



SAKERTOURS



Male Capercaillie seen in Transylvania (Dániel Balla)

Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania GT **with SAKERTOURS** **6th – 17th May, 2022**

Leader: Dániel Balla

The 9th Grand Tour of Sakertours proved again, that visiting the region this time of the year covering all the major habitats can give a complete list which is hardly beatable in the region other ways on a birding tour. Not just the habitats but the weather and birding circumstances were very different in between the birding locations of the itinerary. This year the Zemplén Hills and the Hortobágy region was very dry and we were doing birdwatching in very hot conditions on the plains while up on the Harghita Mountain in Transylvania we had to change our plans, as the best birding trail was covered in so deep snow that it was not possible to trek. Unfortunately, it was one of the worst years for Owls for the past decades, probably caused by last years and this springs drought. Despite the sometimes challenging conditions, we recorded a healthy 220 species including a very high percentage of the region's specialties and overall did a fantastic and memorable birding all along the trip.

Highlight of this year's tour included Ferruginous Ducks, first a female then a male Western Capercaillie, five Grebe species, Pygmy Cormorants, Lesser Spotted and Eastern Imperial Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard, fantastic views of Great Bustards, Corn Crake, Little Crake, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Great-, Common- and Jack Snipes, Gull-billed-, Whiskered-, White-winged and Black Terns, seven Owl species, European Nightjar, eight Woodpecker species and Saker Falcon. From the songbirds the very best were Lesser Grey Shrike, Spotted Nutcracker, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Bearded Reedling, Moustached Warbler, Savi's Warbler, River Warbler, the magnificent Wallcreeper, Ring Ouzel, Collared and Red-breasted Flycatchers, White-throated Dipper, the all-time-favourite Hawfinch, Rock and Ortolan Buntings.

6th May (Friday)

After meeting each other we left the airport at 12:30 and had a short drive to the northern habitats of the Kiskunság National Park. We couldn't ask for a better start as our first stop delivered close views of male Great Bustards, counting six of the heaviest flying bird on Earth. An easy roadside birding was carried on where we saw Collared Pratincoles and found a couple Grey Partridges which species heavily declined and became very difficult to see in the past decades. The open grasslands and bushy habitats had Corn Buntings singing everywhere and European Rollers stole the most colourful birds of the day prize.



Grey Partridge (left) and a duo of a male Great Bustard and a Eurasian Hobby (Dániel Balla)

Visiting the close fishpond system became a good idea as we collected a bunch of great species here. A lonely Pygmy Cormorant was drying itself in the edge of the reeds and several Ferruginous Duck were swimming on one of the ponds accompanied by Red-crested and Common Pochards, Garganeys and Great Crested Grebes to name a few. The reeds along the canals and the ponds held Great Reed Warblers, European Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers almost everywhere. A single Black Stork was seen together with a Grey Heron and Purple Herons also shown several times themselves. We had a few Eurasian Spoonbills flying by before we saw the first couple on the ground. A surprisingly common species was Common Cuckoo, at least 15 birds were spotted during the afternoon and Red-backed Shrikes started to appear everywhere as well. Moving to a natural wetland with shallow water was a good idea, we saw Kentish Plover, Pied Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Temminck's Stints, Dunlins, Whimbrels, several flocks of Ruffs and a beautiful summer plumage Ruddy Turnstone naming just a few shorebirds from the list while behind us another group of male Great Bustards were ready to start their display. Staying here for hours wouldn't be hard but we decided to move on to a gravel pit where the water held more than a hundred of Mediterranean Gulls and we managed to see Little Gulls flying above the water together with dozens of Black Terns; from this spot we located our first Savi's Warbler of the tour. For our last birding spot, we moved to an open grassland where we saw a nice Tawny Pipit and had distant views of Red-footed Falcons to end the day. We arrived at our accommodation in the Zemplén Hills in dark, where our nice and warm dinner was welcoming us.

7th May (Saturday)

