

# Saker eNews

7th edition, 2018



## CONTENTS:

Introductions	1
Latest news	2-3
2018 in review	4-11
Season Greetings	12

A pair of Rose-coloured Starlings, one of the main highlight in 2018 (Photo: Gábor Simay)

## Dear Birders and Bird Photographers!

I have found myself writing our Newsletter again, so it means another year gone. It is remarkable how quickly a year passes when you have fun watching and photographing birds!

These annual newsletters are great opportunities for me to remember our tours of the given year and to gather my thoughts about new plans, tours and products.

This year there have been particularly a lot of new developments I would like to share with you as we have new tours, hides, extensions, improvements, developments coming up for both birders and photographers.

Please have a quick look about future possibilities and pick your choice from our wide range of birding and photography tours in Eastern Europe.

Let us know if you have any questions or need extra information about any of our tours.

Thank you for choosing Sakertours for your wildlife holiday!



János Oláh  
managing director



## LATEST NEWS

### ↓ HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY TOURS

The World Heritage **Hortobágy National Park** in Hungary was the first place where it all started back in **2006**;

...then we came out with our first **Danube Delta** Photo Tour in **2011** where we have now three different tours running annually;

...almost at the same time in **2011** we started to develop our Bear and Bird Hides in **Transylvania**

**NEW** tour coming up: mix of the 3 destinations and tours  
The **ULTIMATE EASTERN EUROPEAN BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR (16 days)**  
available from  
**2020**



Collared Pratincole (Photo: Zoltán Gergely Nagy)

#### For a better Photo Experience in **Hungary** we are planning:

- to build a **2<sup>nd</sup> Falcon Tower** primarily to photograph **Red-footed Falcons** but also with opportunity for Lesser Grey Shrike, Cuckoo and Golden Oriole. This new hide planned to be more comfortable and will already be available in the next season during the **Spring-Summer Hide Photography** Tours in 2019!
- to **rebuild** our **Buzzard Hide** where the rare **Saker Falcon** was increasingly a regular visitor in the last two winter seasons. This hide will be more spacious for the photographers and we will make special efforts to attract Saker for our **White-tailed Eagle Tour's** participants.
- to reopen the 'subject' of photographing **Cranes at a roosting site**. This Hide will be available for evening and early morning Crane Photography in October. In the last season we had a record of 160 000 Cranes staging in the Hortobágy at one time! It will be possible to combine this hide with photographing Cranes on their roost-flight at different locations. So in a 2 days short tour you can experience the Hortobágy Crane migration.
- **Zemplén Photo Safari** in April and May for maximum 4 photographers to capture breeding Woodpeckers and Owls.

#### For a better Photo Experience in **Romania** we are planning:

- The new **Bears and Birds Photography Tour** (8 days) in Transylvania will be online by March 2019 and the first tours will be running in 2020.
- a **2<sup>nd</sup> PILOT TOUR** will be organized to test again the NEW 'Bears and Birds' Photography Tour in Transylvania before the official opening in 2020. If you are interested in this pilot tour for a **special price**, please contact our office directly about availability. (**3 places left at the moment!**)
- to build a hide for **Capercaillie Photography** in Transylvania. We will have a hide in a lekking area where you have to overnight. This hide will be part of the NEW Bears and Birds Photography tour as well.
- **Hazel Grouse** is increasingly more often being photographed on our short autumn Bear Photography Tour and we will make special effort in the future to capture this bird on the September tours.
- to build fixed hides around the Danube Delta accommodation which would supplement our boat excursion and offer an even wider variety of bird species during both type of Danube Delta Tours.

