

# SAKER eNEWS

1st edition, 2012



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Juvenile Saker born in the Hortobágy in 2012 (Photo: Gábor Simay)

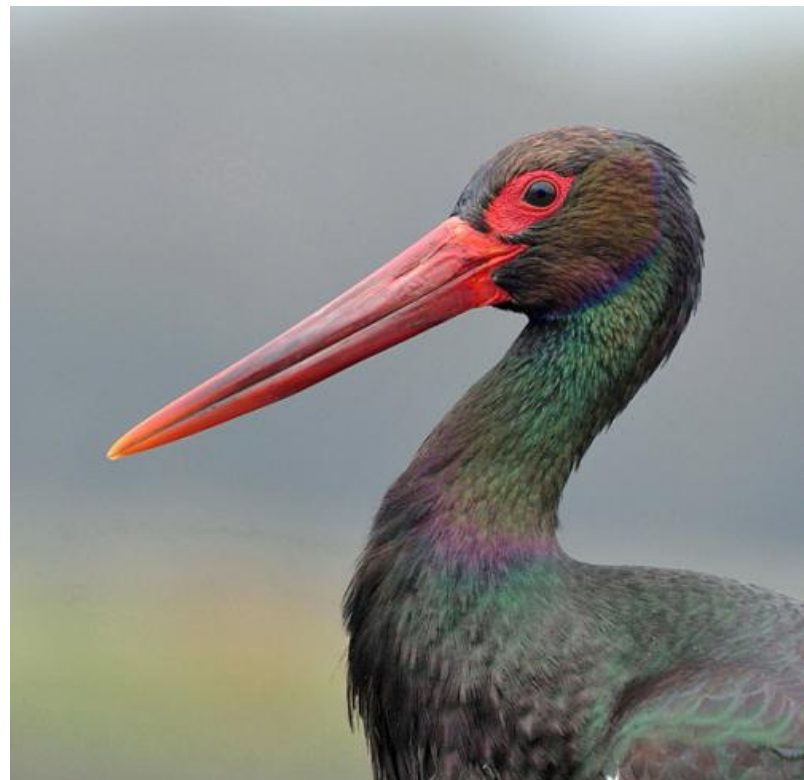
### Dear Birders and Photographers!

2012 was an action-packed year for our guests and now we are preparing for 2013 and looking into 2014.

We have decided to give you a brief insight of the past year, our achievements and particularly our future plans in our very first newsletter!

Our team is continuously working on new and exciting itineraries and hides so we can offer something new even for our returning customers. We highly appreciate all our clients and very much hoping to see you again! Hopefully you can find valuable information here about next year but this also give you the possibility to plan a tour with us in 2014. We are currently updating our [website](#) with lots of new information, the 2014 tour dates and most importantly with lots of images taken on our tours.

Yours sincerely,  
**János OLÁH**  
*managing director*



Black Storks were regular in front of our new hide (Photo: Hansrudi Vögeli)

## Top News

### ↓ Hide photography News

- Our Hide Photography Tours are **fully booked for 2013 Spring** in Hungary and only **3 places left on the 2013 Danube Delta Spring / Summer** tours.
- In the second half of 2013 we will run two Crane photography tours and also uploaded the tour date for our December 2013 White-tailed Eagle photography tour
- In 2013 we are planning to build **two new hides in Hungary**, in the garden of [Hortobágy Eco Lodge](#) - due to open in Spring 2014. These hides will be operational in 2014. One is going to be a Canopy Drinking Tower-hide especially targeting the shy Golden Oriole while the other is a shorebird hide with an eye-level viewing! Both of these new hides will be within walking distance from the comfortable rooms of the Eco Lodge.
- The Black Stork / Egret hide (in Hungary) was really successful in 2012 and for **2013 Spring we will improve the hide comfort and viewing level**. Beside the Black Storks, flocks of breeding plumaged Spoonbills and Night Herons regularly visited this new hide.



Spoonbill (Photo: Hansrudi Vögeli)

- Our Reedbed hide (in Hungary) will also **re-open in 2013 Spring** after the fishpond rehabilitation finished.
- In the Macin Mountain (Danube Delta photo tour) we make special efforts in 2013 **to attract the Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush** in front of our mobile hide.
- We will launch our **Autumn photo tour in the Danube Delta**. It will be the same itinerary as the spring tour but will run in September. Beside the resident local species **this tour will focus on migrants**.



Red-breasted Flycatcher on migration (Photo: Zoltán Baczó)

- In Transylvania we successfully **finished our first two Brown Bear photography hides** and after testing in 2013 we have it ready for our guests from March 2014! If you want to participate in the testing work for a special 'cost price', please contact our office! In 2013 two more hides will be built to complete our Brown Bear hide network.