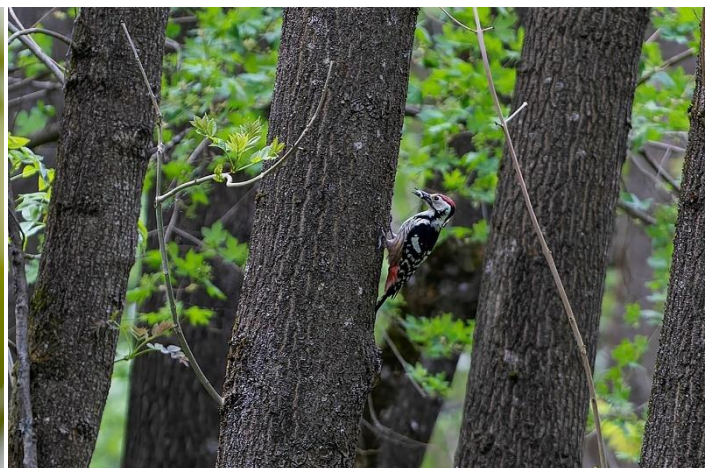
In the morning we met Zoltán Petrovics our local guide in this area, who was helping us in the upcoming two days of birdwatching. We started birding just from the entrance of our hotel and managed nice views of a Grey-headed Woodpecker. We took a dirt road on a nearby hill where we glimpsed a Middle Spotted Woodpecker and saw our first Collared and Spotted Flycatchers. To have better views we drove west and arrived in a nice mixed forest, where Zoltán found a fresh made hole a few weeks back; keeping a safe distance, we had decent views of Middle Spotted Woodpecker visiting it. A walk in the forest produced close views of Wood Warbler and a stunning Hawfinch. Outside the forest, the vineyards of the famous Tokaj region were stretching around. Checking the wooden poles of the wines produced a stationary Woodlark while several others were singing in

flight. We still had an hour before lunchtime, which we spent at a huge quarry, waiting for raptors to turn up. During our time here we saw European Honey Buzzards, Common Buzzards, Montagu's Harrier and just before leaving we had a show of two male Short-toed Eagles flying together, trying to overdominate each other. We spent a tasty lunch on the terrace of a close restaurant.



Short-toed Eagle and Collared Flycatcher (Dániel Balla)

After lunch we stopped near the main road to have a look on Black Kites, they were in the air together with dozens of White Storks. In the afternoon we started driving along the southern slopes of the hills in hope of more raptors. Once we spotted a flying eagle we stopped and the upcoming half an hour was a productive birding experience. We saw at least three different Lesser Spotted Eagles, a single Eastern Imperial Eagle, a Short-toed Eagle, Common Buzzards, European Honey Buzzard and Marsh Harrier from an incredible single spot. Moving on we had a short stop where we saw Golden Orioles, European Turtle Doves, Short-toed Eagle and a male Red-backed Shrike from a very close distance. It just took 10 minutes driving to arrive to the close town where a Tawny Owl was waiting for us in a chimney of an abandoned building. We had a two-minute walk to a quarry where we checked the nesting location of the Eurasian Eagle-Owl. The sun was high up and it was quite warm the exposed wall of the quarry made the female bird leaving back its youngsters alone in the nest while she moved somewhere into the shade. Two large, roughly 5 weeks old chicks were waiting for the cooler times of the day to arrive and were making birdwatchers looking them happy. After the owls we went back to the forests and arrived to Zoltán's next secret site. Just stepping out of our bus and waiting for a few minutes we were watching a hole where male and female White-backed Woodpeckers were changing each other carrying food for their young inside the hole. A comfortable walk to release the endorphins produced Collared Flycatchers, Goldcrest, Eurasian Wren, Great Spotted Woodpecker and a stunning Fire Salamander in a stream near the road. To finish the day we stopped on a more open patch of the forest where we observed Yellowhammer, Marsh Tit and found a white headed Long-tailed Tit in one of the trees.



Tawny Owl and White-backed Woodpecker (Dániel Balla)

8th May (Sunday)

A prebreakfast birding produced European Green Woodpecker and Black Woodpecker. After leaving the accommodation we drove to the floodplains under the Zemplén hills. We saw Black Kites on the way and some common species. Arriving at the bank of the Bodrog river we heard singing Wrynecks which we managed to track down. We had an amazing close fly-by of a Black Woodpecker which then was showing himself for several minutes on the other side of the river. Common Kingfisher was seen along the bank flying and perched above the water while the huge woodpecker was still visible. Last but not least a 2nd calendar year White-tailed Eagle turned up and flew down above the river just crossing above us. After leaving the floodplains we picked out a Little Owl from the bus sitting on a chimney but jumped down before we could manage good views of it; thanks to Zoltán's excellent searching skills it didn't take too long while we had it again sitting in an open spot in a nearby tree. On the way to our next spot, we decided to check a quarry on the way where luckily, we managed to see a (half) Eurasian Eagle-Owl, this time an adult individual. Just before driving forward another White-tailed Eagle got even closer to us than the previous one. Our next stop was at a small lake where we saw a drake Garganey, Little Ringed Plover, Wood Sandpipers and a Common Whitethroat in the nearby bushes. An Eastern Imperial Eagle nest was visible from the shore where an adult bird was spotted flying around the nesting tree.