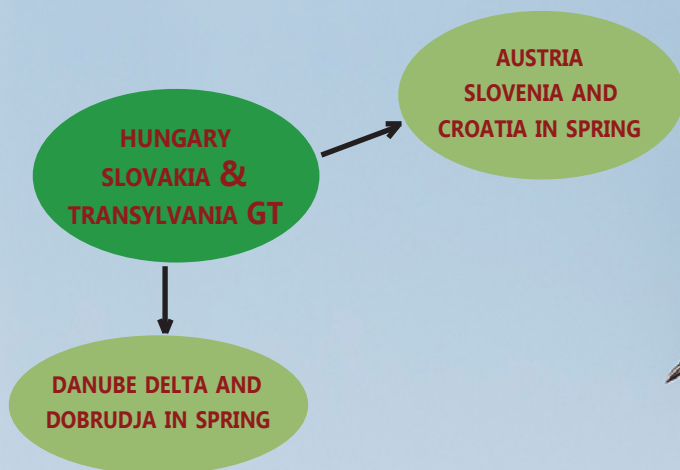
Please visit our **HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR CALENDAR** for dates, availabilities and extra information!

## ↓ BIRDWATCHING TOURS

**NEW** tour coming up:

# ULTIMATE EASTERN EUROPEAN BIRDING TOUR

available from 2020



Pied Wheatear (Photo: Beat Rüeegg)

You will be able to check and select the best possible species range for your tour once in a lifetime visit to Eastern Europe!

- We are creating the **Ultimate Eastern European Birding Tour**.

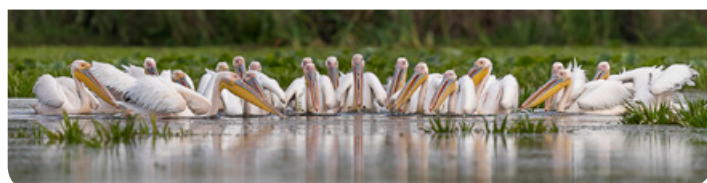
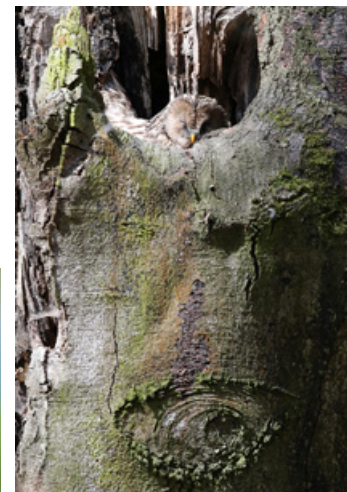
Our well known Hungary, Slovakia & Transylvania GT will be the base with **two possible finish options**:

- (1) the **NEW Austria-Slovenia-Croatia Spring Tour** **or**
  - (2) the redesigned **Danube Delta-Dobrudja Spring Tour**.
- The tours will be possible to book on their own as well as together creating the Ultimate Eastern Europe Tour specifically meeting your species targets!

- **NEW Tour** will be announced in March 2019: **Austria - Slovenia - Croatia Spring Tour** was designed as an extension to our Hungary, Slovakia & Transylvania grand tour and concentrating on those birds not possible on this tour.

- **NEW Tour** will be announced in March 2019: **Hungary - Slovakia Spring Tour** which will be substituting our Hortobágy - Zemplén Spring Tour. This tour is designed to offer a great coverage of birds visiting the Kiskunásg and Hortobágy National Parks, the Zemplén Hills and the Ore Mountains to find all the 10 species of European woodpeckers and a great selection of other goodies!

- In the **Danube Delta** we will have a new and very comfortable **wildlife watching boat** from 2019.



Clockwise from top left: Isabelline Wheatear (Photo: Gábor Simay); Rock Thrush (Photo: Gerald Reiner), Ural Owl (Photo: János Oláh); White Pelicans and Paddyfield Warbler (Photo: Beat Rüeegg)

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

# 2018 IN REVIEW

## ↓ HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE HORTOBÁGY NATIONAL PARK

The last photography season in Hungary was quite eventful. Since the [Bibic Nature Lodge](#) opened, no doubt we are offering the most enjoyable trips to explore Hortobágy nature and birds in a `package` offer.

The Photo season started already in December and the last [winter season](#) with [White-tailed Eagles](#) was already our [12<sup>th</sup> year of operating this great photo tour!](#) We had three hides available for the photographers and all were excellent to capture WTEs or Common Buzzards and several occasion even Saker Falcons and Eastern Imperial Eagles.

