Fieldfares and White-throated Dippers. In the afternoon we checked into our accommodation and after a late lunch we arrived to the Slovensky Raj National Park. We soon changed to 4WDs and we were on our way up to the mountains in search of Three-toed Woodpecker. Almost as soon as we started our walk we flushed an unexpected male Capercallie from a roadside pine. Otherwise the afternoon was very quiet with Coal Tits, Northern Wrens and a single Dunnock. On the walk back we had a male Black Woodpecker and eventually a Three-toed Woodpecker was glimpsed to fly away by some of us. Fortunately after a few nervous minutes the male flew back and started to drum right above us! Wow! Still in daylight a Tengmalm's Owl called twice but it was just not enough to determine the exact location. So we waited until dusk, but we only heard a brief call from a pair distantly. A roding Eurasian Woodcock was a nice consolation.

Monday, 7th of May

Our pre-breakfast walk produced White-throated Dipper, Mistle Thrushes, Willow and smart Crested Tits and an overflying Nutcracker for some of us. After a quick breakfast we left the hotel to reach the Hungarian part of the border to give another chance for the Eurasian Pygmy Owl. We arrived around lunchtime and after a short walk we entered the breeding habitat of this little beast. We tried hard but despite the strong response from passerines the owl refused to show. A nice female White-backed Woodpecker was a surprise here. We had our packed lunch at the base of the mountains and headed to the lowlands. The weather was still windy, so we decided to go straight to the Hortobágy National Park and look for some waterbirds. We reached the Hortobágy area by late afternoon where a wetland area produced Common Shelducks, some Shovelers and Pintails, two scarce Glossy Ibises, a lot of breeding Black-winged Stilts, Pied Avocets and Lapwings. The wetland was full of breeding plumaged Marsh Terns, so we were able to study all the three species close by alongside with smart Little Gulls, Ferruginous Ducks summer plumaged Dunlins, a single Curlew Sandpiper, Spotted Redshanks and various herons. Also a few thousand Ruffs were displaying around us. Close to this wetland area 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. As we arrived to our nicely situated Trófea Hotel near Nádudvar some of us managed to see a nicely perched male Little Bittern in a pond just next to our hotel! Yet again we had a superb day of birding with a long list of exciting species!



White-winged Tern (János Oláh)

Tuesday, 8th 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! From here we moved to a huge rookery where alongside with breeding Red-footed Falcons we had an incubating Long-eared Owl. Our next port of call was the famous

Hortobágy Fishponds, where we enjoyed Pygmy Cormorants, Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes, Squacco Herons, more Glossy Ibises, our first pair of Lesser Grey Shrike, nice Penduline Tits and an Icterine Warbler. Close to the visitor centre we scoped a Savi's Warbler and a Nightingale too! After a tasty lunch in the Tiszacsege Fish Csárda we visited another fishponds, where we had some noncooperative Bluethroats as well as a few Red-crested and Ferruginous Pochards and a surprise breeding plumaged Slavonian Grebe. The late afternoon destination was a vast grassland area where we saw a single, but close enough male Great Bustards. On the way back we stopped to scope some European Bee-eaters and Golden Orioles with a singing Grasshopper Warbler being a fine bonus.

Wednesday, 9th of May

After breakfast we had to leave for Transylvania as we had some distance to cover. A small but very productive detour just before the border produced the trio of Great, Common and Jack Snipes as well as an unexpected Spotted Crake and even a few Red-throated Pipits were flushed! After an unusual long border cross due to the migrant crisis we arrived to Élesd Reservoir just to have our packed lunch. The reservoirs were quite empty comparing with the previous years with almost only Common Terns, Great Crested Grebes and Little Gulls were on the reservoirs. Nearby we got very good looks of several singing male Ortolan Buntings and best of all we had a pair of the now scarce Gray Partridge. After this stop we continued towards Torda, where we had good looks on Alpine Swifts and a single Golden Eagle. We arrived to Torockó for dinner. After having dinner we tried for Eurasian Scops Owls, which we only heard briefly most probably they were inactive due to the rather cold evening.

