

# SAKER eNEWS

4th edition, 2015



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Male Red-footed Falcon from the Hortobágy (Photo: Christophe Pérelle)

### Dear Birders and Bird Photographers!

It is a real privilege to present our latest Newsletter to all our guests and friends! In this we are keen to share all the new things we have planned and achieved, all the improvements we have been working on for an even better birding or photography experience with us! We also do share our dreams and future plans as well as some nice memories we spent together in the past season. Enjoy our little collection of pictures taken in the past tours and find your new or next favorite trip with our help.

Our website is continuously developed, we aim to give you even more information. Now you can easily check dates and availabilities in our **birdwatching** and **photography tour calendars**.

Don't forget to follow us on **Facebook** to get all the updated information's immediately.

If you have any questions relating with any of our tours please contact our office at any time! I hope you will have a productive and enjoyable tour with us in 2016 or beyond!

Yours sincerely,

**János OLÁH**

*managing director*



Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Macin NP (Photo: Kathleen Everitt )

## LATEST NEWS

### ↓ HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY

- Bibic Nature Lodge is going to be our base from 2016. What we have been dreaming of for a long time has been finally completed this year. A **superb accommodation run by birders for birders**. The accommodation is located next to a soda lake in the World Heritage Hortobágy National Park with great photo opportunities right in the garden!



- New hide photography tour was launched in the Danube Delta from summer 2016. This tour was created for those who like to spend **a week only in the Danube Delta on a photo boat**.

After many years of operation we decided to offer this kind of tour at the end of June early July when the floating vegetation is best and there are many subjects available. On this tour photographers are able to try all the creative ideas having in mind. This tour is excellent for couples too!

- Danube Delta **photo boat** will start the next season in a new shape. We have made some important improvements on it (changed the engine, refurbished, upgraded) to raise the comfort level for more relaxing tours with it.



Danube Delta Photo Boat (Photo: Jean-Francois Conte)

- We have enlarged and improved the main **Brown Bear photo hide** and now comfortable for **6 photographers**. This hide were placed in an area where the chances to capture Brown Bears in daylight are the best. We also building a new bear hide in 2016 which will be operational in 2017.

- We also launched a short **Brown Bear photography extension** for Danube Delta Photo Tour participants. While you are in Romania we can offer you this possibility to capture wild Brown Bears right after your Danube Delta trip. This trip would only add 2 extra days on your photography tour. Worth to try it!



Brown Bear Photography (Photo: Zoltan Gergely Nagy)

- We were very busy from August to October in Hungary where we have changed, renovated or rebuilt the Red-footed Falcon Tower, the Eagle Hide No. 2, both of our Passerine Drinking Hides and the Well Hide.

- In the amazing Macin Mountain National Park we testing a **raptor hide** in 2016. As a supplement to our drinking hides in this area we launched the *Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush* photography in 2015 and now we hoping to further expand the photography exploration of this fantastic area.

Please visit our **HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR CALENDAR** for dates, availabilities and extra information!

## ↓ BIRDWATCHING

- **Bíbic Nature Lodge in the Hortobágy** is going to be our base for our Autumn birding tours from 2016. What we dreamed long time ago finally was successfully completed this year. A superb accommodation run by birders for birders.

- **'Red-breasted Goose Special Tour'** is our newest short break tour to Hungary and a guaranteed target in November and March.

In 2014 there were up to 2000 birds and in 2015 up to 400 in the Hortobágy region, probably due to poor breeding year with very few juveniles in 2015. Supporting cast would be *Lesser White-fronted Goose*, *Rough-legged Buzzard*, *Eastern Imperial Eagle*, *Saker*, *Great Bustard*, *Syrian Woodpecker* and others.

- Fennoscandinavian **Lesser White-fronted Goose** population had a successful breeding year in 2015 therefore in September we have witnessed a visit of 131 individuals. Such a large flock was seen back in 1992 and it is so emotional after so much conservations efforts in Europe. We modified our **Autumn Tour to Hungary** to coincide with their stay in our region.



LWFG and Redbreasts (Photos: Gábor Simay and Sándor Borza)

- If you like **'short break' type tours** here is one to Romania for Birds and Brown Bears in mid April with our partner company. Early spring birding in Transylvania is great and very productive. You can see over 100 species within 4 days of birding and also have the chance to see and photograph Carpathian Brown Bears from special hides. You can read the latest trip report **here**.