Black Woodpecker flying by (Dániel Balla)

After an easy lunch and a coffee, we headed back to our accommodation for a short break in the heat of the day. Later we drove to a bushy area, where we saw a Barred Warbler singing in the light rain which was just lasting for 10 minutes in the afternoon. Another short stop produced a singing Grasshopper Warbler, which we had in our scopes for everyone in the group. Our main birding spot for the rest of the day was a nearby wetland where we spent almost two hours in an observation tower. We were lucky to spot a female and a male Little Crake and everyone enjoyed clear and long views of both individuals through telescope as they were skulking in the edge of a reedbed. Getting the Moustached Warbler needed some patience but the group was rewarded with decent views of a bird in the dry bulrush under us. Tired of the great birds we saw we drove to the final attraction of the day, to a local winery, where we had a superb dinner and enjoyed a variety of the famous Tokaj wines.

9th May (Monday)

The morning was spent with traveling as it took us some time to drive up to the mountains of Slovakia. We visited several locations where birding was sometimes interrupted by rain or just was hard because of the windy weather. We successfully managed to see some more common species of the higher elevations such as Crested Tits, Firecrests or Mistle Thrush. In a patch of pristine pine forest, we heard a singing Hazel Grouse but our attempts to see the bird failed all the time, even if sometimes it was calling from a very close distance. However, this species is always hard to see, it takes even more luck to find them in May when they are usually quiet, vocal observation is also rare of this elusive Grouse this time of the year. Later we stopped at a wetland site where we saw Temminck's Stints, Common Sandpipers, Common Greenshanks and the first Little Grebes of the tour just to mention a few species. A late afternoon arrival to our accommodation in Slovakia and an early dinner was part of our preparation for the next morning's early start.



Firecrest and Red-breasted Flycatcher in Slovakia (Dániel Balla)

10th May (Tuesday)

In the morning we met István, our local guide for the day and visited woods of beech near a small lake where we started searching for Ural Owl. An hour walk in the dedicated area spent without luck spotting the Owl but produced memorable views of a drumming Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and later a Middle Spotted Woodpecker as it was visiting its nesting hole and the local Collared Flycatchers.



Eurasian Pygmy Owl perched above us in Slovakia (Dániel Balla)

Moving on to higher elevation we birded the conifer woods of the peak of a close mountain. While the forestry sadly started cutting the beautiful forest we visited the local Eurasian Pygmy-Owl showed well after the second attempt giving almost half an hour for everyone to enjoy its presence, while Crested Tit, Willow Tit, Coal Tit, Firecrest, Goldcrest were the supporting cast during our walk here, though our attempt to see the Three-toed Woodpecker was unsuccessful. We drove to a karst valley with a mature beech forest to have our packed lunch and shortly after we collected Red-breasted Flycatcher – our target species of the spot. As it was already the middle of the afternoon, we said good bye to István and started driving down to the Hortobágy in Hungary. We had a smooth drive giving us enough time to have a short visit of the Great Forest near Debrecen where we quickly bagged Short-toed Treecreeper. As we arrived in Balmazújváros – the town of our lovely lodge for the upcoming two nights – we spotted a long-awaited Syrian Woodpecker from the car which then treated us with proper views to finish this long day.



Short-toed Treecreeper seen near Debrecen (top left), Lesser Grey Shrikes (top right) and a hunting Saker Falcon in the Hortobágy (Dániel Balla)

11th May (Wednesday)

Our full day in the Hortobágy National Park became a real memorable one. We started birding early in the morning in search for Long-legged Buzzard, which we found soon still roosting in a bush, while Turtle Dove was singing and a Lesser Grey Shrike was spotted. We opted to go closer to the Shrikes for better views, finally seeing 3 of them chasing each-other around us with a nice bonus Golden Oriole crossing the air. We quickly

drove to a close stretch of open grassland and stopped near a small patch of woods. The trees had several pairs of nesting Red-footed Falcons and Common Kestrels always noisy and flying around and it took only a few minutes for a Saker Falcon to appear and we enjoyed it as it was scanning the area from the air for European Soursniks down in the short grass. On the way to our next birding spot, we had a brief stop to have a close look on a Syrian Woodpecker visiting its nesting hole in the town. After finding a window between the branches and leaves we were looking at a Long-eared Owl sitting on the nest carefully checking us with its bright orange eyes just ten minutes after leaving the town. A Common Nightingale was also cooperative and showing well finally. Driving a few more minutes down on the stretch of road we stopped at a scrubby patch where we heard and spotted a Barred Warbler in the dense vegetation. Further down the road we had nice views of Crested Larks and Corn Bunting before we met Tamás – another guide working for Sakertours – who came to help us with our main target here – the Great Snipe. We just got down from the paved road when we flushed a bird from the wet grass. We sat back into the 4x4 to cross the water and gave another chance for this special bird. We were lucky and a few hundred meters away we flushed the same individual and another one giving perfect views for everyone in the group – hard work paid off. As we still had some time before lunch, we stopped at an abandoned farm building where with the help of the local ranger we had great views of Barn Owls.



