



Red-breasted Geese (Dániel Balla)

RED-BREASTED GOOSE SPECIAL TOUR with **SAKERTOURS** 5th – 9th November, 2025

Leader: Dániel Balla

This was the eighth year this tour has been running and we made it successful again, this time having our best sighting of the target Red-breasted Goose ever and probably anyone can ever dream of. The lucky ones who chose to join us this year were able to observe no less than 39 individuals of Red-breasted Goose and 26 Lesser White-fronted Goose in a short week's time spent in the Hortobágy National Park, in the heart of the Carpathian Basin.

The timing this year was spot on and we enjoyed tens of thousands of Greater White-fronted Geese in the area and the challenge to find something special amongst them was taken seriously and was yielding well. With most of our time spent in the field around wetlands and the endless grasslands of the Hortobágy we located six species of geese and were fascinated by other sightings such as the great number of Hen Harriers, the huge Great Bustards while we even made it to twitch Black-shouldered Kite which is a rarity in the region thus was unexpected on any levels.

Our birding during the trip was focusing on the two endangered target goose species, but other highlights should be mentioned like seeing Taiga Bean Goose, Ferruginous Duck, Pygmy Cormorant, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Rough-legged and Long-legged Buzzard, Lesser Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers, Saker Falcon and a fantastic Wallcreeper to elevate a few of our total of 107 bird species recorded on this year's tour.

5th November (Wednesday)

Leaving Budapest before noon we drove to the northern Kiskunság as a usual start of the tour where – to our surprise – we failed to locate the Great Bustards at their well-known spots finding only a few Corn Buntings and Northern Lapwing to mention, thus we quickly decided to change plans and start driving to the Hortobágy area with time for birding there and would also mean that we arrive in time to the cosy Bíbic Lodge – our base for the upcoming few days. As time let us do so, we chose to arrive from the southern tip of the Hortobágy National Park where we tried again the Great Bustards in the afternoon – still no luck with them, we had to be satisfied with some Hen Harriers hunting around including some fine males. Arriving at the lodge we found our first larger flock of Greater White-fronted Goose feeding in front of the terrace but proved clean from any endangered ones between them.



Crested Lark (Dániel Balla)

6th November (Thursday)

An early start after breakfast and we set off to visit the northern areas of the Bihar Plains just south to the Hortobágy National Park.

As a start we stopped at a roadside pylon where a Saker Falcon was still holding its roosting spot enabling some clear views with the telescopes. A hint from the local national park ranger took us to a stretch of road between some grasslands and cultivated area fragments where Great Bustards should be present – again. Now it became clear that these avian giants will cause some headache for us and are our boogie birds on this tour as they were not showing here either.

It was late morning when we reached the main birding spot for the day, a great wetland with grazed shoreline and a fantastic observation tower providing a good overlook on the habitat. As we arrived there were already thousands of Greater White-fronted Goose on the water and it seemed that we just arrived at the best moment as the sky was full of arriving smaller and bigger flocks all coming in to drink and rest in the middle of the sunny day. On the pool with less geese, we soon found Common Shelduck, Common Teals, Eurasian Wigeon and Northern Shoveler and Pintail all with several nice drakes included. Suddenly all the waterfowl taking off a good sign that something bigger is approaching and we soon found White-tailed Eagles arriving to the area. After some time, a Saker Falcon crossed the air next to us and fly above the water in search for prey and disappeared for a short time which after we spotted him again coming back and watched as it tried on a Common Teal without luck and then perched on a dry tree a cc. 200 metres from us – what a great opportunity for a spectacular scope view.



Northern Lapwings flying around threatened by a Peregrine (Dániel Balla)

The geese were still coming in when we finally spotted our first Red-breasted Goose swimming between the mass. With the first one harder to find other individuals started popping up here-and-there with the high-count totalling 19 individuals in one scan.

As we trained our eyes finding Red-breasted Goose the next challenge soon arrived when we spotted a Lesser White-fronted Goose in the middle of a dense swimming flock of Greater White-fronted and Greylag Goose. We took our time and patience but finally everyone managed to get on the bird and at the end it turned out that not only one but all together four individuals are in front of us, 3 adults and a first-year bird, the hardest one to find.

