



SAKERTOURS



Eurasian Dotterel (Dániel Balla)

HORTOBÁGY – ZEMPLÉN AUTUMN TOUR **with SAKERTOURS** **28th September – 4th October, 2019**

Leader: Dániel Balla

Enjoying the autumn migration in mainland Europe could provide a variety of shorebirds and also songbirds while in Hungary the resident woodpeckers are always nice to see. This tour gives a unique opportunity to collect all these in the yellow-red coloured nature together with the amazing Common Crane migration which gives unforgettable memories for all birdwatchers coming to enjoy them this time of the year.

Moreover, this year we had a very unusual Eurasian Jay influx while they were migrating to south on every site we visited during the tour. All in all – despite the bad rainy and most of the times windy weather we bagged 136 species on the tour including such highlights like Pygmy Cormorants, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Eurasian Dotterels, Red-necked Phalarope, Pallas's Gull, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Ural Owl, 7 Woodpecker species, Red-footed Falcons, Saker Falcon, a few late staying Red-backed Shrikes, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Bearded Reedling, Hawfinch and Rock Bunting.

28th September (Saturday)

After meeting each other at the airport we had a short drive to the Northern part of the Kiskunság National Park where sunny but windy weather was welcoming us. Our target was to find Great Bustard as it could be tricky this time of the year in the Hortobágy region. After a 30 minutes search we were gifted with three birds feeding on an agricultural plot together with Grey Herons and Great Egrets. While enjoying the Great Bustards we were having our packed lunch when we spotted a juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle struggling in the wind but remained a distant and short view. After leaving the site we started a 3 hours journey to our first accommodation at the Hortobágy. On the way we saw our first Marsh Harriers and first flocks of Common Cranes just before arriving. At our lodge we had a delicious dinner and went to have a sleep to prepare for the upcoming trip.

29th September (Sunday)

In the morning we had a short birdwatching before breakfast. We had great views of a beautiful adult female Peregrine Falcon just from the terrace and also had a juvenile Red-footed Falcon, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Common Kestrel to finish the raptors here. We also found Eurasian Spoonbill and heard a Black Woodpecker from the distance.



Eastern Imperial Eagle (Dániel Balla)

After breakfast just before leaving the lodge we had close scope view of a Syrian Woodpecker in the garden. We headed to the main fishponds to continue the day where we found a Common Redstart near the parking lot. Reaching the wetlands, we collected Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Curlew and Common Ringed Plover soon and had a nice Red-backed Shrike on a fence. We had a short walk to a bigger reedbed where we found several Bearded Reedlings with some good-looking adult males between them. On another pond we enjoyed views of more than a hundred Pygmy Cormorants while on a nearby site we found Goldcrests in a flock of Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers. Before leaving we finally managed to see a Water

Rail after the many ones only heard calling. When walking back to our vehicle we spotted a juvenile Red-necked Phalarope on a small pool very close to us. After lunch we headed into a close grassland site with bushes where we found a European Roller and saw a juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle in very good lights. Then we got back to the fishponds and reached the well-known Common Crane roosting site where we found a flock of Black-tailed Godwits, Spotted Redshanks, Pied Avocets, had close views of Grey Plovers, Dunlins, Little Stints and a Curlew Sandpiper before the show began. We chose to stay close to the roosting site to see the Common Cranes coming in to the pond and we were not disappointed. We had an amazing hour when huge loud flocks were flying by us just a few meters away in front of the orange and purple sky. We got back to the lodge and had another delicious dinner to finish this long day.

30th September (Monday)



White-tailed Eagle (Dániel Balla)

The early morning session gave very close view of an unexpected Black Kite flying south just in front of the Lodge's terrace and the Syrian Woodpecker also flew by a few minutes later to warm us up for the day. We drove to a fishpond on the western side of the Hortobágy where we got calling Penduline Tits sometimes perched on the top of the reeds giving unforgettable moments. The site also gave us Common Pochards and Tufted Ducks and a Green Sandpiper flying by. We continued the investigation of fishponds and drove to one on the northern side of the Hortobágy where we enjoyed more than a hundred Pied Avocets feeding in the shallow water. Heading to have a lunch we stopped near the road to try for Saker Falcon but only had very distant view of a pair sitting on an electric pylon. The same spot however also gave a distant Great Grey Shrike. After lunch we went to see the Red-footed Falcons at a close grassland site. We had about twenty individuals of all ages and sexes hunting and feeding and resting on the ground around us. As the weather was getting very windy and rain was coming towards us, we decided to go back to watch a Common Crane roost again but now from the small huts protected from any kind of weather coming. Despite the strong wind the Crane roost was phenomenal again. When leaving the hides, we had a Black-crowned Night Heron passing us in the really last lights of the day.