Red-backed Shrike (top left), Bluethroat (top right) and a landing Great Snipe in the Hortobágy (Dániel Balla)

We were enjoying our lunch and the shade at the local restaurant when fresh news from the field reached us as local birdwatchers found a Terek Sandpiper just 10 minutes' drive from us. The soup went down rapidly and

there was no need to drink coffee to wake us up as we left the restaurant and soon we were scanning a narrow patch of water in a drained fishpond. It only took a few minutes to spot the Terek Sandpiper, it was a bit distant walking in the mud and feeding while some nice birds were around including several Black Storks, Eurasian Spoonbills, Little Gulls, Common Ringed Plovers, Grey Plovers, Black-tailed Godwits, Whimbrels, Eurasian Curlews, Ruff, Little Sting just to name a few. Checking the nearby lake we added Red-crested Pochard and Red-necked Grebe to our day list. We moved to another fishpond system where one of the larger lakes provided us some fabulous looking Ferruginous Duck and other waterfowl. The reedbed behind us had a singing Bluethroat which we had in the scope before repositioning ourself to another spot on the dike. Climbing up an observation tower to have a complete view of the lake was a good idea and soon we were watching Slavonian Grebes and Red-necked Grebes together while checking other spots on the lake Black-necked and Great-crested Grebes were also showing well as a Little Crake and Savi's Warbler was calling under us in the reedbed. We stopped near a wetland close to the fishponds to collect our last possible Snipe and after trying a few suitable habitat patch, we finally saw a Jack Snipe as it was flushed.



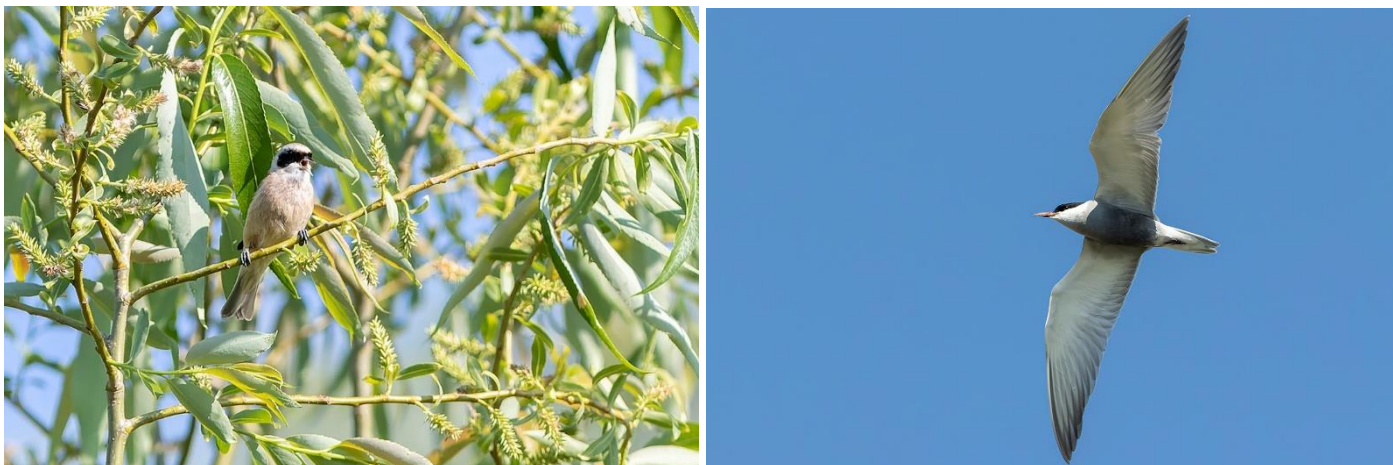
European Roller posing for us (Dániel Balla)

Back on the main road we were heading to the Western edge of the Hortobágy National Park to a magnificent open stretch of grassland where we met Sándor, who helped us with our main target here. A cooperative European Roller was seen before entering the grasslands. Driving on the flat steppe seemed to be bumpier, than thought before, but for sure it was worth it, as we had wonderful views of a Eurasian Stone-curlew pair (Thick-knee) in the middle of nowhere immediately after getting out from our vehicle. On our way out a male Montagu's Harrier was crossing in front of us providing some exceptional views. We were back to our lodge in time for an early dinner. After dinner we drove out to a semi open patch of forest near Debrecen where we managed to see at least two European Nightjars with relative ease and heard a few more of this tricky species to end a long day with birding.

