

SAKER eNEWS

3rd edition, 2014



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Male Little Crake was a new photo subject in 2014 (Photo: János Oláh)

Dear Birders and Photographers!

In the very beginning of the Winter Photography Season we are glad to send you our next Newsletter.

Hopefully it will give you ideas about our recent activities and a little insight to our 2014 tours.

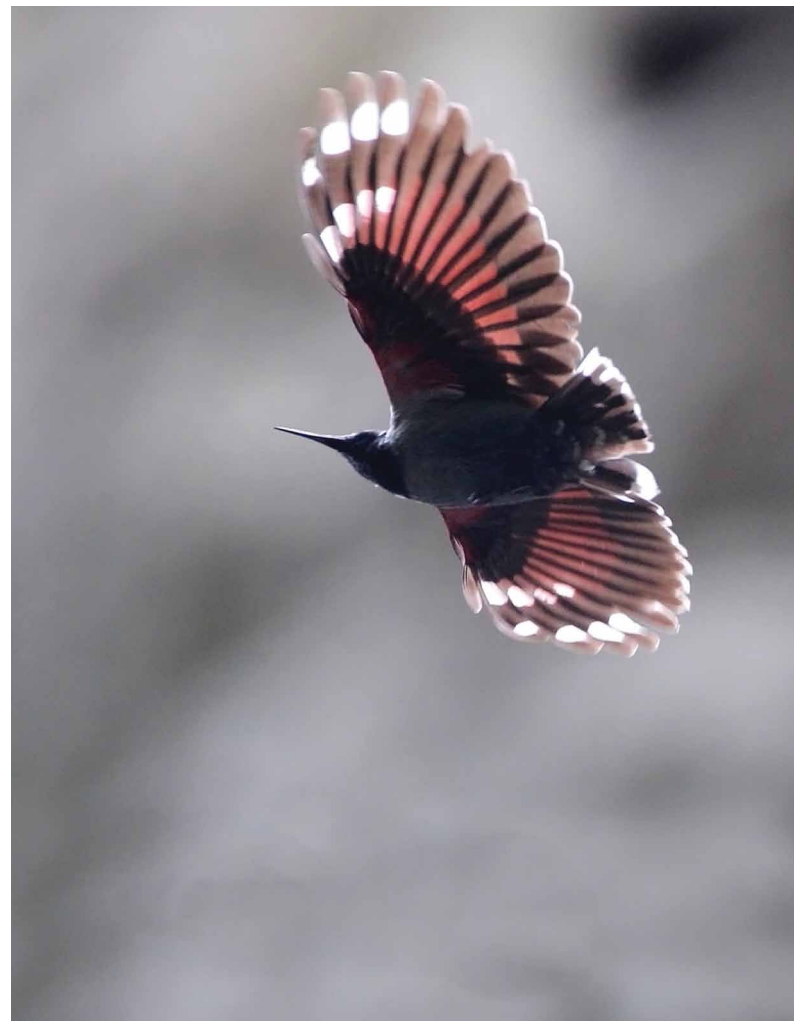
We also include more images exclusively from the past season, so now you can admire the fantastic birdlife of Central and Eastern Europe.

Although most of our photography tours now fully booked for 2015 Spring, we still have places for some birdwatching tours as well as for the Autumn and Winter Photography Tours.

Please contact our office if you are interested in any of our 2015 tours!

Follow us on [Facebook](#) or check out the [News](#) section on our website to get even more up-to-date information!

Yours sincerely,
János OLÁH
managing director



Wallcreeper in Transylvania (Photo: János Oláh)

LATEST NEWS

↓ HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY

- Last year we have finished several new hides in the Hortobágy and the Danube Delta (Macin Mountains) and now our hide network reached an impressive 25-30 hides. Each hide has its own personal life and some hides need time to achieve the expected goals while others score immediately. In this constantly growing hide network we try to keep a good standard of operation with good interconnections.

We also continuously improving the comfort level of the hide system but most importantly **our no. 1 target is to have a superb photo setup for each hide!**

At the moment our main focus for hide development for 2015 is in Transylvania (for birds) and also to finalize our hides for Eastern Imperial Eagle in Hungary (by 2015/2016 winter season). In this coming season we are testing locations for this bird in cooperation with the Hungarian Ornithological Society.

- The **canopy drinking tower hide** was in a 'test mode' in 2014 but now it will be in full operation for the 2015 spring season in Hungary and certainly adds new bird species to our photographable bird list.