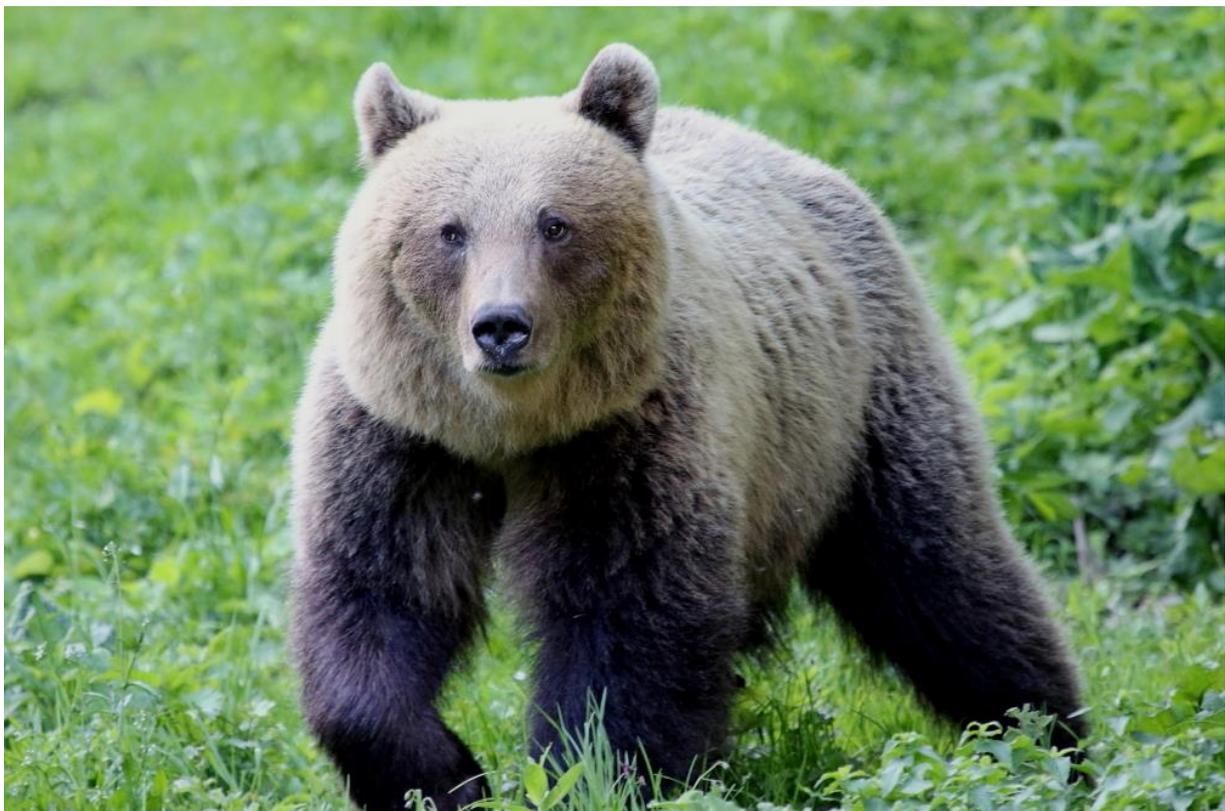


Ortolan Bunting (János Oláh)

Thursday, 10th of May

We awake for a foggy morning and before breakfast we headed east from Torockó, where in the slippery trail we soon reached the scenic limestone area where almost immediately

watched the rare Sombre Tit in our scope. As the fog cleared the scenery become more and more breathtaking with Rock Bunting singing from the rocky outcrops and Woodlarks were reasonably common. As all our targets seen in this place we headed back to our van, where at least two River Warblers were singing. After a bit of playback we enjoyed scope views of this skulker. We had a late breakfast and left our hotel to head the western slopes of Székelykő where we scoped a distant Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush together with more Rock Buntings. From here we drove to the eastern part of the outcrop again and in a different location at the nearby Kőköz area we located about ten Eurasian Crag Martins and four Red-rumped Swallows. Both of these species are on the most northern border of their distribution range. We continued our drive towards the Hargita Mountain and on the way we had our first Northern Grey Shrike. Late afternoon we arrived to our final destination and were soon off to a bear hide. We got very good results as there were nine Carpathian Brown Bears in front of the hide with an adult male visited the feeder too! A good finish a very exciting day!