12th May (Thursday)

Our main goal for today was to reach the Western part of Transylvania which was five hours driving distance from the Hortobágy. Soon after leaving the lodge in the morning, we stopped at a great wetland habitat on the way, still on the Hungarian side of the border and managed to see a singing Eurasian Penduline Tit just near the parking spot. Getting on the observation tower we were surrounded by thousands of waterbirds. Focusing on the new species for the tour we scoped a few Greater White-fronted Goose amongst Greylags, Curlew Sandpiper in a flock of hundreds of Dunlins, several close Temmmick's Stints, more than a dozen

Mediterranean Gulls were seen and a Common Gull was also spotted, the biggest surprise though was an unexpected Gull-billed Tern showing well.



Singing Penduline Tit and a Whiskered Tern seen on the way to Transylvania (Dániel Balla)

We drove forward to the Hungarian-Romanian border where we had an unexpected and well placed joke from the Romanian officer but a smooth crossing was never a question. We had a sort stop for lunch and arrived in time for some birding in the vicinity of our next accommodation in Rimetea. We drove to a nearby gorge where after nerve-racking minutes we finally managed Rock Bunting into the scope, while Eurasian Crag Martins, Red-rumped Swallows were spotted around us and a Golden Eagle turned up for a short time as well. On the more open habitats we collected Ortolan Bunting, European Stonechat and Whinchat and had nice views of a Grey-headed Woodpecker. Our boogey bird for today was a Corncrake which was playing with us and finally we had to give up before we had a breakdown and went back to our accommodation. After a delicious dinner from the local cuisine we went out for some night birding, where we had fantastic views of Eurasian Scops-Owl and tried again for the Corncrake but this time it was silent.



This male Rock Bunting showed amazingly well (Dániel Balla)

13th May (Friday)

Early morning start for birding as we had to climb a steep hill before the heat kicks in. A showy Common Cuckoo was the first species we spent some time with singing on the top of a close tree. We trekked up to a scrubby patch on the hillside to give a try for Sombre Tit, but our luck was not with us for the species this time.

However, we had some great views of Woodlark, Grey Partridge and Wryneck around. Descending back, we heard two Corncrakes calling close, so we tried again for this tricky species and this time we were lucky to spot the 'singing' bird close to us in the dense vegetation. We were lucky and could follow the bird for several minutes the only disturbing factor being a Black Woodpecker which just landed behind us eye-level on the closest tree – tough moments. On the way driving back to have our breakfast we had a Great Grey Shrike added to the triplist singing on a fence.



Eurasian Scops Owl and Grey-headed Woodpecker seen very well in Rimetea Valley (Dániel Balla)

After breakfast we had a longer drive to the Harghita area. We stopped for a chilling icecream before trying for Thrush Nightingale – our next target species. The riverside habitat usually hides well the skulking Thrush Nightingale but we were lucky to tape lure the bird to an open branch where great views were provided for everyone. Off we go for a lunch and some wetland birding after at the close fishponds where we had some shorebirds at a close distance especially Curlew Sandpipers, Dunlins, Ruffs, Little and Common Ringed Plovers and *dombrowski* and *thunbergi* races of Western Yellow Wagtails.



This male 'Carpathian' Brown Bear was the biggest from the seven individuals we saw from the hide (Dániel Balla)

Our day was set by a fantastic bear watching close to our accommodation the Harghita Bear Lodge. We had seven different individuals of Carpathian Brown Bear from the hide including a huge male one which was very busy following a female of less interest in him. The long day made a good appetite for dinner which after a well-deserved sleep was the reward for everyone.

14th May (Saturday)

The morning was spent up on the Harghita Mountain where we were aiming species of higher elevation. After reaching the top of the road we started walking down the other side where we spotted a female Capercaillie sitting under the top of a spruce resulting in unexpected scope views of this elusive species. We walked further down collecting Mistle Thrush, beautiful Common Redstarts, Coal Tits when we heard a Three-toed Woodpecker drumming under the track in the valley, which we were unable to bring closer. A Red Crossbill flew by while walking back to the parking. We tried to walk a trail which we usually do this time of the year but we were blocked by very deep snow, simply impossible to go towards on the trail. Changing plans, we turned back and we birded the first section of the trail collecting Crested Tit and Firecrest. We went back to the carpark where Ring Ouzel and Mistle Thrush was easy and Tree Pipit was bagged.



Female Capercaillie blending into the canopy of a spruce and Common Cuckoo sitting in the open (Dániel Balla)

We had lunch in a local restaurant and walked back to our Lodge. Just before the gate we had a singing Marsh Warbler which wasn't giving himself easily for us, but our patience payed-off with it. The middle of the day and early afternoon was very hot and bird activity was low so we had a short post lunch break before going back birding. Our plan for the afternoon was to try Hazel Grouse and Ural Owl along a quiet forestry road. We drove up a sometimes steep road going through nice beech forests finally reaching the spruce zone. We had a sort stop in the lower section where we found a nice singing Collared Flycatcher. Further up the habitats near the road were unfortunately silent. At the end of the road we had a short walk on a trail into a nice spruce forest where we had a Eurasian Pygmy Owl calling from a very dense part of a tree – thus we were unable to spot it, though as we had fantastic views before we didn't want to disturb the bird more. We drove down the road very late afternoon but were unlucky bumping into Ural Owl. We had a rapid checklist session after arriving back to the lodge and had our dinner in time.