Now you can photograph up to 70 species on a spring tour to Hungary!

- It took us quite a while to get our **Carpathian Brown Bear Photography Tour** and hide system into operation but after three years of hard work we can now offer a very good chance to photograph these shy creatures in Transylvania. We have three different hides with different setups and also learnt the best periods for photography.



Carpathian Brown Bear (Photo: Zoltán Baczó)

- We have developed and tested the simple **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush Hide** on our Danube Delta tour.

This hide is in the Macin National Park and allows getting close images of this declining and colorful species.



Singing Rock Thrush (Photo: Rosella Gernez)

- In 2015 we will be running a new tour to the Danube Delta: **The Ultima(te) Danube Delta Photo Tour** in cooperation with our partner company Skua Nature. This is a relaxing, single based and mainly hide based photo tour to capture Golden Jackal and many different bird species in the Danube Delta! Although the 2015 tour is fully booked we have already secured the very best date for the 2016 tour which is now **online**.



Golden Jackal (Photo: Richard Steel)

- In summer 2015 finally the **Bíbic Eco Lodge** will open in Balmazújváros and hopefully most of tours will be using this fantastic place for the Hortobágy birding and photography tours in 2016.

Also in 2015 summer the **Harghita Bear Lodge** will open in Transylvania and hopefully most of tours will be using this fantastic place for the Transylvania birding and bear photography tours in 2016.



Dalmatian Pelican (Photo: David Mercel)



White-tailed Eagle (Photo: Richard Steel)



Hoopoe (Photo: Richard Steel)

THE FOLLOWING PHOTO TOURS HAVE AVAILABILITIES IN 2015:

Danube Delta & Dobrudja Bird Photography Tour in June (4 places left)

Hungary Crane Photography Tour in September (6 places left)

White-tailed Eagle Photography Tour in February (6 places left)

Brown Bear Hide-Photography Tour in April, July and September (2 places and 6-6 places left)

↓ BIRDWATCHING

- **Hungary, Slovakia & Transylvania GT** recorded 230 species which included 10 species of owls and woodpeckers seen. This is a new record for Central Europe and certainly an amazing tour to see the birds and the scenery of this part of the World. It is fully booked for 2015 but the new dates for 2016 are now **online**.



Pallid Harrier attacking an Imperial Eagle (Photo: János Oláh)

- **NEW** tour to Transylvania in search of **Birds, Butterflies** and **Brown Bears** at the end of July. Amongst special targets are the Ural Owl, Wallcreeper, Ring Ouzel, Nutcracker, Shore Lark... In Butterfly front good chance to see Danube Clouded Yellow, Large Cooper, Scarce Cooper, Pallas's Fritillary, Titania's Fritillary and of course the Carpathian Brown Bear! More informations **here**.



Titania's Fritillary in Transylvania (Photo: Mike Watson)

- **The Hortobágy is superb:** an all time amazing record count of Common Crane were on the Hortobágy where a total of 135 000 individual were counted at three evening roost in October 2014. Autumn Crane migration has its special feeling here what every birder must experience once in a lifetime.

The Hortobágy is superb: the biggest ever Red-breasted Goose invasion occurred in early November 2014 when a total number of 1733 individual were present in the Hortobágy region! This is very interesting information and we might be witnessing another change of wintering ground for the species!? Gradually less Red-breasted Goose wintering in Romania's Black Sea coast - probably because of the uncontrolled hunting - and bigger and bigger numbers are counted in the Carpathian Basin.



Red-breasts in the Hortobágy (Photo: Attila Szilágyi)