All our main targets in the bag and such more with Eastern Imperial Eagles circling low above us, a passing Peregrine Falcon, several White-tailed Eagles and Common Buzzards, while on the deck we found Water Pipit and a single European Golden Plover was located in the flock of Northern Lapwings which we estimated to be more than 3400 individuals – a real spectacle when they took off in fear of the Peregrine passing by.

We were having our picnic lunch on the spot when some of the geese started grazing on the edge of the water and slowly coming closer and closer to us – to a great surprise two immature Red-breasted Goose were amongst them. As they were slowly but steadily moving, they had no fear of the birdwatchers eating their well-deserved meals and enjoying a cup of hot tea and suddenly they were just there. We were already excited when they approached us to cc. 100 metres but slowly, they came as close as 30 metres. I've personally had great views of Red-breasted Goose before many times, but never as close as these birds approached us – moreover they did it in the best afternoon lights one can imagine. Not many times you can enjoy the iridescent plumage on the neck and breast this well as we did for almost two hours with these two birds, before they took off suddenly marking also the time for us to pack and start moving back to our lodge.



Subadult Eastern Imperial Eagle (Dániel Balla)

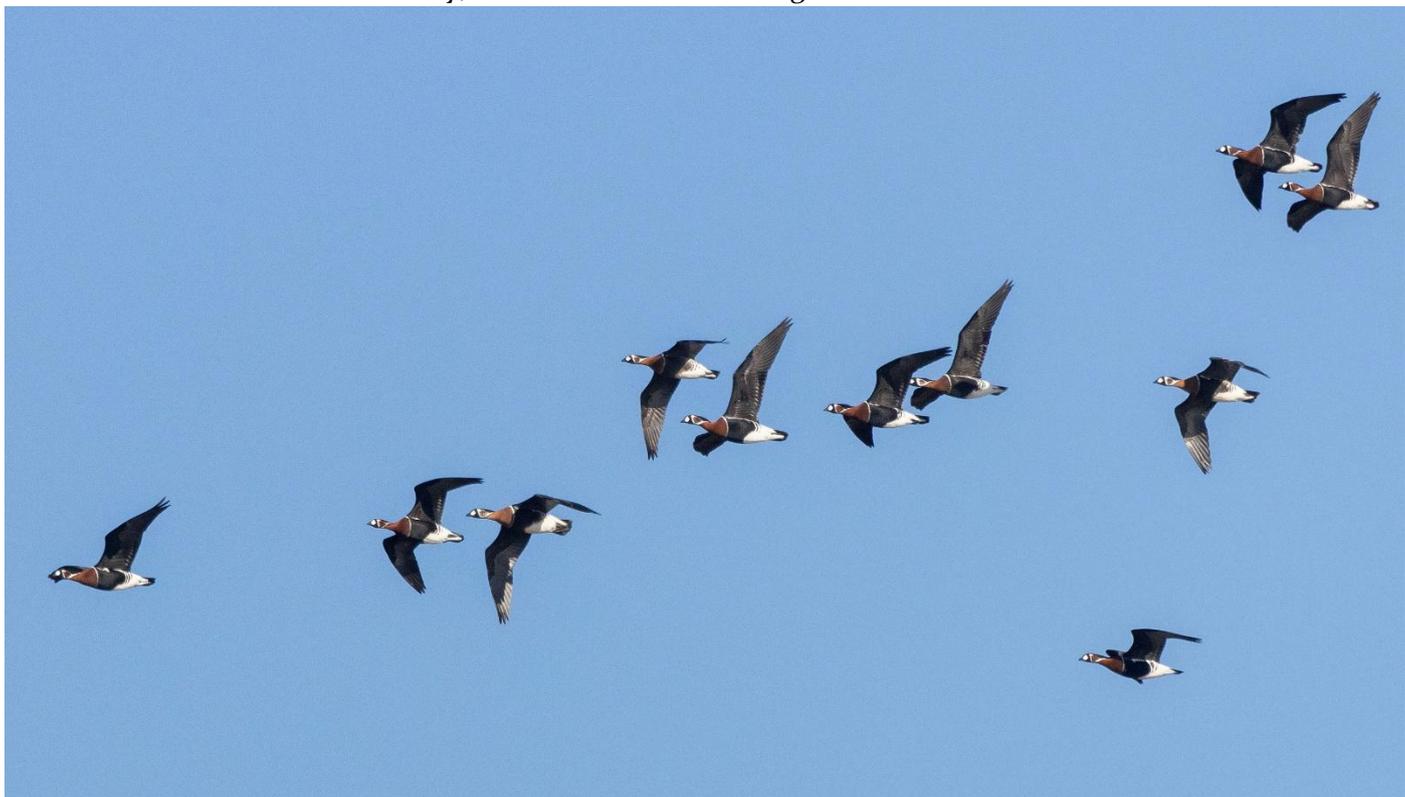
7th November (Friday)

