



SAKERTOURS



*Red-breasted Goose (Gábor Simay)*

## RED-BREASTED GOOSE SPECIAL TOUR with **SAKERTOURS** 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2019

### **Leader: Dániel Balla**

An early November birdwatching on the lowlands of Hungary is not considered to be the most species full one, however it provides a few specialties which are the most reliable this time of the year. These specialties are the Red-breasted Goose and the Lesser White-fronted Goose which are best found in the first enormous flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese arriving to the Carpathian Basin in the recent years. Moreover the mass flock of wild geese found these days in the Hortobágy region, the last days of the Common Crane's autumn staging still lasts, giving memorable moments and sightings on these couple days for the birdwatchers joining this tour.

This year, after a very long dry summer and dry start of fall the autumn rainy days started just the same day as the tour did, so were birding in rain or windy overcast every day except the last two. The bigger amount of Greater White-fronts which are usually carrying the specialties amongst them arrived later then the past years, exactly on the second night of our tour. Regarding the unfavourable conditions we were still able to enjoy views of a total 91 individuals of Red-breasted Goose with the biggest flock of 26 amongst them. Also we had all together 10 individual Lesser White-fronted Goose on two days of the tour.

Other memorable moments of the tour were the spectacular numbers of Common Cranes everywhere in the countryside, Saker Falcon, Long-legged Buzzard, Eastern Imperial Eagles, Hen Harriers, Eurasian Dotterels, a Yellow-billed Diver, Black-necked and Red-necked Divers, huge flocks of Eurasian Wigeons, Mallards and Teals and the Bearded Reedlings, Penduline Tits and other supporting cast presenting in the area ending with Alpine Accentors on the way to Budapest on the last day. This year's tour ended with a total number of 119 species observed in 5 days including 6 species of Goose.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> November (Saturday)

A fortunate morning start was the outcome of early arriving planes of this tour. In the morning we could start with the visit of the Northern parts of the Kiskunság National Park. Just 40 minutes drive from the airport we arrived to a special site with mixed agricultural plots and grasslands where we started searching for our first target species, the Great Bustard. It didn't take us too much time to find an impressive flock of 52 individuals feeding on a rape field. While watching the Bustards we were gifted with at least 6 Hen Harriers hunting around us and a small flock of Skylarks behind us on a plough field. Moving onward to a close wetland we started scanning our first flock of several thousand Greater White-fronted Geese and Greylag Geese without any luck on rarer Geese species. While enjoying the flock of Geese in front of us we collected commoner duck species like Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal and Northern Shoveler and got close views of Water Pipit feeding on the edge of the wetland.



*Impressive flock of Great Bustards seen on the first day (Dániel Balla)*

For the afternoon we drove to a huge reservoir on the River Tisza where we started searching for a Yellow-billed Loon seen here in the past days. Within 5 minutes we found it and got good but always short views as it was continuously feeding. Besides this rare diver we also found a total 9 Black-throated Loons and 3 Red-throated Loons from the same spot, while Common Goldeneyes close to us in front of other species on the lake.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> November (Sunday)

Before breakfast we had a short birding session in the lodge garden. From the terrace we looked on the mass of Common Cranes and Greater White-fronted Geese which were roosting on the wetland in front and found a flock of 43 Common Shelducks on the water. In the garden a beautiful male Hawfinch was spotted sitting on a dry branch on a treetop. After breakfast we went to a close site with small agricultural plots near grasslands to check raptors there. At least a dozen Common Buzzards and few Common Kestrels were sitting around while a Great Grey Shrike alone was hunting from a telegraph wire near us where a small flock of Fieldfares joined it for a few seconds. On a ploughed section we spotted a nice Long-legged Buzzard showing its rufous colours even in the dull lights and then jumped on a closer bush enabling good flight views as well. We left the site to escape from the rain which was getting more serious by every minute and drove to a fishpond system on the north-eastern part of the Hortobágy. Here we found a single Eurasian Spoonbill together with Grey Herons and Great Egrets in the small pools at the entrance. On the first pond we checked we found Red-throated Loon and three Black-necked Grebes amongst the very common Great Crested Grebe, also another flock of 36 Common Shelduck were present here. For lunch we went to the famous Hortobágy Inn to get closer to the afternoon programme's sites – on the way stopped for a beautiful adult Eastern



Imperial Eagle which was just a few minutes driving from the main road. From the same spot we also saw a nice Rough-legged Buzzard hunting around us and a few Hen Harriers as well.