Carpathian Brown Bear (tour participant Hector Galley)

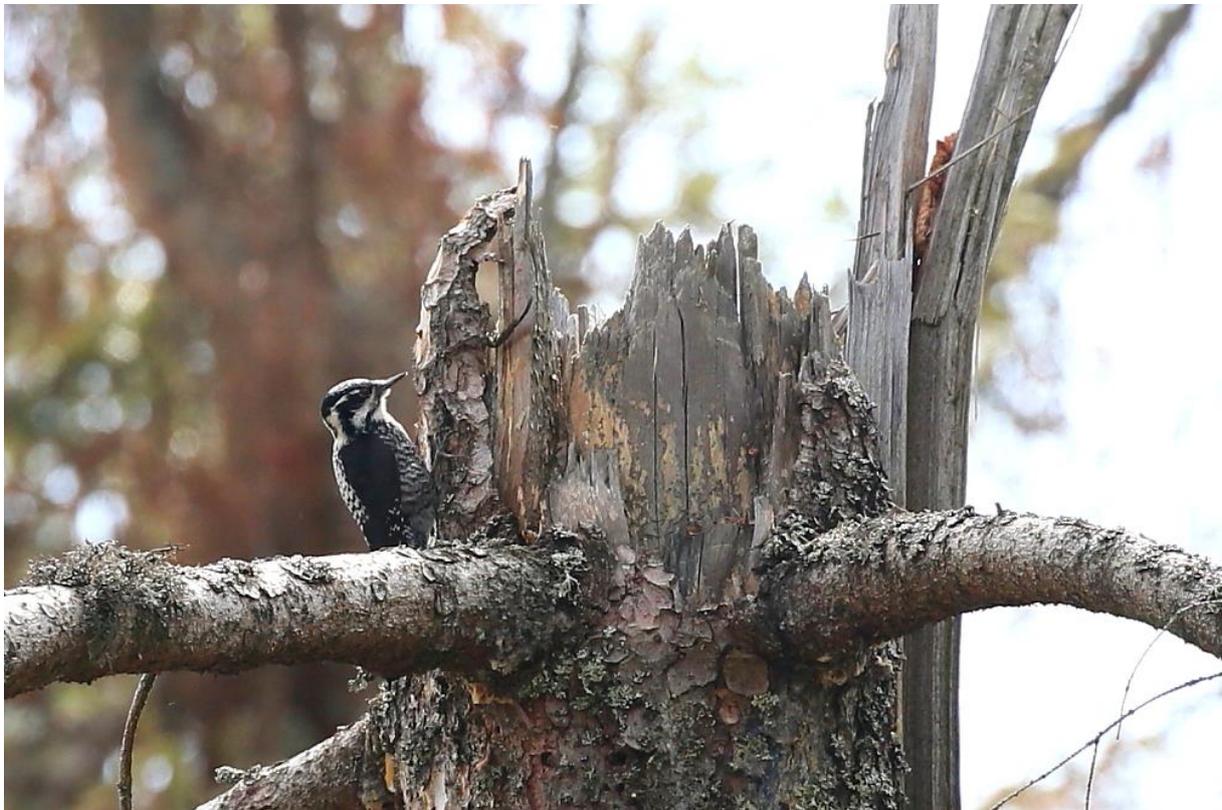
Friday, 11th of May

We started the day with a prebreakfast walk in a park at the heart of Székelyudvarhely. Here we located a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, and Fieldfare and Collared Flycatcher were equally common. After breakfast drove towards the Görgény Basin. En route we had a late Hen Harrier passing. The fabulous Békás (Bicaz) Gorge 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 disappointed because almost as soon as we arrived we located a Wallcreeper very low down in a streambed. Later we enjoyed flight views and some fighthings too and had at least four birds. Additional birds in the gorge included Alpine Swifts, White-throated Dippers and Grey Wagtails. On our way back we heard the distinctive call of a Nutcracker from the bus and soon enjoyed scope views of this usually shy creature.