15th May (Sunday)

We were very excited leaving in the morning as we were heading to the Békás Gorge. Leaving after an early breakfast we drove up a forestry road on the way which rewarded the group with an excellent Spotted Nutcracker perched on a spruce. One more hour driving during Great Grey Shrike was seen and we were watching the thrilling walls of the Békás Gorge. No group can be luckier than us as we spotted a Wallcreeper immediately as we got out of our vehicle. We had nice views but the bird disappeared soon so we decided to follow it and went further down in the gorge. The stream down had White-throated Dipper and Grey Wagtails but the Wallcreeper was hardly giving itself so we went back to the original spot. Here we were lucky again and

had several good views again of at least two individuals feeding, sunbathing or just chasing each other on the wall. High up, in the sky we had Alpine Swifts before leaving the site. We had a nice lunch on the way back which after we stopped at a meadow with some bushes along the road. Here we had a calling Corn Crake and saw several Garden Warblers. Near the close stream we had nice views of Fieldfares. Driving further back we passed our Lodge and went towards a spot near a village to try River Warbler. It seems that it was too early for them here as only a Thrush Nightingale was heard singing at the dedicated spot. On the way driving out from the valley we found a Lesser Grey Shrike sitting on the telegraph line near the road. Later a fantastic Lesser Spotted Eagle was sitting on a close bush on the way to Sighisoara where we had a dinner at a restaurant. After dinner we went up a near-by hill with open pasture on the top surrounded by mature beech forest. Here we waited for sunset and stayed until it got dark in hope of a Ural Owl coming out from the woods. No luck with Ural Owl we only saw a Tawny Owl flying in dawn – so close. We drove back to the lodge after a very long day.



Wallcreeper (top left) White-throated Dipper and Ring Ouzel in Transylvania (Dániel Balla)

16th May (Monday)

In the morning we did a long prebreakfast birding and drove up to the mountains. We were lucky at the first lights as we spotted a huge male Capercaillie, which then posed for us for several minutes before disappearing. Our main goal however was to try again the previously heard Three-toed Woodpecker. We drove close to the point and started searching for the bird. Common Redstart, Willow Tit and Mistle Thrush were seen soon and

the Tree-toed Woodpecker drumming for a few times heard again. A Great-spotted Woodpecker was also drumming close which we found soon but our efforts on seeing the Three-toed unfortunately remained unrewarded. We had a short walk around the peak and saw nice Ring Ouzels and a few Red Crossbills flying by. Our last bird on the top was a magnificent Nutcracker showing for a few minutes on the top of a pine tree closing the morning session. We went back to the Harghita Bear Lodge for a breakfast end prepared for leaving.



Bearded Reedling seen on the way to the Hortobágy and a Spotted Nutcracker from the early morning visit to the Harghita Mountain (Dániel Balla)

We drove straight to Hungary with a few short breaks and stopped for a late afternoon birdwatching in Hungary at a restored wetland on the way to the Hortobágy. We had a short walk along the reedbed where we saw a Bearded Reedling and flushed a Bluethroat. On the mudflats and in the water, we saw Temminck's Stints, Little Stints, Dunlins, Curlew Sandpipers just to name a few and a Spotted Redshank which was new to the triplist. We arrived to our hotel in Balmazújváros in the last lights of the day.

17th May (Tuesday)

We left our hotel early in the morning to have enough time out in the field before the tour ends. We straight drove deep into the Hortobágy National Park to a natural wetland site, where grazing animals were making a mosaic habitat structure creating a paradise for birds. We had close views of Black-tailed Godwits in their prettiest breeding plumage, Common Redshanks and Northern Lapwings everywhere and just passed a colony of Whiskered Terns near the dirt road.