Finishing our lunch we straight drove to close grassland section where we found two adult and a juvenile Lesser White-fronted Goose together with a flock of a hundred Greater White-fronts, however the sun was still hidden behind the dark clouds we could enjoy our first real target species as long as we wanted from a quite close distance as they were feeding on the short grass. To end the day we went to the southern part of the Hortobágy in hope of finding the last Dotterels which are turning up every autumn to moult on the same site. While searching for these cute shorebirds we found ourselves in the middle of a European Golden Plover flock of about 45 individuals and recognized that the site we are standing is probably a roosting area for Hen Harriers as we could count at least 10 of them sitting on the taller grass around us. We almost gave up the Dotterels when we spotted a few individuals about 200 meters away from us so we decided to try to get closer to them. Unfortunately a Hen Harrier flushed them and we lost them flying but minutes later saw another flock of about 40 birds flying in the distance which we couldn't relocate as it was getting too late. We left the site and went back to our lodge to have a delicious dinner.



*Yellow-billed Loon from the first day, and record shot of Lesser White-fronted Geese from the second day (Dániel Balla)*

#### **4th November (Monday)**

In the morning we started scanning the flock of geese in front of the lodge and it was clear that there was a significant increase in their numbers during the night so we were hoping to find better number of them during the day. After breakfast we decided to give another try for the Dotterels so we drove back to the same spot where we finished yesterday. This time we had help as Tamás Zalai was helping us to find the birds to be time efficient. Following Tamás's fresh information we straight drove to the exact location from where we could enjoy nice views of 3 Dotterels in a smaller flock of European Golden Plovers. Just while watching these few individuals a bigger flock of 28 individuals turned up behind us so we decided to try to get close views on these as they were separated from the usually quite vary Golden Plovers. In a few minutes we were enjoying very close Dotterels running and feeding in front of us on the short grass when a small flock of about 20 Greater White-fronted Geese were passing by having a Red-breasted Goose amongst them. They were close but in front of the overcast sky the Red-breast didn't showed its real beauty. When walking back to the car we had scope views of a Short-eared Owl flying behind the Dotterels. We drove to a fishpond system on the Western part of the Hortobágy where we had amazing views of a few Bearded Reedlings along the trail and two Red-throated Loons on a pond. On the way back to our vehicle we found an unusually skulking Penduline Tit which we enjoyed watching as it was hiding and calling in the reeds. Driving back to have a lunch we stopped near a ploughed field where a Saker Falcon was guarding its territory. Just when we got out from our vehicle it dropped down to chase away an immature Eastern Imperial Eagle crossing the site – what a fantastic observation.

After lunch we went back to check the flock of geese in front of our lodge. It not took us long to spot a single Red-breasted Goose standing alone close to the terrace. Finally we were enjoying this fine art of nature why we came for and were not disappointed. As we agreed spending enough time watching this individual we went out on the grasslands in search for other wildgeese flocks. A few kilometres away we found a huge flock of Greater White-fronted Geese feeding close to the road so we stopped to have a look at them. After few minutes we found a flock of 11 Red-breasts amongst them. Unfortunately the rain was getting heavier so after spending a about 15 minutes enjoying these birds and scanning for others we decided to retreat to the lodge and warm up.



*Phonescoped pictures of Eurasian Dotterels and a Red-breasted Goose (Dániel Balla)*

## 5th November (Tuesday)

The morning started with three Red-breasted Goose which we found from the lodge terrace. After days with birding in overcast and rainy weather today was surprisingly clear and sunny. After a fast breakfast we headed to the main fishpond system in the middle of the Hortobágy. On the way we stopped at an old farmhouse to try to see Barn Owl which we succeeded with, thanks to Attila Szilágyi who arranged everything for us.