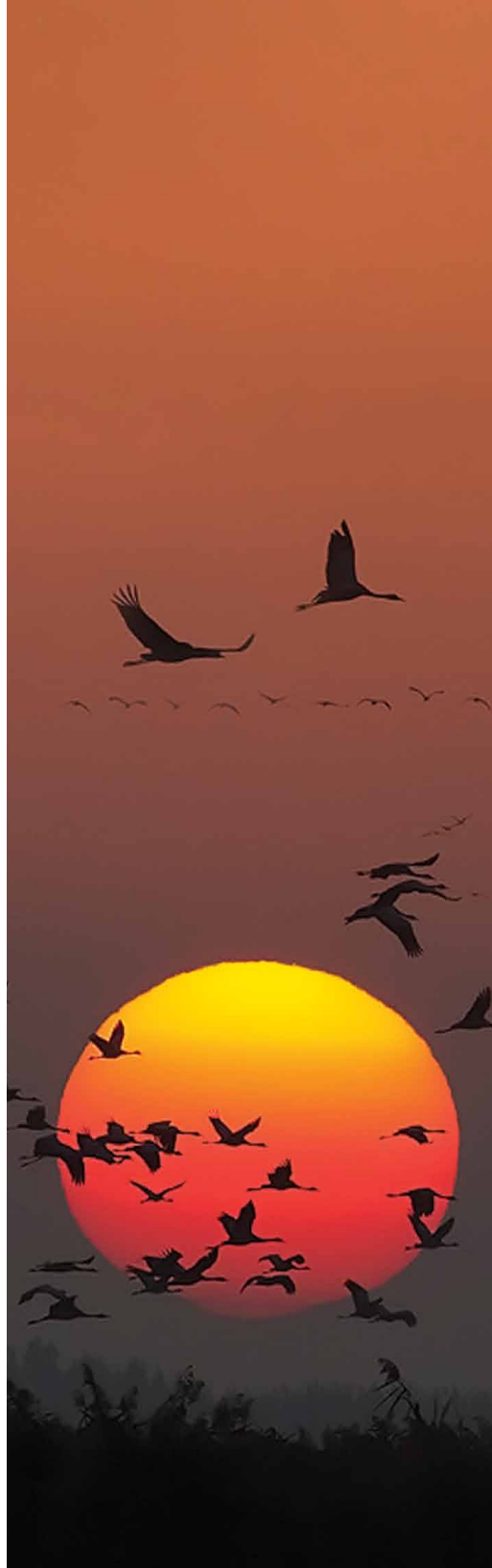
- Sakertour **nestboxing** is a long-term project when our group members every Autumn meet and install nest boxes for Ural Owl, Scops Owl, Tengmalm's Owl, Pygmy Owl, Red-footed Falcon, Roller and Tits or Flycatchers. In 2014 autumn 60 different nest boxes were distributed.



Nestbox for Ural Owl in 2014 (Photo: Zoltán Gergely Nagy)



White-backed Woodpecker (Photo: Gábor Simay)



Cranes in the sunset (Photo: Attila Szilágyi)



Tengmalm's Owl (Photo: János Oláh)

THE FOLLOWING BIRDING TOURS HAVE AVAILABILITIES IN 2015:

Hortobágy - Zemplén Spring Tour - 9-16 May (6 places left)

Hortobágy - Zemplén Autumn Tour - 3 - 9 October (8 places left)

Danube Delta - Dobrudja Spring Tour - 16-23 May (5 places left)

Danube Delta - Dobrudja Autumn Tour - 29 August- 5 September (8 places left)

2014 IN REVIEW

↓ HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE HORTOBÁGY NP.

We had a highly successful photo season in 2014 and now we would like to highlight a few moments. The winter was mild but the eagle season was still very successful. The Hortobágy was dry in the spring of 2014 completely the opposite of last year when everything was flooded. These conditions continued to the autumn migration as well.

In Hungary as usual the **photo season started** with **White-tailed Eagle Photography**. The last winter was really mild but the eagle activity was great until late March.

We had many eagles in our feeding station and surprisingly several young **Imperial Eagle** was photographable again.

This species become more frequent since winter of 2012/2013.



White-tailed Eagle (Photo: Yves Baptiste)

The **spring-summer season** was fantastic with so many memorable moments! We would like to mention only the most interesting ones like having a pair of **Little Crakes** breeding nearby the Pygmy Cormorant Hide and allowing great images for most photographers! We also had amazing Woodpecker activity at our **drinking hides**.

Black Woodpecker was a daily visitor in May and one of our lucky tour participant photographed six species of woodpeckers on a single day (Black-, Middle Spotted-, Lesser Spotted-, Great Spotted-, Green Woodpecker and Wryneck)!

We had several pairs of **Hoopoes** and they offered fantastic opportunities for almost three month continuously.

Most other hides were also excellent at certain times of the year and produced excellent photo opportunities for **Black Stork, Spoonbill, Purple Heron, Red-footed Falcon, Pygmy Cormorant, Roller, Bee-eater, Little Owl.**

In early September in front of the Egret and Stork Hide the "stage" was occupied by **Common Cranes**. This is a special tour which is designed to capture these fantastic birds in action. You can often see them bathing in a pool on their back splashing water all over.

We only run one Crane tour a year but still have places for the 2015 tour.