Phonescoped images of the singing River Warbler and the Terek Sandpiper (Dániel Balla)

A few hundred meters more and we were on the edge of a small, extensively managed fishpond system with some mudflats on the shore. It didn't take too long to spot a Broad-billed Sandpiper amongst a few dozen Dunlins. We carefully got closer to the birds and took our time enjoying the scope view when a Terek Sandpiper popped up near the flock of shorebirds we were investigating. A rare bird for the country and so close. However,

we twitched one on our first day here, this individual was much closer, showing all its features very well. In the meantime, a Bluethroat started singing on the top of a bush showing its white spot. Other birds showing well were Curlew Sandpiper, Common and Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Spoonbill, Common Shelduck just to name a few. After a magnificent start we took a coffee and had our breakfast in Hortobágy village, just on the way to our last birding hotspot on the tour. We had an hour to spend at a fishpond system in the middle of the National Park with a serious reedbed and old willow trees around. Just arriving and opening our doors we heard a River Warbler singing close. It took us no more than five minutes to find the bird singing in a bush, with telescope it gave exceptional views to everyone. The rest of our time was spent at the edge of the reedbed where the last Ferruginous Ducks, a drake Red-crested Pochard, Bearded Reedling were the last species for the group. Our fantastic tour was finished with a lunch at Hortobágy where everyone voted for the top5 birds of the tour, which after we had a transport to Budapest.



Phonescoped image of the Broad-billed Sandpiper with Dunlins and Little Stint (Dániel Balla)

After summarizing the points, the Top5 birds of the tour became the following:

1. Wallcreeper
2. White-backed Woodpecker
3. Western Capercaillie
4. Eurasian Pygmy Owl
5. Great Snipe

BIRDS – list of bird species recorded on the 2022 tour

C = Commonly seen, more than 10 individuals

'Numbers' = Actual number seen on the tour

H = Heard only

LO = Leader only

NL = Non-leader

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	C
2	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	2
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	C
4	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	C
5	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	6
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	8
7	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	5
8	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	8
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	C
10	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	6
11	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	C
12	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	C
13	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	C
14	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	1
15	Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>	2H
16	Western Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>	2
17	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>	6
18	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	H
19	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	C
20	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	6
21	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	5
22	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	C
23	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	6
24	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	3
25	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	5
26	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	C
27	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	C
28	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	H
29	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	1
30	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	3
31	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	4
32	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	C
33	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	C
34	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	C
35	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	3
36	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>	C
37	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	C
38	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	5
39	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	4
40	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>	3
41	Eastern Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	6



Lesser Spotted Eagle perched for us nicely in Transylvania (Dániel Balla)

42	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	1
43	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	3
44	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	C
45	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	3
46	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	7
47	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	5
48	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	1
49	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	C
50	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	12
51	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H
52	Corn Crane	<i>Crex crex</i>	1
53	Little Crane	<i>Porzana parva</i>	2
54	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	3
55	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	C
56	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	2
57	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichenus</i>	2
58	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	C
59	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	C
60	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	C
61	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	3
62	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	C
63	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	4
64	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	3
65	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	10
66	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	C
67	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	1
68	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	C
69	Broad-billed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris falcinellus</i>	1
70	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	8
71	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	8



Black-tailed Godwit in the Hortobágy (Dániel Balla)

72	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	C
73	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	C
74	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	2
75	Jack Snipe	<i>Lymnocyrtus minimus</i>	1
76	Great Snipe	<i>Gallinago media</i>	2
77	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1
78	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	9
79	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	C
80	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	C
81	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	1
82	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	7
83	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	6
84	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	C
85	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	C
86	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	C
87	Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	1
88	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	C
89	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	5
90	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	10
91	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Glenocholidon nilotica</i>	1
92	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	C
93	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	6
94	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	C
95	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia f. domestica</i>	C
96	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	C
97	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	C
98	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	C
99	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	C
100	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	C
101	Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	2

102	Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	2
103	Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	3
104	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	2
105	Eurasian Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>	1
106	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	5
107	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	1
108	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	2
109	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	3
110	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	5
111	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	5
112	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	2
113	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	C
114	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	3
115	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	5
116	Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>	H
117	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	4
118	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>	2
119	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	2



Syrian Woodpecker was amazing in Balmazújváros (Dániel Balla)

120	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	C
121	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	2
122	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	5
123	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	3
124	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	2
125	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	C

126	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	C
127	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1
128	Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	1
129	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	C
130	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	5
131	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	1
132	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	C
133	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	C
134	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	C
135	Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	2
136	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	C
137	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	C
138	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	C
139	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	C
140	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	C
141	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	C
142	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	6
143	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>	2
144	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	C



A beautiful male Montagu's Harrier in the Hortobágy (Dániel Balla)

145	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	C
146	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	1
147	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	4
148	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	C
149	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	C

150	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	C
151	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	C
152	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	C
153	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	10
154	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	C
155	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	3



Great Grey Shrike in the Rimetea Valley (Dániel Balla)

156	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	C
157	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	3
158	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	2
159	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	C
160	Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>	2
161	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	C
162	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	C
163	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	1
164	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>	H
165	Common Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	2
166	River Warbler	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>	1
167	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	5
168	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	C
169	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	3
170	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	3
171	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	C
172	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	C
173	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	3
174	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	3
175	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	4
176	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	C
177	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	2
178	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1
179	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	1