*Phonescoped Barn Owl and small flock of Red-breasted Geese with Common Cranes (Dániel Balla)*

Near the junction of the fishponds we saw a small flock of Greater White-fronted Geese which looked promising, so we stopped to spend a few minutes scanning them. After setting up our scopes we immediately found a nice male Lesser White-fronted Goose sunbathing in front and a few seconds later it joined the flock. After a minute or so we spotted another Lesser White-front, now a female bird seconds later joined by 3 juveniles and a male. While watching them the first bird turned up again with another juvenile making the



total number of this vulnerable species up to 7 in this small flock. We drove towards to the fishponds excitedly. Arriving in the village a nice Little Owl was welcoming us on the chimney of the highest building. At the fishponds our first stop was at a flooded and grazed wetland where we found commoner species like Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler and others but from a quite close distance and nice lights so we took our time enjoying them. Moving onward to a real fishpond where we found a single Eared (Slavonian) Grebe amongst the dozens of Great Cresteds and two Little Grebes. A flock of Pygmy Cormorants were drying themselves in the sunlight nearby and thousands of dabbling ducks. As flock of geese were flying by to the northern ponds we decided to have an unforgettable ride on the local narrow gauge train which took us to the largest pond. When entering the birdwatching hide a magnificent adult White-tailed Eagle was sitting just in front of the window. Looking around a few thousand Greater White-fronted Geese were swimming in the middle of the pond and about 2000 Common Cranes were roosting in the middle of the day. After a few minutes we spotted our first Red-breasts in the geese flock while we also found Pied Avocets and a flock of Dunlins. It was hard to spot but we found a single Taiga Bean Goose swimming in the flock of geese and a single male Lesser White-fronted Goose was showing sometimes while we increased the number of Red-breasted Geese spotted here to a nice 16 individuals. We took the train back to our vehicle and gone for a refreshing lunch in the Hortobágy Inn.



*Male Bearded Reedling (Dániel Balla)*

In the afternoon we found a huge flock of Greater White-fronts on a grazed grassland edged with a wetland and started scanning them. We found several smaller parties of Red-breasted Geese and a single Taiga Bean Goose while Spotted Redshanks and Grey Plovers were present on the wetland side. While enjoying the birds and the sunshine a flock of 26 Red-breasted Goose just arrived from nowhere and landed in the middle of the White-fronts but easily followed by telescopes. To continue the afternoon we went back to scan the flock of geese in front of the lodge. We found two Red-breasts in a few minutes but the geese were walking away so we moved as well. We drove to check the local roost of Long-eared Owls where we counted at least 25

individuals on two trees. To finish the day we drove to a nice and quite area with open grassland and small woodland with scrubby edges where we found Long-tailed Tits, Goldcrest and a nice Black Woodpecker.



*Penduline Tit (Dániel Balla)*

### **6th November (Wednesday)**

The morning started with the usual check on the geese flock roosting in front of our lodge. This morning we found a flock of 12 Red-breasted Goose from the terrace to have nice memories of this place. After breakfast we packed the luggage to our vehicle and started our journey back to Budapest. We stopped at a drained fishpond for the last time in the Hortobágy where we found a late Little Gull, a huge flock of Dunlins, several Eurasian Curlews, Spotted Redshanks, Grey Plovers and two Common Ringed Plovers. We didn't spend too much time here to reach our morning target site in time. Our plan was to see the wintering Wallcreeper in the southern Bükk Hills. We had a short walk up to an abandoned quarry while we saw some common songbirds like Mars Tits. Up at the quarry we were searching for about an hour but we missed our target, however we found Alpine Accentors on the rocks which were at least good. We went back down and had a rapid lunch so we had enough time to visit a last site close. In a nice beech forest with pine patches we found Mistle Thrushes, Fieldfares, Long-tailed Tits, Goldcrest and surprisingly both Eurasian and Short-toed Treecreepers at the same spot. Back to the parking spot we saw a Green Woodpecker and a European Robin as the last birds of this memorable short tour.