We must also mention the special **Dotterel photography** and this year the Crane Photo Guests were privileged to photograph them from a few meters only.

Crane Photography continued in October when thousands of birds congregate in an evening roost area. This is a special hide to capture roosting Cranes.



Dancing Common Crane (Photo: Attila Szilágyi)



Blue hour in the roosting area (Photo: Attila Szilágyi)

In a nutshell these moments were the most characteristic ones of the past season and we are really looking forward to the 2015 photography season.



↓ HIDE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE DANUBE DELTA

Danube Delta Photo Tours in 2014 was amazingly rich in colorful birds and very successful in terms of pictures taken by our guests!

The `classic` **Danube Delta and Dobrudja Tours** were fantastic! This is a very productive tour which gave you the widest range of photographable bird species possible in a week with covering three different areas.

First part is deep in the Danube Delta using a camouflage photo boat, than the 2nd part is in the Macin Mountain National Park using drinking hides and mobile blinds, and the 3rd part is in the Black Sea coastal wetlands.

First time in our Danube Delta operation we have tested a new and a more relaxed, one base tour in the Danube Delta which is going to first run in May 2015 and we hope to repeat it every year at the end of May.

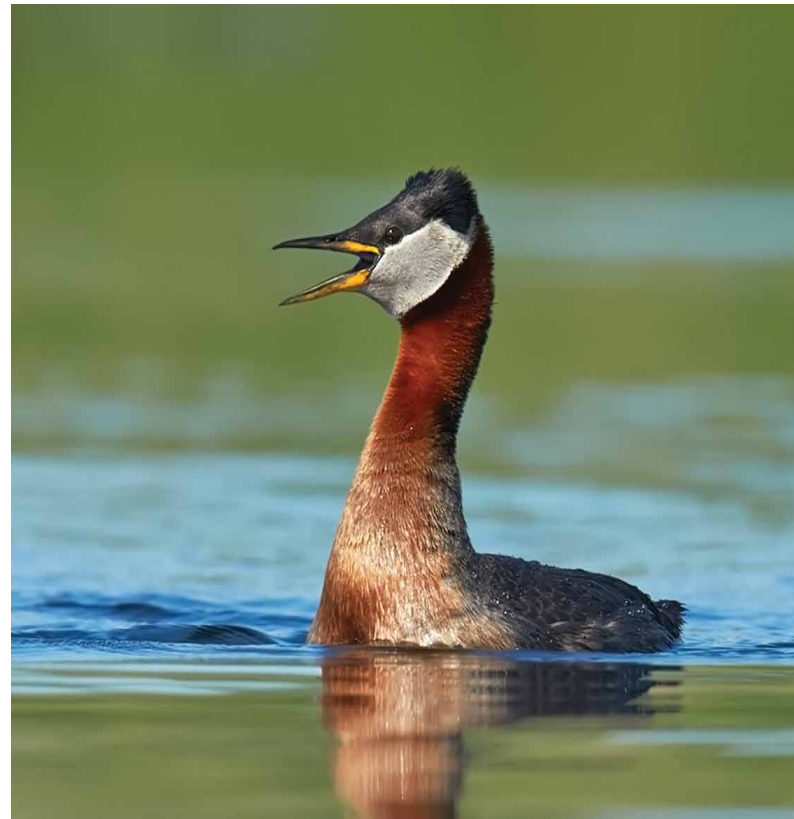
This is the **The Ultima(te) Danube Delta Photo Tour** which focusing to one particular area inside the Delta, where a hide network was built for photographers. **Key species** are *Golden Jackal, White-tailed Eagle, Little Owl, Marsh Harrier, Pygmy Cormorant, Purple Heron, Bee-eater, Roller, Bearded Tit, Penduline Tit* and others. This is an easy tour for those who would like to spend more days in one place and avoid travelling between places.

In Spring 2014, deep in the Danube Delta lakes we had a fabulous photo season. Our accommodation is located very close to the best and most bird-reach places therefore the morning and afternoon photo time is greatly maximized. This year was unique because **Red-necked Grebes** appeared in larger number and almost everybody had chance to capture nice moments of this superb looking grebe's private life: displaying pair, calling pair, interactions between Great-crested Grebes, adults with chicks etc. In 2014 also **Black Terns** and **Black-necked Grebes** started to breed in the region again.