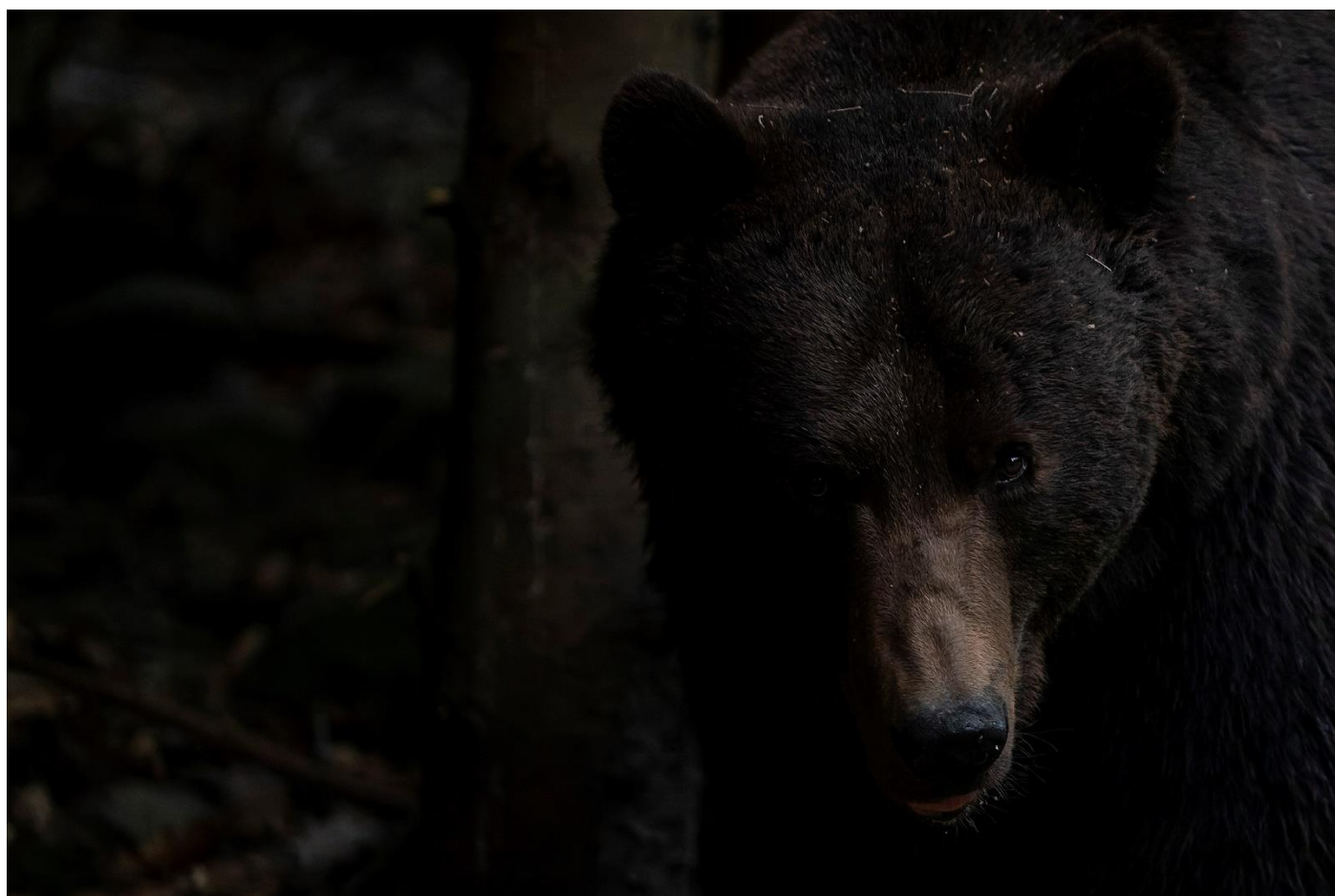
180	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	C
181	Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	7
182	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	C
183	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	C
184	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	C
185	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	5
186	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	C



White-winged Terns seen in the Hortobágy (Dániel Balla)

187	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	C
188	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	3
189	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	1
190	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	4
191	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	6
192	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>	1
193	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	C
194	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	2
195	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	C
196	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	C
197	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	6
198	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	3
199	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	C
200	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	C
201	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	6
202	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	C
203	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	C
204	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	C
205	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	1
206	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	3
207	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>	H
208	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	C
209	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	5

210	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	H
211	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	C
212	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	C
213	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	5
214	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	C
215	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	C
216	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	C
217	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	C
218	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	3
219	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	4
220	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	C



A 'Carpathian' Brown Bear we saw in Transylvania (Dániel Balla)



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