A prebreakfast journey took us to the nearby fishponds where some of the Common Cranes were still coming in to roost and we just arrived in time to see a few hundred leaving with the first lights of the morning. Besides the Cranes few thousand geese also chose to use the same area for the night and on the limit of vision we managed to spot two Red-breasted Goose swimming between them. On the edge of the water Eurasian Curlews, Spotted Redshanks, Northern Lapwing, a few Dunlins were feeding and we managed to spot Mew Gull and a Yellow-legged Gull amongst the more common Black-headed and Caspian Gulls. As breakfast time was approaching fast, we started walking out from the site seeing a Green Sandpiper and a cooperative pair of Syrian Woodpecker perching in the nice morning sun for us.



Lesser White-fronted Geese together with Greater ones (first and third from left) (Dániel Balla)

After breakfast we reached the main fishpond system in the centre of the Hortobágy where opting for the best pond we managed to locate five late staying Ferruginous Duck on the water, while Eurasian Wigeon, Gadwall and Common Teal were the dominating species a lonely Smew was also seen. A few dozen Pygmy Cormorants were giving a good show fishing nearby and Western Marsh Harriers and White-tailed Eagles were seen around. We chose to visit one of the observation platforms to have a better view picking up Bearded Reedlings, Penduline Tit, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and a flock of Eurasian Siskins on the way. From the platform we had the first smaller flocks of geese coming into drink in the middle of the day just passing nearby and in one we spotted an immature Brent Goose – a scarce visitor in the country. To have a better look we decided to move to the nearby grazed wetland where the birds took off to our initial arrive, they slowly came back and we were soon enjoying a lovely pair of Lesser White-fronted Goose much closer than on the previous day in great light. More and more geese coming in we were spotting several more individuals of Lesser White-fronts at the end totalling 22 different individuals. Moreover, a flock of 11 Red-breasted Goose took a visit and circled around above the area, but they did not land. Fortunately, we spotted a few other individuals seeing a total 15 of them here. At the end a small group of geese coming in and there was the Brant Goose with them, we managed to find the bird on the water as luckily, we could follow it coming in.



A small flock of Red-breasted Goose making a show (Dániel Balla)

We had a fantastic goulash soup in the local inn and finished it with a lovely dessert. Ready for some exciting birding we headed towards the northern part of the Hortobágy where in the afternoon we navigated through some dirt roads to arrive where the Black-winged Kites were seen in the past few days. It took some dedication to reach the site seeing a Saker Falcon on the way and also needed patience but at the end we had some good views of the local rarity and even seen Rough-legged Buzzard, Stock Doves and Fieldfares in the area.

8th November (Saturday)

As a start of the day, we visited a farm where couple Crested Larks were entertaining us and a flock of the underrated European Goldfinch were seen in great light. A rapid check on a pond at the main fishpond was rather a twitch to see a Red-throated Loon. A few minutes' drive and we were searching for geese along the roadside spotting a smaller flock and soon picking out a Bean Goose between them. Initially we thought it being

a Tundra Bean Goose staying on the safe side but later from the pictures taken it was confirmed as a Taiga Bean Goose a species become a rarity nowadays in the region. At our luck not too far away, we also spotted three Red-breasted Goose in another small flock of geese before moving on. Further south the road our first real good view of a wintering Great Grey Shrike was a nice addition for the day.



Two male and a female Great Bustard at close range (Dániel Balla)

Stopping on the way at another fishpond system we connected with a nice pair of Green Woodpecker in the willows and had a few white-headed Long-tailed Tits.

Arriving to the southern areas of the Hortobágy National Park we gave enough time to finally locate the Great Bustards and what a view we had of two males and a female walking slowly away from our van. Later to boost numbers we found another eight birds but those were more distant ones.