In the afternoon we drove to the Szentpál Fishponds. At the fishponds we had a nice selection of waterbirds which included Ferruginous Ducks, an unexpected Little Heron, Little Stint, Temminck's Stint, breeding plumaged Curlew Sandpipers.

Saturday, 12th of May

This was our last full day in the scenic Transsylvania, so after our „usual” walk in a nearby park where we had Wryneck our 10th species of the woodpecker on this trip we headed to the Hargita Mountain. Almost as soon as we got out from the bus we heard Crested Tit and Firecrest singing. A bit further along the path we also heard a Ring Ouzel mobbing. As we passed a small clearing a Three-toed Woodpecker started to drum and it takes a while when we had a pair of this scarce alpine bird in our scope. As we were just about to leave suddenly an Eurasian Pygmy Owl called from a distance. After some nervous moments the owl sat on the top of a pine tree and allowed us to study him as long as we wanted. If that would be not enough Crested and Willow Tits mobbed the little devil, the Three-toed Woodpecker called from the back and even a Nutcracker appeared. After one and a half hour we left the place and all of us agreed that that was the most magical morning of the trip! On the way back we had good views on a singing Firecrest and the alpestris race of the Ring Ouzel. As we drove to the top and had a packed lunch we had a walk around and located Water Pipits and a single quick Crossbill. From here we drove back to our Hotel and continued to Szováta, where we located a nice pair of Red-breasted Flycatcher and found a nest of Hawfinch. From here we visited a riverside area where Garden Warblers were common and after a while we studied a Thrush Nightingale in the scope. We also had a Kingfisher and a pair of Grey-headed Woodpecker around us. At the end of this unbelievable day we visited the park again and this time we had an Eurasian Scops Owl to finish the day. This was our ninth owl species during the trip.



Three-toed Woodpecker (János Oláh)

Sunday, 13th of May

Before breakfast we had a close view of a male Syrian Woodpecker at the riverside park. It was time to leave Transylvania behind and after breakfast we started our long return journey to Hungary. Later we stopped for a quick picnic lunch at Maroscsapó Fishponds where we had a scarce Mediterranean Gull and several singing Marsh Warblers. After the much shorter border crossing we stopped at Andaháza wetland, where despite the strong wind we added a few to our growing birdlist like Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sanderling and two Turnstone. As a storm approached we left this bird-filled place behind and our next stop was in Hungary. Not far from our accommodation a freshly drained fishpond with extensive mudflat yielded a scarce Broad-billed Sandpiper in a wader flock and an even more scarce Gull-billed Tern. We were certainly back to the very birdy Hortobágy region! It was late afternoon when we arrived to the familiar hotel near Nádudvar.

Monday, 14th of May

Our last full day birding was spent again in the Hortobágy National Park. In the morning we visited a wetland we did several days ago but seems almost all the marsh terns left the area, but still managed to see a Glossy Ibis and a Turnstone. After a lot of searching finally we managed to find a pair of Long-legged Buzzard. We had our lunch at the nicely situated and just opened Bábic Ecolodge, where we enjoyed some birdwatching too. From Balmazújváros we crossed the Hortobágy and stopped for an immature pair of Eastern Imperial Eagle. The dirt road to the marshy area was unpassable by our van so we needed to take a walk to the best marshy areas. On the walk we had a singing Bluethroat and a Water Rail as a good sign. As soon as we arrived to the certain spot we immediately heard two Moustached Warblers singing and it didn't take a long to have a fine male in the scope as did a superb male Bluethroat minutes later. On the way back we saw several fine Montagu's Harriers and had a good look of a male Little Crake. Before we arrived back to our hotel checked a roosting place for Barn Owl and it took only a minute to succeed.