Brown Bear photo hide in Transylvania (Photo: Zoltán Baczó)

- We have good news for landscape photographers as well! Our special photo tour in Transylvania is now completed and will first run in October 2013. This can be taken in combination of Brown Bear Photography. You can soon find more details about this photo tour on the [Sakertour website](#).



The Pietra Craiului / Királykő National Park (Photo: Joan Roca)



The Bicz Gorges National Park (Photo: Joan Roca)



Sad moments: Pygmy Cormorant Hide in early March 2012 (Photo: Attila Szilágyi)



A thirsty Common Crane from the past season (Photo: János Oláh)

## ↓ Birdwatching News

- Aquatic Warbler's of the Hortobágy

2012 was the worst year for this species in the Hortobágy NP and probably following the global decline of the species it is possible that the only Hungarian population crashed. We hope in 2013 Aquatic Warblers will return to the Hortobágy.

Europe rarest migratory songbird will be really in trouble soon if the breeding and wintering grounds will be not protected in the highest level. The wintering grounds especially vulnerable in Africa and some still need to be discovered to be able to protect it in time! You can find more information's about the species protection [HERE](#).

- Owl nest boxing in Transylvania for Ural and Tengmalm's Owls

The Ural Owl is a common breeding bird of the Transylvanian forests while the Tengmalm's Owl is a very secretive bird of the mature coniferous and beech woodlands of higher altitudes.

For a better chance to see these nice birds in our trips we started to put up nest boxes in the last years and we already experienced breeding of Ural Owl in our boxes.

Two years ago we found a more accessible Tengmalm's Owl territory, where several nest boxes were installed in the autumn of 2012.



Nestbox for Tengmalm's Owl in Transylvania (Photo: Zoltán Baczó)

- White-backed Woodpecker's of Transylvania

This is the rarest Woodpecker of Transylvania (and Europe too). After continuous search we found a promising population in 2011 in an old growth mixed forest. We saw and photographed this species in this place in April 2012 so we hope in the next years we can see it with our guests too.

This species is regularly seen on our trips when we visit the Zemplén Hills where an impressive population of about 150 pairs present.



White-backed Woodpecker in Transylvania (Photo: Zoltán Baczó)

- Pygmy and Tengmalm's Owl breeding in Slovakia

In 2012 we have found two Pygmy Owl nest holes where the birds bred successful and also had several territorial male Tengmalm's Owl but unfortunately the nest were not found. They did not use our nest boxes but we saw the male in daytime with our guests during spring grand tour!

- Ural Owls of the Zemplén Hills

Zemplén is the best place to see Ural Owls in Hungary and possibly in Europe! We have not missed the species on any of our Spring tour since 1994 – which is a fantastic achivment and many thanks to our expert Zoltán Petrovics! 2012 was one of the best breeding year for this species and majority of our nest boxes were occupied!



Ural Owl in the Zemplén (Photo: Gábor Simay)

- Great Black-headed Gulls are now regularly seen on our Danube Delta trips

Despite the fact that these rare gulls become a regular breeding bird in the Danube Delta area since 2009 it is not so easy to find without local knowledge! We can safely say now we have seen it well in most of our Danube Delta trips and in every Limosa Holidays Danube Delta tours since 2010! The Danube Delta is the only place in Europe where this Eastern specialty can be reliably seen.

- Dotterels on our Danube Delta Autumn tour

Three years ago a possible moulting area of the species was discovered near the Danube Delta. Since the discovery of the site Dotterels were observed in every autumn (up 100). Dotterels use the Hortobágy (in Hungary) as a moulting area occasionally in spring and regularly in autumn. Our clients always love to see large trips of these fantastic birds so we decided to include this new place in Romania during our [Autumn Danube Delta Birding Trip](#) from 2013.

- With a new smaller capacity 'house-boat' we can offer cost-effective trips to Danube Delta even for smaller group size now!

House boats or pontons are special accommodations of the Danube Delta. Actually it is a floating hotel with different room capacity. The most widely used ones has place for 18 to 20 persons on double rooms. In fact that nowadays a birding group size rarely reaches 12+ participants, smaller boats can be much more cost effective. Smaller house boats have a capacity for 10 persons on 5 double rooms. For more information's or a customized offer please ask our office.



A 'floating hotel' on the move (Photo: Zoltán Baczó)

- Sakertour Danube Delta Tours

Carefully planned birding tours are available to the Danube Delta in Spring and Autumn! Guaranteed departure for a minimum of three persons with a maximum group size of 10 participants plus Sakertour leader. You can find more information about our 2013 tours on our [website](#).