1st October (Tuesday)

Before breakfast a Black Woodpecker showed itself at our accommodation to start the day with. After leaving the lodge we tried to get better views of Saker Falcon which we succeeded on the third attempt as we got close to a nice male when suddenly the female came and they started playing with a flock of Starlings in front of us. We got back to the main fishponds to have a final chance seeing Lesser White-fronted Goose but sadly they were not coming on the lake today. After lunch we checked a fresh-drained fishpond where we found a juvenile Red Knot and another Red-necked Phalarope after the second day's bird. We had our first Little Egrets and an unusually showy Water Rail was entertaining us for several minutes before leaving. On the way to the last fishpond site for the day we stopped in a town to check the Long-eared Owl roost where we found 6 individuals sitting peacefully hidden between the leaves and branches of a large acacia tree. The fishpond we visited was drained formerly and they started to fill it again but still had shallow water and mudflat around the edges. On one side a huge mass of birds held more than a hundred of Great Egrets and Grey Herons, thousands of Greylag Goose which had a single Greater White-fronted Goose amongst them and several Caspian and Yellow-legged Gulls. After searching for a while, we finally picked out our target here: a icy Pallas's Gull which was hanging around in the past days. With this fantastic species in the bag we drove to the south part of the Hortobágy to try the Dotterels.



Eurasian Dotterels (Dániel Balla)

We saw about 60 birds but unfortunately, we got them only flying to their roosting spot, so delayed the better views for the upcoming morning. To finish the day a couple European Golden Plovers were showing themselves close in the sunset.

2nd October (Wednesday)

We started the day with having close views on a small flock of Dotterels on the grasslands of Southern Hortobágy then we drove to Debrecen to have an unforgettable session in one of our drinking hides having

amazing close views of Great Spotted Woodpecker, European Nuthatch and Marsh Tit just to mention a few. Before heading to the Zemplén hills we checked a roosting Tawny Owl sitting out in the open on a broken oak trunk in the forest. Arriving to the Zemplén hills we straight drove to a quarry together with our local guide Zoltán Petrovics who provided us unbelievable open views of a well-hidden beautiful male Eurasian Eagle-Owl on the wall. To continue the day we drove closer to our upcoming accommodation and stopped in a valley where we had a flock of Siskins feeding, found European Treecreeper but all this was just preparation for the late arriving Ural Owl which just sat on a side branch of beech tree and started calling just after sunset still providing fantastic moments. Minutes after leaving the Ural Owl site, a Tawny Owl just crossed the road in front of us lighted by our vehicle as the last bird of the day.