We had another picnic lunch in the vast grasslands – tough for the first time on the tour the weather was not too kind to us. Our late lunch was followed with some final birding here where we saw Eastern Imperial Eagle and two Long-legged Buzzards to conclude our birding days in the Hortobágy area.

9th November (Sunday)

In the morning we departed from the lodge and stopped to check the local parliament of Long-eared Owls in the town easily seeing at least 30 of them in a few trees is always a spectacle.

We drove through the center of the Hortobágy for the final time and reached the Bükk Hills later in the morning where we had an easy walk up in the forest adding Marsh Tit, Eurasian Nuthatch and other common species to our list while climbing to the designated rocky area where our last target of our trip we were hoping for should be seen. A beautiful Fire Salamander on the path was welcomed and a male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Grey-headed Woodpecker showed well at the quarry. A Peregrine Falcon was guarding its territory in the area – it was not a good sign but after some time and splitting the group to maximize chances of finding the Wallcreeper suddenly everything came together and we were watching an individual high on the cliff with scopes as it was feeding in the grey weather.

An easy walk back to the van and we departed to Budapest where we ended our great tour.



Water Buffalos watching as a Saker Falcon is trying to prey a Common Teal (Dániel Balla)



Lesser White-fronted Goose pair with their offspring (Dániel Balla)

BIRDS – list of bird species recorded on the 2025 tour

C = Commonly seen, more than 10 individuals

'Numbers' = Actual number seen on the tour

H = Heard only

LO = Leader only

NL = Non-leader



Immature Brant Goose with White-fronted Geese (Dániel Balla)

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----|
| 1 | Brant Goose | <i>Branta bernicla</i> | 1 |
| 2 | Red-breasted Goose | <i>Branta ruficollis</i> | 39 |
| 3 | Greylag Goose | <i>Anser anser</i> | C |
| 4 | Taiga Bean Goose | <i>Anser fabalis</i> | 1 |
| 5 | Greater White-fronted Goose | <i>Anser albifrons</i> | C |
| 6 | Lesser White-fronted Goose | <i>Anser erythropus</i> | 26 |
| 7 | Mute Swan | <i>Cygnus olor</i> | C |
| 8 | Common Shelduck | <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> | 10 |
| 9 | Northern Shoveler | <i>Spatula clypeata</i> | C |
| 10 | Gadwall | <i>Mareca strepera</i> | C |
| 11 | Eurasian Wigeon | <i>Mareca penelope</i> | C |
| 12 | Mallard | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | C |
| 13 | Northern Pintail | <i>Anas acuta</i> | C |
| 14 | Eurasian Teal | <i>Anas crecca</i> | C |
| 15 | Ferruginous Duck | <i>Aythya nyroca</i> | 5 |
| 16 | Smew | <i>Mergus albellus</i> | 1 |
| 17 | Common Pheasant | <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> | C |



Red-breasted Goose is considered one of the best looking wildfowl - no wonder why (Dániel Balla)

| | | | |
|----|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----|
| 18 | Red-throated Loon | <i>Gavia stellata</i> | 1 |
| 19 | Little Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> | 3 |
| 20 | Great Crested Grebe | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> | 4 |
| 21 | Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | C |
| 22 | Great Egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> | C |
| 23 | Pygmy Cormorant | <i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i> | 35 |
| 24 | Great Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | C |
| 25 | Black-winged Kite | <i>Elanus caeruleus</i> | 1 |
| 26 | Eastern Imperial Eagle | <i>Aquila heliaca</i> | 9 |
| 27 | Eurasian Sparrowhawk | <i>Accipiter nisus</i> | 5 |
| 28 | Western Marsh Harrier | <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> | C |
| 29 | Hen Harrier | <i>Circus cyaneus</i> | C |
| 30 | White-tailed Eagle | <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i> | C |
| 31 | Rough-legged Buzzard | <i>Buteo lagopus</i> | 1 |
| 32 | Long-legged Buzzard | <i>Buteo rufinus</i> | 2 |
| 33 | Common Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo</i> | C |
| 34 | Great Bustard | <i>Otis tarda</i> | 11 |
| 35 | Water Rail | <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> | H |
| 36 | Eurasian Coot | <i>Fulica atra</i> | 40 |
| 37 | Common Crane | <i>Grus grus</i> | C |
| 38 | Northern Lapwing | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> | C |
| 39 | European Golden Plover | <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> | 4 |
| 40 | Eurasian Curlew | <i>Numenius arquata</i> | C |
| 41 | Ruff | <i>Calidris pugnax</i> | 10 |
| 42 | Dunlin | <i>Calidris alpina</i> | C |
| 43 | Common Snipe | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> | C |
| 44 | Green Sandpiper | <i>Tringa ochropus</i> | 1 |
| 45 | Spotted Redshank | <i>Tringa erythropus</i> | C |
| 46 | Black-headed Gull | <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> | C |
| 47 | Mew Gull | <i>Larus canus</i> | 4 |
| 48 | Caspian Gull | <i>Larus cachinnans</i> | C |