- Our **Hungary, Slovakia & Transylvania Grand Tour** is a continued success. We have had yet another fantastic tour in 2015 – please read the report here – and now our first tour is fully booked for 2016. We have just launched another date: **see our tour calendar!**

- We use our own, **professional Brown Bear hides** for our birding tour guests in Transylvania. An important part of our birding tours to Transylvania is to see wild Brown Bears from these special and safe hides.

- Coming soon: at the end of 2016 our new base in Transylvania: the **Hargita Bear Lodge** will also be completed! In 2017 we shall be staying there with all our birding and photography tours!

Please visit our **BIRDWATCHING TOUR CALENDAR** for dates, availabilities and extra information!



Three-toed Woodpecker (Photos: Gábor Simay)

## 2015 IN REVIEW

### ↓ HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE HORTOBÁGY

2015 was a highly successful season yet again and we would like to share some great memories with you through pictures taken from our hides. In Hungary the first two months of the year is about eagles. In 2015 yet again our hides were very reliable for White-tailed Eagles with a 93% success of eagle visit in 60 days (56 days)! This remarkable result is a result of many years of experience and work. The hides now well established and the birds know them very well. The weather was not very kind – winters getting less cold and wintry – with only 6 days of snow cover in front of the hides. However special moments such as fighting eagles, large numbers, and interaction with other species did compensate the occasional dull weather.



Landing White-tailed Eagle ( Photo: János Tar)

The next photo target was the enigmatic *Great Bustard* in late April. This photo subject has a variable success rate but every year nice images captured by our persistent guests! If you get lucky it is a quite unique experience to see and photograph the heaviest flying bird on Earth!

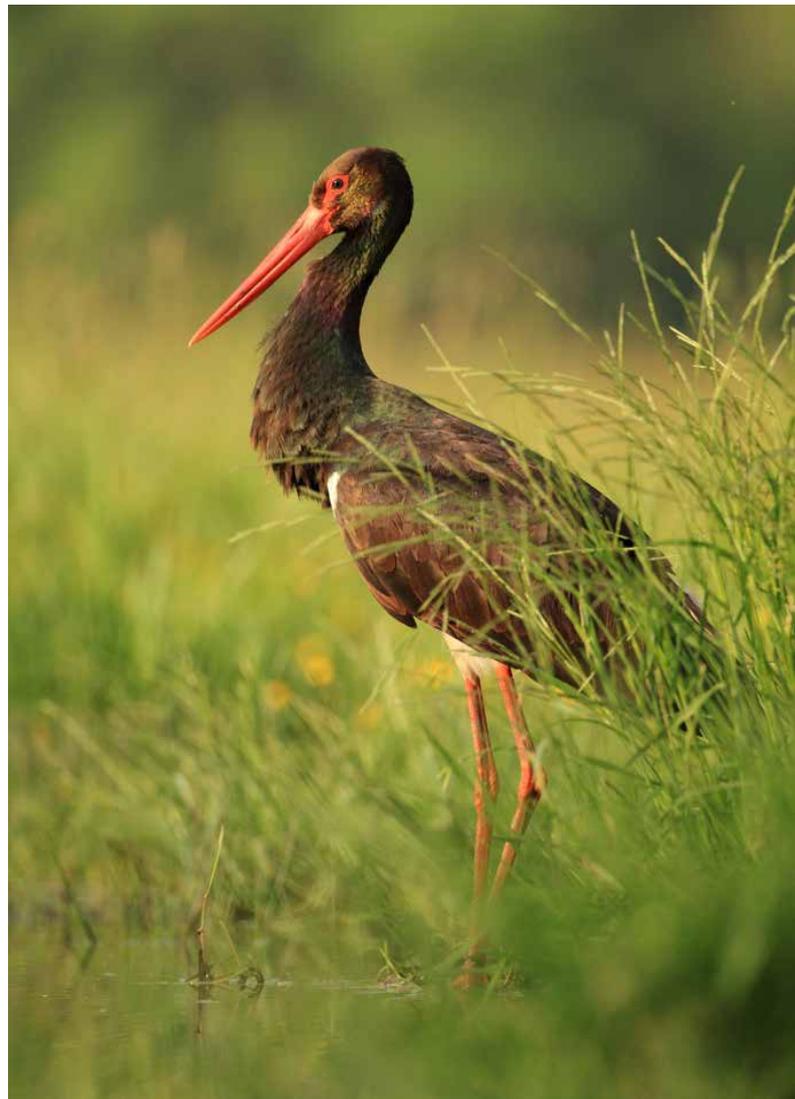
Late April is also the starting time of the Spring/Summer photography experience. We have the highest selection of hides and lots of photo subjects from late April to early July. Early in the season the Egret and Stork hide was very popular while the Red-footed Falcon Tower, the Passerine Drinking Hides and the Pygmy Cormorant Hide were popular throughout the season. Hoopoes, Rollers, Bee-eaters, Little Owls, Lesser Grey Shrikes and Golden Orioles all treated our guests. For the second time in the last 8 years the Red-footed Falcons had a yellow (sunflower) background at the end of June.