'King of the Gulls' (Photo: János Oláh)



Black-necked Grebe (Photo: János Oláh)

## 2012 in review

### ↓ Hide Photography in the Hortobágy NP (Hungary)

- In Hungary the photo season started with White-tailed Eagle photography. All of our hides were perfect due to the very cold and snowy winter. In fact it was a bit exceptionally harsh winter but just perfect to capture intimate moments of WTE's in wintertime. Our success rate was exceptionally good in 2012 January and February as over 90% of the day's eagles were present at the hides!

The main photo season started in mid April but we had an unexpected surprise in March when the main maintenance of the hides is taking place. The Pygmy Cormorant hide completely burned down in a reedbed fire caused by local fishermen! Fortunately we had time to rebuild it and functioned well throughout the year.

This spring especially but generally the whole year was exceptionally warm and dry. Red-footed Falcons, Rollers and Bee-eaters started breeding a week or two later than in normal years but they finally breed successfully and were very photographable!

We installed a new hide in the hope to capture Black Stork images. Partly because our Reedbed hide was out of operation due to the rehabilitation work of the fishponds it is located. The new Egret hide proved to be excellent with Black Storks and Spoonbills being regular visitors!

Due to the dry and hot summer all of our drinking hides were very popular and lots of birds and mammals used it.

Cranes visited the Hortobágy in record numbers in this season, the count revealed over 112 000 birds! The whole autumn period was dry again and Cranes came to drink and bath in front of our hides not only in September but throughout October as well.

We had an exceptionally good year and hopefully lots of satisfied guests, with a huge variety of excellent images!



Adult Collared Pratincole (Photo: Michael Southcott / tour participant)

### ↓ Hide Photography in the Danube Delta (Romania)

- After a preparation of two years in 2012 we finally launched our photography activity in the Danube Delta! We had a wonderful first season with lots of nice moments and plenty of nice images. Naturally does not matter how much you plan a tour ahead the real testing is the first season. Thanks to our wonderful clients feedback we hopefully can improve this tour further for 2013! We learnt Photo tours here are slightly different than in Hortobágy, where the main photo hide is actually a boat.

*"The specially adapted boat which was used to stealthily approach the bird species of the Delta was a little slow and ponderous but very effective. It was so well designed it is hard to see the concealed photographers!" (Peter M. Beesely / tour participant)*

In the Macin Mountain NP our drinking hide had lot's interesting visitors such as Barred Warblers, Golden Oriole, Sombre Tit, Levant Sparrowhawk...and was a popular place until the end of the breeding season. Later in September it was excellent again when lot's of migrant appeared in front of the hide.

The coastal lagoons and steppe habitats were also fantastic. In early May migrating waders were nice, but in June our main focus was on breeding birds like Collared Pratincole, Kentish Plover, Little Tern, Paddyfield Warbler, Pied Weather, Lesser Grey-Shrike, Calandra Lark, Greater Short-toed

Lark, Black-headed Bunting just to name but a few!

The spring-summer photography season in the Danube Delta is short but very productive (6-7 weeks)!

You can read the detailed photo reports of the past season in our [Danube Delta Blog](#) or [Hortobágy Photography Blog](#) and feel free to post a comment if you like!

For a selection of images from our 2012 tours please visit our [hide gallery](#) or the [`best of gallery`](#).

### ↓ Birdwatching tours

- We run several tours for our [partner companies](#) and also offer a few fixed date tours. All the birdwatching tours were run smoothly and had a great success.

In spring 2012 we had our first fixed date **Hungary, Slovakia & Transylvania Grand Tour** which visits the best birding places in the Carpathian basin.

Our other tour is the well tried, classic **Hortobágy – Zemplén Spring Tour**. Both of these were finished with a great success.

During our longest and most productive birding tour we saw 205 species within 12 days. Highlights were the 9 species of owls seen, 10 species of woodpeckers, Wallcreeper, Capercaillie, Great Bustard, Saker, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle and others!

You can read the full trip report [here](#).



Wallcreeper in Transylvania (Photo: Zoltán Baczó)



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

Our 2013 and 2014 dates for this superb GT tour is [online!](#)

The Hortobágy – Zemplén Spring tour was fantastic too and all the available specialties of the region were found! We recorded 187 bird species in just a mere 6 days birding!

2012 year's highlights were 8 species of Woodpecker, 18 species of raptors including Eastern Imperial Eagle, Saker Falcon; 6 species of Owls and other goodies like Little Crake, Corncrake, Collared Pratincole and Great Snipe. You can read the full trip report [here](#).

Our 2013 dates to [Hungary](#) and [Romania](#) are **online!**



Juvenile Terek Sandpiper in the Hortobágy (Photo: János Oláh)



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