Eurasian Blue Tit – a sometimes underrated gem (Dániel Balla)

| | | | |
|----|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|
| 49 | Yellow-legged Gull | <i>Larus michahellis</i> | 1 |
| 50 | Feral Pigeon | <i>Columba livia f. domestica</i> | C |
| 51 | Stock Dove | <i>Columba oenas</i> | C |
| 52 | Eurasian Collared Dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | C |
| 53 | Little Owl | <i>Athene noctua</i> | H |
| 54 | Long-eared Owl | <i>Asio otus</i> | 30+ |
| 55 | Common Kingfisher | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | 4 |
| 56 | Lesser Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dryobates minor</i> | 2 |
| 57 | Syrian Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i> | 4 |
| 58 | Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i> | C |
| 59 | Grey-headed Woodpecker | <i>Picus canus</i> | 1 |
| 60 | European Green Woodpecker | <i>Picus viridis</i> | 2 |
| 61 | Common Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | C |
| 62 | Merlin | <i>Falco columbarius</i> | 1 LO |
| 63 | Saker Falcon | <i>Falco cherrug</i> | 3 |
| 64 | Peregrine Falcon | <i>Falco peregrinus</i> | 4 |
| 65 | Great Grey Shrike | <i>Lanius excubitor</i> | 4 |
| 66 | Eurasian Jay | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> | C |
| 67 | Eurasian Magpie | <i>Pica pica</i> | C |
| 68 | Western Jackdaw | <i>Coloeus monedula</i> | C |
| 69 | Rook | <i>Corvus frugilegus</i> | C |
| 70 | Hooded Crow | <i>Corvus cornix</i> | C |
| 71 | Northern Raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> | 8 |
| 72 | Marsh Tit | <i>Poecile palustris</i> | 8 |
| 73 | Eurasian Blue Tit | <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> | C |
| 74 | Great Tit | <i>Parus major</i> | C |
| 75 | Eurasian Penduline Tit | <i>Remiz pendulinus</i> | 1 |
| 76 | Bearded Reedling | <i>Panurus biarmicus</i> | 8 |