Spring – Summer Hide Photography Tour in the Hortobágy NP area was great again. Every year we are making new setups for new species to improve our tours.

In 2018 we had a [new reedbed feeding station](#) for species like Little Crane, Moustached Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Water Rail, Bluethroat. The project was successful and will continue in 2019 too.

April and May was excellent for [Black Stork](#) and [Ruff Photography](#) but we had a great year with Red-footed Falcons, Rollers, Bee-eaters, Hoopoes, Little Owl, Red-backed Shrike and Woodpeckers. In some hides we do offer possibilities for `birds in the backlight` photography.

In June we had a nice bonus when a [Golden Jackal](#) was present in front of the Black Stork hide for some lucky guests. This species is spreading west so could be more regular in the upcoming years.

However if you targeting this species you need to come and join our Ultima Frontiera Photo Tour in the Danube Delta.

This year a pair of Scops Owl has successfully bred right below the canopy drinking hide in a nest box. Occasionally was photographable just like the Golden Oriole in the very same place. However the Golden Oriole is still a difficult subject and requires time.

[Common Crane Photography](#) in September was excellent.

We had very warm days so hundreds of thirsty Cranes come to drink and bath in front of the hides.

Next year we will reopen the hide for roosting Cranes too!

See you next year!



White-tailed Eagles playing (Photo: Attila Szilágyi); Female Golden Oriole from the Canopy Hide (Photo: Tibor Juhász); and preening Spoonbill (Photo: Gábor Simay)



## ↓ HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE DANUBE DELTA

Our Danube Delta Photography tours were amazing as always. Such a bird rich area of Europe can definitely offer you some exciting and spectacular wildlife photography experiences!

Last year we have changed our main base in the Danube Delta in order to offer you better services and this decision proved to be good because we have found some really nice remote lakes with rich birdlife. The [new accommodation](#) now has a nice wooded garden and a huge land around to explore wildlife when we were back from the boat sessions.

In the garden we had nice time with Rose-coloured Starlings feeding on Mulberries, a nest building Penduline Tit was superb but also found here the 4th Blue Rock Thrush for the country! Wow, not a bad place!

Moreover it is not as busy with 'regular' non wildlife tourists in June as all the major hotels along the main river arm nowadays.

Exclusively in 2018 we have started visiting a smaller mixed heronry primarily for flight shots and this new part was a nice intro in every tour throughout the season. And a good way to practice your skills for flying bird photography!



Photography from the photo boat was the major highlight in every tour. Just 30 minutes' drive from the new accommodation and we were able to reach the best places to capture different kind of delta species. *Squacco Herons, Purple Herons, Night Herons, Glossy Ibis, Spoonbill, Whiskered Tern, Black Tern, White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes, Kingfisher, Penduline Tit, White-tailed Eagle, Pallas's Gull, Caspian Gull, Pygmy Cormorant* being the major species in this part of the trip.

In the coastal area the [undoubted highlight](#) in the last season was definitely the [breeding invasion of Rose-coloured Starlings!](#) In 2018 roughly 5000 pairs have bred in Romania and offered us some superb photographic opportunities. It was magical!

Macin Mountains National Park and the surrounding area offered us some nice moments with Bee-eaters, Rollers, Sousliks, Isabelline Wheatears and we found a place that occasionally offered superb views of Little Bitterns, Cuckoos and Great Reed Warblers.

See you next year!

Please visit our [Danube Delta Photo Blog](#) for more pictures from the last season!



## ↓ BROWN BEAR AND BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY IN TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA

In 2018 the [Harghita Bear Lodge](#) became the birders and wildlife photographers base in Transylvania. The garden of the Lodge has a size of two hectares and here we have a very comfortable drinking hide and portable setups for different available species. In 2018 we had a breeding pair of Red-backed Shrike and a Common Redstart in the area.

Our main focus in 2018 was still the Brown Bear photography. All the three Bear hides were reliable and everybody had their own Bear pictures in different habitats. The best setup in 2018 was in the mature forest hide and in the river hide.