Whiskered Tern (Photo: Klaus Theiler)

Those lakes with dense floating vegetation where excellent for species like **Glossy Ibis, Night Heron, Squacco Heron, Little Egret, Pygmy Cormorant, Whiskered- and Common Terns. White and Dalmatian Pelicans** were present right in the neighborhood of our accommodation and a pair of **Kingfisher** was cooperative throughout May and June. Smaller birds like *Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Bearded Tit and Penduline Tit* were amongst our targets too!



Calling Red-necked Grebe (Photo: Richard Steel)

In the **Macin Mountain National Park** our drinking hide this year was very good for *Honey Buzzards, Golden Orioles, Turtle Doves, Red-backed Shrikes, Hawfinch, Ortolan Bunting, Corn Bunting* and occasionally visited by *Barred Warbler* and *Lesser Grey Shrike*. Beside our drinking hides here we had mobile blinds for **Rollers** and a new hide for **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**.

Lagoons of the Black Sea are amazingly bird rich places where our **special targets** were the *Bee-eaters, Collared Pratincoles, Isabelline Wheatear, Pied Wheatear, Black-headed Bunting, Paddyfield Warbler, Calandra Lark, Little Owl, Red-footed Falcon*, different waders and migrants too.

You can read more about the Danube Delta Photo Season in our **Blog**.



↓ BROWN BEAR PHOTOGRAPHY IN TRANSYLVANIA

We started our first full Carpathian Brown Bear photo season in late March with a pioneering tour but unfortunately due to the extremely rich beech mast crop in October 2013 the Bears were only irregularly seen from the hides – it was a great disappointment indeed!

It seems that this energy rich seed is a very important source of food for the bears throughout October to April and the Bears become regular in front of our hides after mid April only.

Sorry folks for such a unrewarding tour but luckily this kind of mass beech mast production happening once in every 50-100 year or so.

In May, during the mating season we had one of the best moments of the year and more than ten bears regularly visited our hides and offered fantastic photo opportunities.

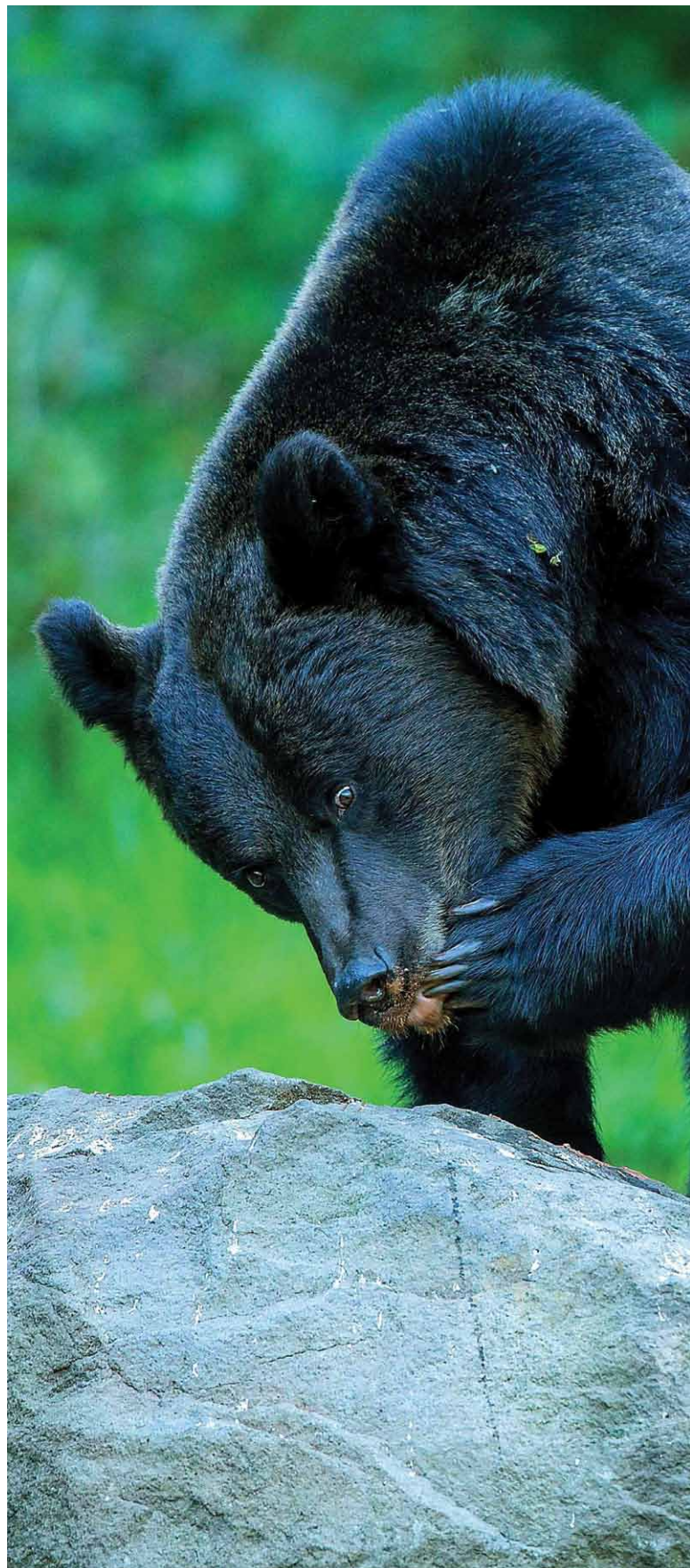
The summer period was just as good in 2014 as it was in 2013 and certainly a very reliable time to see and photograph the **Carpathian Brown Bears**. Several bears were regular at the hides and from August the first cubs appeared with their mothers too.