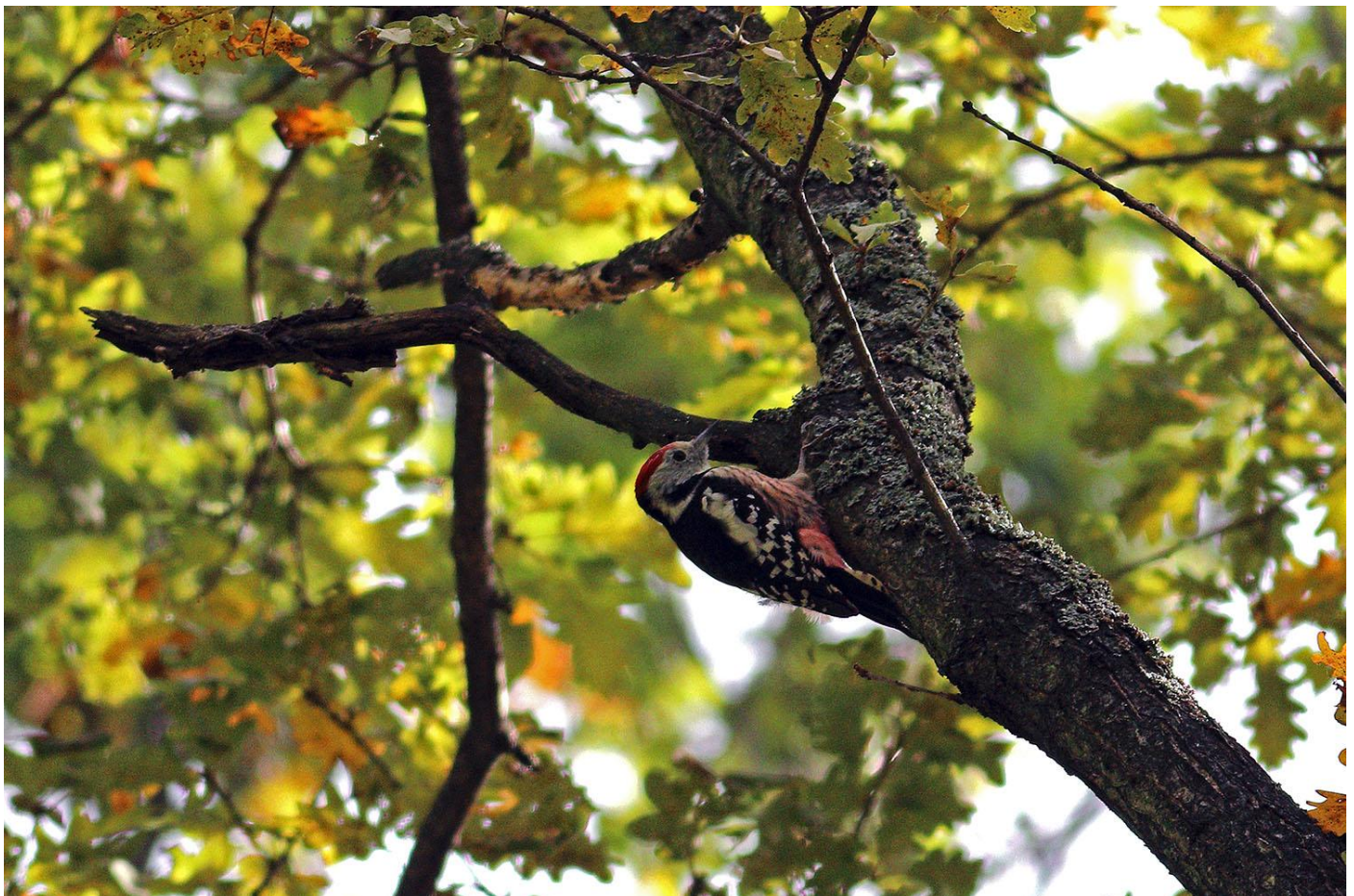
Ural Owl after sunset (top left) and Eurasian Eagle-Owl (right) and Northern Goshawk and Eurasian Sparrowhawk flying together (Dániel Balla)

3rd October (Thursday)

We were promised to have horrible weather today. It turned out that the forecast was right this time we had rain all morning and strong wind all day except the last hours. In the morning rain however we managed to have clear views of a nice male Rock Bunting in a quarry. The same site held numerous Black Redstarts, Yellowhammers and a few migrants like Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers. In the afternoon we had a walk in a nice mixed forest of hornbeam and beech which was unfortunately totally quiet in the continuous wind, but a in the sky an immature and an adult male Goshawk entertained us for a few minutes when they were mobbed by a Eurasian Sparrowhawk giving exceptional opportunity to compare the two species. Driving back to our hotel we found a Great Grey Shrike near the road which sat on the top of a bush in the finally appearing sunlight. In the evening we went for wine tasting to a local winery where we enjoyed a variety of wines from the famous Tokaj region. On the way to the winery we picked out a Little Owl sitting on a chimney in a village which became the last owl species we saw on this tour.