Singing Bluethroat (János Oláh)

Tuesday, 15th of May

After breakfast we had to say goodbye to the Hortobágy and started our drive towards the Liszt Ferenc Airport of Budapest where the tour ended. We had one stop en route on the fields near Karcag where we had good looks of the lovely Collared Pratincole. While we were checking the colony a fine male Black-winged Pratincole - a rare bird in Hungary – was spotted. The bird was courting a Collared Pratincole, and we had good scope views on the ground and also the flying bird to study all the important identification features and eliminate a hybrid possibility. This was the last new bird to our list so the grand total settled on 228 species on the tour. This was a truly memorable tour with the second ever biggest list 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 the great natural heritage of three Central-Eastern European countries.



Eurasian Pygmy Owl (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 male was flushed off the forest track in Slovakia.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*: A pair was seen at Élesd Reservoir. Its such a rare event to see this declining bird nowadays.

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

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

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*: It was numerous in the Hortobágy area with up to 100 daily. This is the eastern *rubrirostris* race in eastern Hungary.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*: We had a single birds at Gyökérkút Fishponds between Greyleg Geese.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: Several were counted in the Hortobágy area and in Transylvania too. A rapidly spreading and increasing species.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: We had a flock of 8 in the Hortobágy later 6 more were seen on the Bihar Plain.

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

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 four birds were seen in the Hortobágy National Park.

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

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*: Two sightings this year in the Hortobágy area.

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

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*: Regular encounters with this globally threatened species on the tour with most sightings in the Hortobágy area. Around 50+ birds were seen in total.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*: We had an overflying six and later three perched in the Hortobágy area with very good looks of fine males.

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

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: We saw a single breeding plumaged individuals on the Hortobágy Fishponds.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: It was common on the fish ponds in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy area.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*: a single fine summer plumaged adult was observed in the Hortobágy. A scarce passage migrant in Hungary.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*: Five in the Hortobágy area and later a single one in Transylvania.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*: It was recorded in the Zemplén Hills and the Hortobágy area.

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

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*: Surprisingly easy this year with three encounters in the Hortobágy.

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

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*: We heard in the Hortobágy area and had a flight views on the Bihar Plains.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: Great looks of a single beside of the Trófea Hotel in the Hortobágy and an unexpected one in Transylvania.

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

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

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

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Up to four birds were seen daily on the Hortobágy and on the Bihar Plains.

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 in Hungary. Particularly in some parts of the Hortobágy.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: Up to 20 birds were seen in the Hortobágy area.

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 20 circling together or occupying their abandoned rook nest or an artificial nest box for breeding.



Male Red-footed Falcon. There are many great raptors on this tour (János Oláh)

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

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

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*: One individuals was seen in the Zemplén Hills.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: The first observation of three birds were in the Zemplén Hills and later six 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.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*: A very late passing bird was observed in Transylvania.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: At least three in the southern Hortobágy.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: One bird was seen in the Zemplén Hills with two more in Slovakia.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*: One bird was seen in the Zemplén Hills.

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 a pair on the Hortobágy Plain.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: We saw two birds in Zemplén Hills later singletons were observed in Slovakia, in the Hortobágy and in Transylvania.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*: A total of six were seen in the Zemplén Hills, Slovakia and Transylvania. The flagship bird of the Carpathians with over 2000 breeding pairs!

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*: We had two adults while we drove down to the Zemplén area and later another pair in the Hortobágy.

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

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*: We had great views of a single male in the southern section of the Hortobágy National Park.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*: One was seen in the southern Hortobágy.

Little Crane *Porzana parva*: One was seen well in the southern Hortobágy.

Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana*: An unexpected one flushed near Andaháza while looking for Great Snipe.

Corncrake *Crex crex* (H): Several birds were heard in the Zemplén foothills and in Transylvania, but we could not have a look.

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 flock in the Hortobágy area – the largest was around 40 individuals.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: We stopped on the way back to airport near Karcag to see this now much localised bird. We managed to get excellent looks of at least 10 birds on our last day!

Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*: Amazing way to finish the tour with this rare bird. We had a single individual in a colony of Collared Pratincoles.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: It was seen in the Hortobágy National Park and on the Bihar Plains where up to 50 were counted.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: It was seen in the Hortobágy National Park and also on the Bihar Plains where up to 100's were counted.