The river hide however became larger and now offers low angle photo possibilities too!

In late May we have organized a week long [pilot tour](#) to the area for experimenting possibilities.

After more than 5 years of experiences with the Bears now we combined the Bear Photography with Bird Photography. The bird photography was from fixed hides or from portable blinds or from the car. It was a test tour before we start offering our new week long wildlife photography tour from 2020.

The trip was successful and we have photographed species like *Dipper*, *Middle Spotted Woodpecker*,

*Common Redstart*, *Crossbill*, *Rose-coloured Starling*, *Collared Flycatcher*, *Bearded Tit*, *Whinchat*, *Red-backed Shrike*, *Scops Owl*, *Cockoo* and *White Stork*. In addition to the great Carpathian Brown Bear photography on the afternoons.

During our short bear Photography Tours in September we had very nice repeated experiences with Hazel Grouse again (following 2017). Looks like autumn and especially September is the best period to photograph this secretive grouse species in Transylvania. See you next year!

Please visit our [Transylvania BLOG](#) for more pictures!



Brown Bear (Photo: Johan Paulussen); Caparcaillie (Photo: János Oláh); Bear cub (Photo: Wim Dirckx)





## ↓ BIRDWATCHING TOURS IN 2018

Most of our birding tours in the Carpathian basin and in the Danube Delta were operating in 2018.

You can find detailed reports under the **`trip reports`** link and now we just highlight the best experiences of each trip. The trip reports are being uploaded continuously and should be completed by late December with all reports.

- **Hortobagy - Zemplén Spring Tour** a classic trip for any kind of person with easy birding and great food! As usual the highlights were the nine species of woodpeckers, Great Bustard, Little Crake, Saker, Ural Owl plus a wide selection of warblers and raptors.
- **Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania GT** is our 12 day long birding tour covering three countries and many different habitats in the Carpathian Basin. In 2018 we have recorded 219 species with a long list of highlights which included Ural, Eagle, Pygmy and Tengmalm's Owls.
- **Danube Delta Spring Tour** : was a great tour where we recorded 167 species! The best experiences were both species of pelicans, Levant Sparrowhawk, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Paddyfield Warbler and breeding Rose-coloured Starlings. Report has already been uploaded. Click **HERE**.
- **Transylvania Birding Tour**: is a relatively new tour which was operated for the second time only. In the pristine woodlands, alpine meadows and limestone gorges of the Carpathians we saw Capercaillie, Hazelgrouse, Caucasian Shore Larks, Rock Thrush, Scops, Pygmy and Ural Owls, White-backed Woodpecker, Red-breasted Flycatcher amongst other goodies.
- **Hortobagy - Zemplén Autumn Tour** in early October was a great time to explore the Hungarian puszta and Zemplén forests for species like Dotterel, Cranes, Saker, Ural Owl, eight species of woodpeckers and a vagrant Yellow-browed Warbler. Report has already been uploaded. You can read the trip report **HERE**.
- **Red-breasted Goose Special Tour** was a fantastic short tour with some mega key species and masses of wintering wildfowl in the Hortobagy National Park. We have enjoyed over 350 Red-breasted Goose, 17 Lesser White-fronted Goose, 69 Great Bustard and daily Eastern Imperial Eagle plus a Greater Spotted Eagle and Sakers.



Pygmy Owl in the Hargita Mountains (Photo: János Oláh)



Ural Owl in front of a breeding cave (Photo: János Oláh)



Red-breasted Goose in the Hortobágy (Photo: Sándor Borza)





Our emblematic species, the Saker Falcon (Photo: Abdulaziz Alasoussi)

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:

*Ahmad Alessa, Abdulaziz Alasoussi, Zoltán Baczó, Sándor Borza, Moritz Braun, Wim Dirckx, Patrick Donini, Mick Durham, Simay Gabor, Zoltán G. Nagy, Dick Van Der Lely, Kevin Lunham, Johan Paulussen, Beat Rüegger, Gerald Reiner, Attila Szilagyi, János Székely, Heinz Frehner, Juhász Tibor*