4th October (Friday)

We had a final morning to catch up the birds we missed in the bad weather the previous day so we were facing a big “sprint”. After breakfast we straight drove to a good quality mixed forest of oak and hornbeam. While walking to one of Zoli’s main hotspot we saw Coal Tits and finally had clear views of Hawfinch sitting on a top of a hornbeam in the warm sunlight. A few minutes before reaching our target site a Black Woodpecker was working hard on a wild cherry tree near the trail which we flushed. Arriving to a more open part of the forest with tall oaks we stopped to scan and listen for woodpeckers.



Middle Spotted Woodpecker seen in the Zemplén Hills (Dániel Balla)

We were amazed as we could hear woodpeckers pecking from almost every direction. We started calling them each after and first managed clear and close views of Grey-headed Woodpeckers and the usual Great Spotted Woodpeckers. Few minutes later a Middle Spotted Woodpecker was spotted in the lower canopy of

an oak tree in front of us. Walking towards the end of this semi-open area we heard a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker calling close which we spotted as it was calling and drumming on the top of a dead tree in front of us. Moving towards to another patch of better forest we saw the Black Woodpecker again and heard Green Woodpecker calling. Our last spot gave us close views of a Middle Spotted Woodpecker again when we had to turn back to the bus. We had a picnic lunch at the edge of the wooded area at a vineyard where we enjoyed this year's amazing Eurasian Jay migration again and heard a Woodlark singing as it passed over.



'White-headed' Long-tailed Tit (Dániel Balla)

BIRDS – list of bird species recorded on the 2019 tour

C = Commonly seen, more than 10 individuals

'Numbers' = Actual number seen on the tour

H = Heard only

LO = Leader only

NL = Non-leader

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	C
2	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	1
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	C
4	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	C
5	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	C
6	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	C
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	C
8	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	C
9	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	C
10	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	1 site
11	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	1 site
12	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	C
13	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	2
14	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	C
15	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	1
16	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	C
17	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	1
18	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	C
19	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	C
20	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1 site
21	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>	C
22	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	C
23	Eastern Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	4
24	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	C
25	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	4
26	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	C
27	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	1
28	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	C
29	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	1
30	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	C
31	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	23
32	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	2
33	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1
34	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	C
35	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	C
36	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	C
37	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	C
38	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	12
39	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	13
40	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	C

41	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	C
42	Eurasian Dotterel	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>	73
43	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	C
44	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	C
45	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	C
46	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	C
47	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	3
48	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	1
49	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	10
50	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	C
51	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	2
52	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	1
53	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	C
54	Red-necked Phalaroppe	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	2
55	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	C
56	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichtyaetus melanocephalus</i>	1
57	Pallas's Gull	<i>Ichtyaetus ichtyaetus</i>	1
58	Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	5
59	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	C
60	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	C
61	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia f. domestica</i>	C
62	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	2 site
63	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	C
64	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	C
65	Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	1
66	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	2
67	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>	1
68	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	1
69	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	6
70	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	3
71	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>	2
72	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>	1
73	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	3
74	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	C
75	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	2
76	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	1
77	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	4
78	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	C
79	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	2 times
80	Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	6
81	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	4
82	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	3
83	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	4
84	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	C
85	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	C
86	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	C
87	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	C
88	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	C

89	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	C
90	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	5
91	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	C
92	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	C
93	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	C
94	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	3 times
95	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	C
96	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	H
97	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	C
98	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	C
99	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	1 flock
100	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	C
101	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	2
102	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	C
103	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	C
104	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	C
105	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	1
106	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	1
107	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	2
108	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	2
109	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	C
110	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	C
111	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	5
112	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	C
113	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	C
114	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	7
115	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	C
116	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	C
117	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	1
118	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	C
119	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	5
120	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	C
121	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	C
122	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	1
123	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	C
124	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	1
125	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	H
126	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>	C
127	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	C
128	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	2
129	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	4
130	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	C
131	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	C
132	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	C
133	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	C
134	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	C
135	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	1 male
136	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	C

MAMMALS – list of mammal species recorded on the 2019 tour

C = Commonly seen, more than 10 individuals

'Numbers' = Actual number seen on the tour

1	European (Brown) Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	C
2	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	3
3	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	C
4	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	H



Tawny Owl at dayroost (Dániel Balla)



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