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 and Hortobágy area.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: We saw three birds on the Bihar Plains.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: A single one in a drained fishpond.

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*: A roading male we saw in Slovakia.

Great Snipe *Gallinago media*: After some work we flushed one on the Bihar Plain.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: Four were seen on the Bihar Plain while looking for other snipes.

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*: One was seen on the Bihar Plain while looking for Great Snipe.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*: Good numbers were seen on the Bihar Plain and on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*: Only 10 at Andaháza wetland.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*: Usually difficult to see by early May. This year we had two sightings in the Hortobágy area.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*: Good numbers were seen in the Hortobágy.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: Seven were seen in the drained fishpond at the edge of the Hortobágy.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: We regularly had flocks of 5-50 birds on most visited wetlands in the Hortobágy area.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: We observed this species in the Szentpál Fishponds in Transylvania and a few birds were also seen on the Hortobágy.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*: A single one on the Bihar Plains.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: First we counted nine individuals in Transylvania, later several we had on the Bihar Plains and in the Hortobágy too.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*: Superb views of two breeding plumaged birds at Szentpál Fishponds, Transylvania.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: Regularly seen on the various wetlands and up to 200 were seen on the Bihar Plains.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: Seven were seen at Szentpál fishpond in Transylvania and more in the Hungarian part.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*: A fine summer plumaged adult was observed the edge of the Hortobágy on a drained fishpond.



Breeding plumaged Broad-billed Sandpiper feeding (János Oláh)

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: Up to 2000 were seen on our first day in the Hortobágy and a few smaller groups later on. Some different breeding plumaged males with great ruffs were also observed.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Two summer plumaged birds were located on a wetland site in the Bihar Plains and a single next day in the Hortobágy.

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

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*: A single immature at Maroscsapó Fishponds in Transylvania.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*: Unusually high numbers were seen this year especially at Élesd Reservoir in Romania where we counted 200 birds.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michaellis*: Only one at Hajdúszoboszló Fishponds.

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 at the Bihar Plains.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*: a singleton of this scarce migrant at Hajdúszoboszló Fishponds.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Up to 20 were counted at Élesd Reservoir in Romania and we also had a few birds in the Hortobágy.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*: It was common on the Hortobágy with up to 80 seen daily.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: Good numbers of migrants were seen throughout the tour. The biggest count of 200 birds were in the Hortobágy.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*: Good number of migrants were seen throughout the tour. It was especially common on the Hortobágy with up to 150 seen daily.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia f. domestica*: 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, Slovakia and in Hungary too.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Still a fairly common sight in most parts of Hungary. 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.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*: We had excellent looks of one in the Hortobágy area in a roosting place.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*: Two were glimpsed in the Zemplén Hills.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*: We had two sightings in the Zemplén Hills but the best observation was just before left the Zemplén.

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

Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus* (H): Sadly only heard a pair in Slovakia. It seems they were not breeding this year.

Eurasian Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum*: After some fruitless try in Slovakia and Hungary, finally we had walkaway views of this little creature.

Long-eared Owl *Asia otus*: We saw a single incubating bird in the Hortobágy.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: Surprisingly only a single one in the Hortobágy.

European Scops Owl *Otus scops*: We missed in Torockó due to the cold weather, but scored in Székelyudvarhely in Transylvania.

Eurasian Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*: A displaying male on our first evening in the Zemplén Hills.

Common Swift *Apus apus*: Small numbers were seen in Slovakia, Hungary and in Transylvania.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: About 15 were seen at Torda Gorge, some 20 in Torockó and 2 more 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 the Hortobágy.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: Three sightings we had in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: We saw several in the Hortobágy area and also in Transylvania.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: One was seen near Székelyudvarhely in Transylvania.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: We had a single responsive one in Székelyudvarhely.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*: At the beginning of the tour we had good looks of a pair 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. Later a female was observed at Aggtelek Hills.



Male White-backed Woodpecker (tour participant Hector Galley)

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*: A pair in the Zemplén Hills and later another one was observed at Aggtelek Hills.