Late August and early September is the best period to capture the bathing and drinking Cranes and our tour was successful again. A little rain made the photography a little bit difficult this August but finally everybody got it's desired wet Crane pictures.

Dotterels and Pygmy Cormorant were great subjects too.



Female Red-footed Falcon with a cricket ( Photo: Attila Szilágyi)



Black Stork ( Photo: Christophe Pérelle )

**We hope to have an equally action-packed season in 2016 as well! See you next year!**



## ↓ HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE DANUBE DELTA

This is a very special photo trip to a very special place in Europe!

The last season was fantastic again with a growing list of photographable species! This tour has maximum 4 photographers and it is really a great experience.

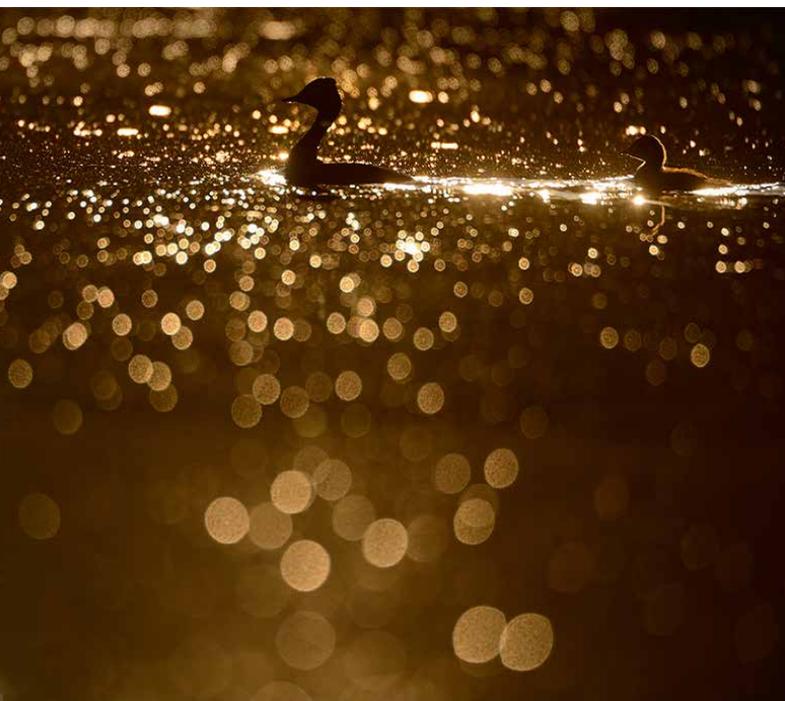
Last year favorites inside the delta itself were the Black-necked Grebe and Red-necked Grebe families, Squacco Heron, Night Heron, Glossy Ibis, Kingfisher family, Bearded Tit, Penduline Tit, Dalmatian Pelicans and groups of fishing White Pelicans. Grebes were the all time favorites for many photographers inside the Delta but watching and following fishing White Pelicans and listening the Edible frog's concert were just unforgettable.



Isabelline Wheatear family (Photo: Joan Roca )

In the coastal area of the Black Sea (on our first or last day of the tour – depending on the tour schedule) we were focusing on Collared Pratincoles, Bee-eaters, Stone Curlews, shorebirds and other steppe species. During May and already in early June migrant shorebirds, like Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Avocet or even Broad-billed Sandpiper were great subjects for our photographers.

Our **`Ultimate Danube Delta Tour`** was great with almost daily meetings with *Golden Jackals and White-tailed Eagles*. Also had nice time with *Bee-eaters, White Pelicans, Purple Herons, Pygmy Cormorants, Little Owls, Collared Pratincoles and Pallas's Gulls*.