A very dark (almost black) female Brown Bear dominated one of the feeding stations all the year and by the autumn we realized she is pregnant and going to be a mother soon – so good hopes for next August and September for family images!

September was very good again and this time mainly female Bears with cubs, younger Bears and the `Black Bear` visited the site regularly. From November the season ended and apart from the very beginning of the year we can say that our first Brown Bear Photo Season was finally successful!

A nice bonus this year was a **Eurasian Wolf** seen and photographed very first time from our main hide. Between August and October it was seen about six times and some lucky photographers even had a chance to take pictures too. Fantastic animal!

We are looking forward for an exciting **Brown Bear Photo season in 2015** too.



Carpathian Brown Bear (Photo: Lorenzo Zuntini)



↓ BIRDWATCHING TOURS IN 2014

We run several tours for our **partner companies** regularly but also offer a few fixed date tours every year.

We are also able to cater for customized birding tours adapting to certain targets and wishes. All the birdwatching tours were run smoothly and had wonderful memories.

A huge thank you to our guides, partners and supporters!

Our main Carpathian transect tour - **Hungary, Slovakia & Transylvania GT-** in Spring set a **new record with 230 species** seen in a mere 10 days of birding! This year's highlights were ten species of owls including *Ural, Eagle, Scops, Eurasian Pygmy and Tengmalm's Owls*, all the European breeding woodpeckers including superb views of the rare and declining *White-backed Woodpecker* and the enigmatic *Three-toed Woodpecker*, eighteen species of raptors including *Pallid Harrier, Short-toed and Imperial Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Red-footed Falcon and Saker; Capercaillie, Great Bustard, Little Crake, Corncrake, Collared Pratincole, Wallcreeper, Red-breasted and Collared Flycatchers, Thrush Nightingale* and a wide range of warblers including amazing views of singing *River Warbler*.

All the **Danube Delta Birding Tours** were very enjoyable and over 180 bird species were seen in Spring and Autumn as well. Both periods are excellent to experience the migration along the Black Sea coast. 2014 highlights included several great encounters with *Dalmatian Pelican, Pallas's Gull, Levant Sparrowhawk, Saker Falcon, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Paddyfield Warbler, flock of 187 Broad-billed Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Rosy Starling, Pied Wheatear, Citrine Wagtail, Sombre Tit* and others.

A **Transylvania extension** is available for the Spring Danube Delta Tour. We had wonderful birding here during Spring with such birds like *Shore Lark, Alpine Accentor, Wallcreeper, Pygmy Owl, Ural Owl, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Thrush Nightingale* and so on. All the participants had chance to see *Carpathian Brown Bears* from our hides.

The **Hortobágy - Zemplén Autumn** tours in Hungary were excellent in 2014 with such highlights like 45 000 roosting *Cranes, Lesser White-fronted and Red-breasted Goose, Great Bustard, Sociable Plover, Dotterel, Ural and Eagle Owls, Long-eared Owl roost, White-backed Woodpecker*.

Great birds, great food, great company...this is how we would characterize our birding tours and don't hesitate to try if you haven't been to this fascinating part of Europe yet!

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



Ural Owl, Transylvania (Photo: János Oláh)



Broad-billed Sandpipers, Danube Delta (Photo: Glyn Sellors)



Short-toed Eagle, Hortobágy (Photo: Attila Szilágyi)



Capercaillie in love (Photo: Zoltán Gergely Nagy)

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