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

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

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*: First we had a drumming male in Slovakia and later a brilliant prolonged looks of a pair in Transylvania.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: Two sightings of this largest European woodpecker in the Zemplén Hills and Slovakia.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: We seen it near the hotel in Erdőbénye and later one heard in Transylvania.

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

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*: This lovely bird was commonly encountered on the tour.



Male Red-backed Shrike is a common sighting along this tour (János Oláh)

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

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*: We saw two birds on this years tour, both in Transylvania.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: It was commonly seen throughout the tour. We even had a good scope views near Nagyiván.

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*: Some of the participants had a flight view in Slovakia, but later everybody had great views of this often secretive breeding bird in Transylvania.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Very common in Slovakia, 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, Slovakia and in Transylvania too.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*: A few were seen in the Zemplén Hills, Slovakia and Transylvania.

Willow Tit *Parus montanus*: First we had a couple in Slovakia. A pair mobbed an Eurasian Pygmy Owl in Transylvania!

Sombre Tit *Parus lugubris*: Two birds near Torockó in Transylvania. Seem this scarce bird getting more predictable in our tours recently.

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 Slovakia and Transylvania, where they mobbed an Eurasian Pygmy Owl!

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.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*: Small numbers at various locations but the biggest concentration was seen on the Hortobágy where up to 30 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 four 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*: We observed two couples in Slovakia and Hungary. 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, Slovakia 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 heard one in the Zemplén Hills and seen plenty in Transylvania.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*: One was heard and seen briefly in the Hortobágy area.

River Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: We only heard in the Zemplén Hills but finally we had good scope views of a singing bird in Transylvania.

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 two were heard and a singleton seen in the Hortobágy area including 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 four birds were seen in Transylvania.

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

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*: We observed a few birds, 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 saw in Slovakia and some migrants in the Hortobágy too.

- Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*: It was commonly heard throughout the tour and several were seen.
- Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin*: We saw about five different birds in Transylvania and a migrant in the Trófea Hotel garden too.
- 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 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 several times.
- Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.
- Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria*: Two pairs 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 Aggtelek Hills.
- 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 had a singleton on the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania. This is the more scaly 'alpestris' race here.



The scaly-bellied alpestris race of Ring Ouzel in the Carpathians (János Oláh)

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*: Fairly common in Slovakia, Hungary and in Transylvania.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*: The first four 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 scoped 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 some fine males very well in the Hortobágy area. This is the 'white spotted' Central European race.

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

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: One pair was seen in Székelyudvarhely and a single male on the Hargita Mountain.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: First was seen in Slovakia. Also was seen in small numbers in Hungary.

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 in the Hortobágy.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: A bit distant male scoped near Torockó in Transylvania.

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

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*: A superb pair was giving excellent looks in Transylvania.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*: One in Slovakia, with another at Trófea Hotel.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*: We had several excellent looks of different males of this very handsome species throughout the tour, but the best views were in Székelyudvarhely.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: We had two birds in Slovakia and two 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*: One were seen in Slovakia.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*: The nominate race was common in Hungary and we also had some nice males of 'dombrowski' and 'superciliaris' 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 Zemplén Hills and later one was seen near Torockó too.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: Several birds were heard in Slovakia, also seen in the Hortobágy area and in Transylvania.

- Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus*: Three were seen at Bihar Plains while sniping in the marsh.
- Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta*: Three 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*: Some were seen this year in Slovakia.
- Common Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina*: It was fairly common in Transylvania and in the Zemplén Hills. A few were in the Hortobágy area too.
- Eurasian Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: Only a singleton heard in Slovakia later one was seen in Transylvania.
- Common Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*: Only a single elusive female this year in Transylvania.
- Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: Some encounters in the Zemplén Hills, but the best views we had in Transylvania where a pair fed their youngsters.
- 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 four near Torockó in Transylvania.
- Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*: A total of five birds were seen at Élesd Reservoir and another one near Torockó in Transylvania.
- Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*: It was fairly common in suitable habitat on the Hortobágy area.
- 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 nine 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.