Black-necked Grebe in the contralight (Photo: Zoltán Gergely Nagy)

The other base for this tour is in the Macin Mountains National Park. We have two drinking pools here with regular visitors such as *Barred Warbler, Turtle Dove, Red-backed Shrike, Sombre Tit and Ortolan Bunting*. This year we had scarce birds as well like *Honey Buzzard, Wood Lark, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Woodchat Shrike and Golden Oriole*. From our special hide a pair of *Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush* were performing well throughout the season. Another favorite subject was the *Isabelline Weatears*, where the parents were feeding their youngsters in front of the breeding hole. These Weathers live together with *Sousliks (Ground Squirrel)* so we often had the two subjects side by side. Wonderful experience! Other highlights in this area were *Rollers, Little Owls and Hoopoes*.



Kissing Bee-eaters (Photo: Conor Molloy)

**We hope to have an equally action-packed season in 2016 as well! See you next year!**



## ↓ BROWN BEAR PHOTOGRAPHY IN TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA

Brown Bear Photography Season started in mid-April and the bear activity was very good from early May until early October.

We have improved and enlarged our most reliable hide so it is now comfortable for up to six photographers. We have been continuously working on the surroundings of this hide as well to make it more and more natural every year.

The first Bears appeared on the **20th of March** but we had to wait until mid-April for the bears to come regularly in daylight. As the days get longer there are more and more chance to photograph the bears. From May we had them around the hides 3-4 hours before sunset.

When the mating season started in early May we have recorded up to **14 bears at one hide**. This was the maximum count for the season. We regularly had 8-10 bears in one afternoon allowing excellent photography opportunities! We also had mother Bears with older cubs as well as various aged lone females and males.

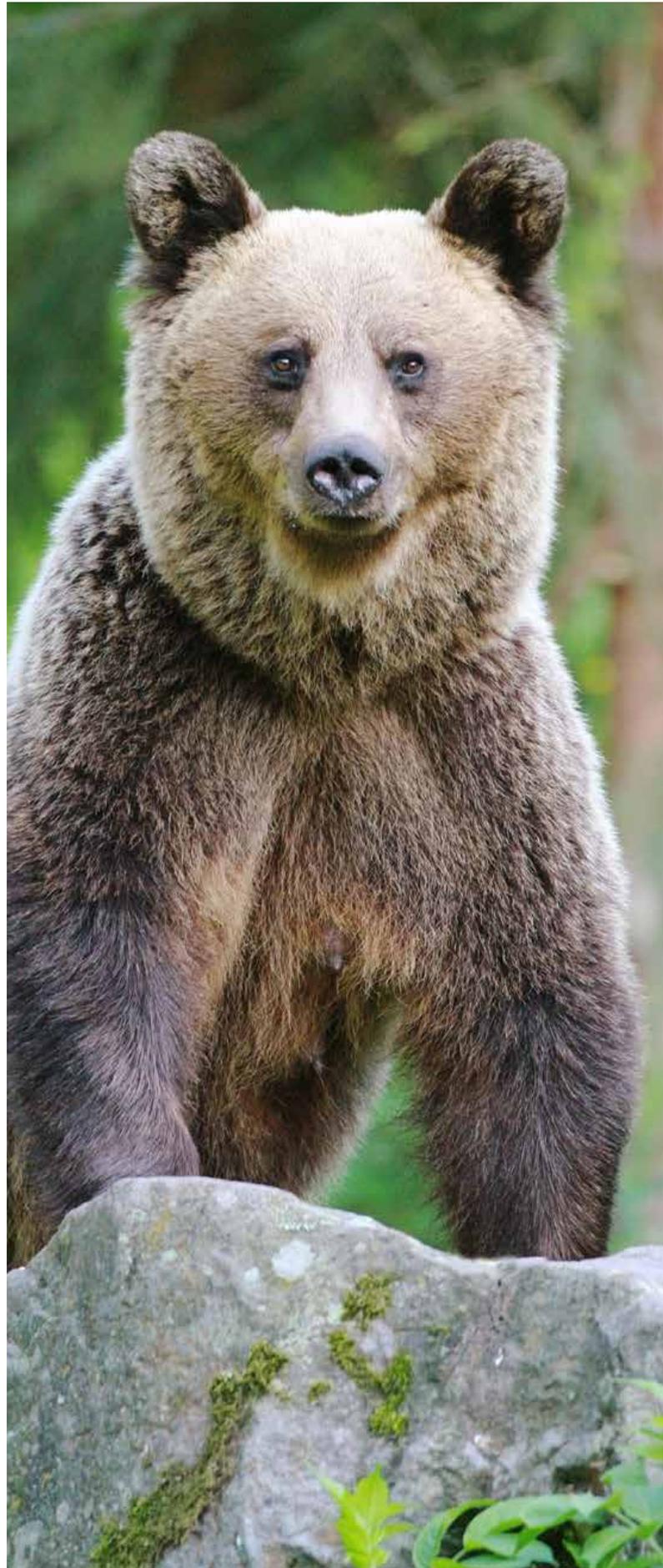
After the mating-season mother Bears with their newborn babies (they give birth during the winter months) started to come – in early June. The well known `black` mother Bear appeared with her two young cubs by the end of June. We know this individual from 2014 when we saw her almost every day at our hide and later realized she`s pregnant.