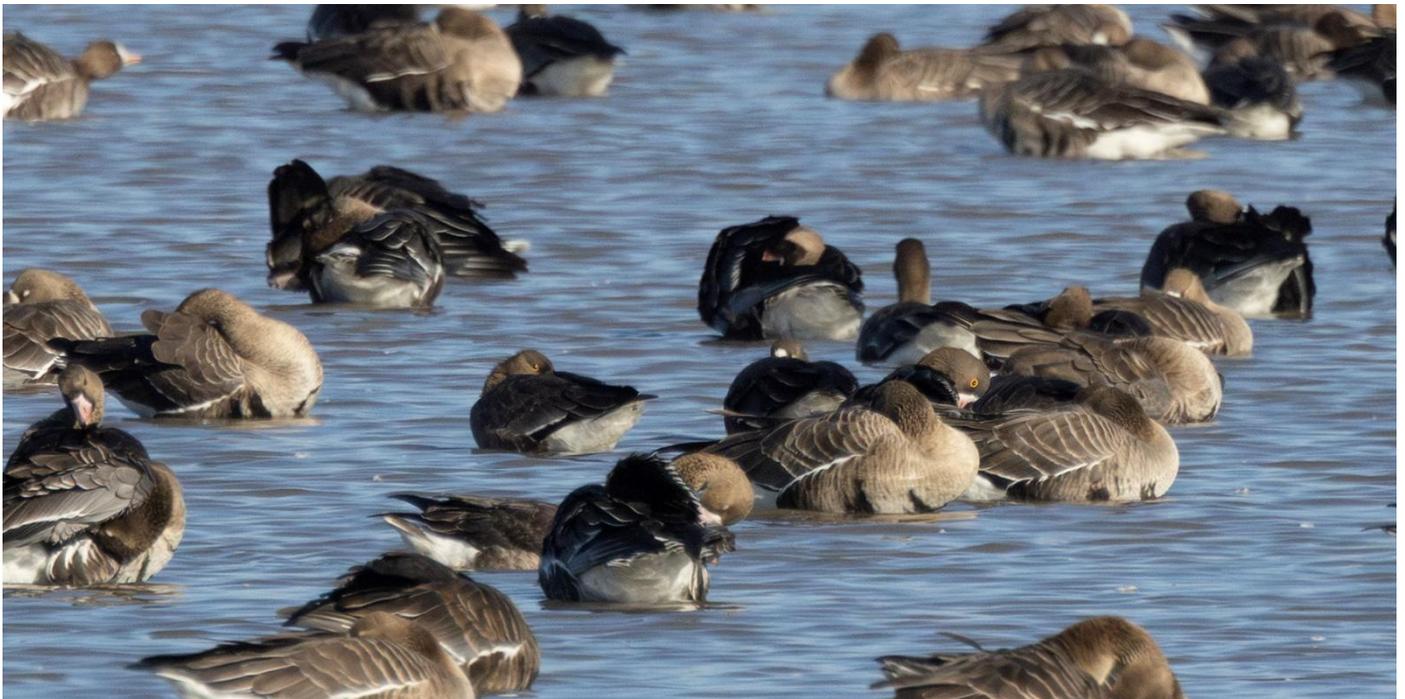
Fire Salamander was a non-avian highlight in the hills (Dániel Balla)

| | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----|
| 77 | Eurasian Skylark | <i>Alauda arvensis</i> | 5 |
| 78 | Crested Lark | <i>Galerida cristata</i> | 9 |
| 79 | Long-tailed Tit | <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> | C |
| 80 | Common Chiffchaff | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> | 2 |
| 81 | Goldcrest | <i>Regulus regulus</i> | C |
| 82 | Eurasian Wren | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | C |
| 83 | Eurasian Nuthatch | <i>Sitta europaea</i> | 5 |
| 84 | Wallcreeper | <i>Tichodroma muraria</i> | 1 |
| 85 | Eurasian Treecreeper | <i>Certhia familiaris</i> | H |
| 86 | Common Starling | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> | C |
| 87 | Common Blackbird | <i>Turdus merula</i> | 2 |
| 88 | Fieldfare | <i>Turdus pilaris</i> | 11 |
| 89 | Song Thrush | <i>Turdus philomelos</i> | H |
| 90 | Mistle Thrush | <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> | 1 |
| 91 | European Robin | <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> | C |
| 92 | Black Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> | 5 |
| 93 | House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | C |
| 94 | Eurasian Tree Sparrow | <i>Passer montanus</i> | C |
| 95 | Dunnock | <i>Prunella modularis</i> | H |
| 96 | White Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba</i> | 2 |
| 97 | Meadow Pipit | <i>Anthus pratensis</i> | C |
| 98 | Water Pipit | <i>Anthus spinoletta</i> | 10 |
| 99 | Common Chaffinch | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> | C |
| 100 | Eurasian Bullfinch | <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> | H |
| 101 | European Greenfinch | <i>Chloris chloris</i> | 9 |
| 102 | Common Linnet | <i>Linaria cannabina</i> | C |
| 103 | European Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | C |
| 104 | Eurasian Siskin | <i>Spinus spinus</i> | 15 |



The mighty Wallcreeper in front of its wall (Dániel Balla)

| | | | |
|-----|---------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 105 | Corn Bunting | <i>Emberiza calandra</i> | 5 |
| 106 | Yellowhammer | <i>Emberiza citrinella</i> | H |
| 107 | Common Reed Bunting | <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i> | 2 |



Lesser White-fronted Goose is sometimes a challenge to spot – three individuals in the centre of the image (Dániel Balla)



Taiga Bean Goose become a vagrant species (Dániel Balla)



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