So all in all some of our hides are now well established and from May to September the bears are regular at our hides and there are great opportunities for photography! Wolf was only seen once this year – *on the 10th of August* - but only a few minutes.

**We are looking forward to a great season again!**



Bear Cub (Photo: János Oláh)



Mother Bear (Photo: Gábor Simay)



## ↓ BIRDWATCHING TOURS IN 2015

In April the first birdwatching tours started. All tours in April managed to see excellent displaying Great Bustards, all nine species of woodpeckers possible in Hungary, Saker and Great Snipe on migration. It wasn't a particularly good owl year but Ural and Eagle Owls performed very well in the Zemplén Hills.

The highly successful **Hungary, Slovakia & Transylvania GT** was again an amazing tour with 227 species recorded by the group! You can read the detailed trip report [here](#).

In June we had a very interesting and successful custom tour in Transylvania and Danube Delta with almost 200 species seen – after the main migration time! We had a good overview of the region's habitats, as we visited the high Carpathians and the mature woodlands and flowering meadows of Transylvania, fantastic alkaline ponds, the vast reedbeds of the Danube Delta and the always exciting Dobrudja region.

The Birds, Bears & Butterflies tour in Transylvania in mid-July was a very relaxed and enjoyable combination. In some places birds were quite but Butterflies were abundant. This tour was clearly created for Birds and Butterfly lovers. We encountered 40 species of Butterflies like Large Cooper, Purple Emperor, Titania's Fritillary and such bird species like Shore Lark, Pygmy Owl, White-backed and Three-toed Woodpecker. And best of all we had fantastic bear experience in the afternoons!

**Danube Delta in Autumn** was another fabulous trip with species like the scarce Terek Sandpiper, over 200 Broad-billed Sandpipers, Dotterels, Little Crake, Saker, many Pallas's Gulls, 8 species of Woodpeckers and amazing 'visible' migration like seeing 1620 Purple Heron on migration within just a few hours! You can read more about this tour [here](#).

Our regular **Hortobágy & Zemplén Autumn Tour** was running again with many great birds like Ural Owl, woodpeckers and thousands of Cranes! We have modified this tour for future to coincide with the Lesser White-fronted Geese on the Hortobágy. **Check out the new itinerary and dates!**

All in all we have yet another action-packed and highly successful year for the many birdwatching tours we completed!



Tengmalm's Owl in Slovakia (Photo: Gábor Simay)



Paddyfield Warbler in the Danube Delta (Photo: Gábor Simay)



Young Saker Falcon in Romania (Photo: Zoltán Gergely Nagy)

Come and book a birding holiday with **SAKERTOURS!**

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Ural Owl in a winter forest (Photo: Zoltán Gergely Nagy)

With best wishes for Christmas and the  
New Year from everyone at **SAKERTOURS**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

We would like to say thank you to all of our tour participants and especially for those who allowed us to share their images in this newsletter:

*Massimo Basso, Joan Buixareu, Moritz Braun, John Chambarlain, Jean-Francois Conte, Pedro Curonisy, Tiziana d'Arcangelo, Kathleen Everitt, Patrick Gallet, Mike Lane, Sylvian Lefebvre, Conor Molloy, Christophe Pérelle, Noelle Piron, George Reekie, Steve Robinson, Joan Roca, Tom Schandy, Paul Fisher*