# 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	<b>Red-breasted Goose</b>	<i>Branta ruficollis</i>	91
2	<b>Greylag Goose</b>	<i>Anser anser</i>	C
3	<b>Taiga Bean Goose</b>	<i>Anser fabalis</i>	1
4	<b>Tundra Bean Goose</b>	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>	1
5	<b>Greater White-fronted Goose</b>	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	C
6	<b>Lesser White-fronted Goose</b>	<i>Anser erythropus</i>	10
7	<b>Mute Swan</b>	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	C
8	<b>Common Shelduck</b>	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	C
9	<b>Northern Shoveler</b>	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	C
10	<b>Gadwall</b>	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	C
11	<b>Eurasian Wigeon</b>	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	C
12	<b>Mallard</b>	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	C
13	<b>Northern Pintail</b>	<i>Anas acuta</i>	C
14	<b>Eurasian Teal</b>	<i>Anas crecca</i>	C
15	<b>Common Pochard</b>	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	C
16	<b>Tufted Duck</b>	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	C
17	<b>Greater Scaup</b>	<i>Aythya marila</i>	1
18	<b>Common Goldeneye</b>	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	C
19	<b>Common Pheasant</b>	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	C
20	<b>Red-throated Loon</b>	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	5
21	<b>Black-throated Loon</b>	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	9
22	<b>Yellow-billed Loon</b>	<i>Gavia adamsii</i>	1
23	<b>Little Grebe</b>	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	2
24	<b>Great Crested Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	C
25	<b>Horned Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	1
26	<b>Black-necked Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	3
27	<b>Eurasian Spoonbill</b>	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	1
28	<b>Eurasian Bittern</b>	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	1
29	<b>Grey Heron</b>	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	C
30	<b>Great Egret</b>	<i>Ardea alba</i>	C
31	<b>Pygmy Cormorant</b>	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>	C
32	<b>Great Cormorant</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	C
33	<b>Eastern Imperial Eagle</b>	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	3
34	<b>Eurasian Sparrowhawk</b>	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	5
35	<b>Northern Goshawk</b>	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	1
36	<b>Western Marsh Harrier</b>	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	C
37	<b>Hen Harrier</b>	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	C
38	<b>White-tailed Eagle</b>	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	C
39	<b>Rough-legged Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	1
40	<b>Long-legged Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	2
41	<b>Common Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	C
42	<b>Great Bustard</b>	<i>Otis tarda</i>	52
43	<b>Water Rail</b>	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	1

44	<b>Common Moorhen</b>	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	LO
45	<b>Eurasian Coot</b>	<i>Fulica atra</i>	C
46	<b>Common Crane</b>	<i>Grus grus</i>	C
47	<b>Pied Avocet</b>	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	5
48	<b>Northern Lapwing</b>	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	C
49	<b>European Golden Plover</b>	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	2 times
50	<b>Grey Plover</b>	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	2 times
51	<b>Eurasian Dotterel</b>	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>	40
52	<b>Common Ringed Plover</b>	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	2
53	<b>Eurasian Curlew</b>	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	C
54	<b>Dunlin</b>	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	C
55	<b>Common Snipe</b>	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	2
56	<b>Spotted Redshank</b>	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	C
57	<b>Black-headed Gull</b>	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	C
58	<b>Little Gull</b>	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	1
59	<b>Mew Gull</b>	<i>Larus canus</i>	2
60	<b>Caspian Gull</b>	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	C
61	<b>Yellow-legged Gull</b>	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	5
62	<b>Feral Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba livia f. domestica</i>	C
63	<b>Common Wood Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	2
64	<b>Eurasian Collared Dove</b>	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	C
65	<b>Western Barn Owl</b>	<i>Tyto alba</i>	2
66	<b>Little Owl</b>	<i>Athene noctua</i>	1
67	<b>Short-eared Owl</b>	<i>Asio falmmeus</i>	1
68	<b>Long-eared Owl</b>	<i>Asio otus</i>	26
69	<b>Common Kingfisher</b>	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	4
70	<b>Syrian Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	1
71	<b>Great Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	C
72	<b>Black Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	2
73	<b>European Green Woodpecker</b>	<i>Picus viridis</i>	3
74	<b>Common Kestrel</b>	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	C
75	<b>Saker Falcon</b>	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	1
76	<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1
77	<b>Great Grey Shrike</b>	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	8
78	<b>Eurasian Jay</b>	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	C
79	<b>Eurasian Magpie</b>	<i>Pica pica</i>	C
80	<b>Western Jackdaw</b>	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	C
81	<b>Rook</b>	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	C
82	<b>Hooded Crow</b>	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	C
83	<b>Northern Raven</b>	<i>Corvus corax</i>	5
84	<b>Marsh Tit</b>	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	3
85	<b>Eurasian Blue Tit</b>	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	C
86	<b>Great Tit</b>	<i>Parus major</i>	C
87	<b>Eurasian Penduline Tit</b>	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	1
88	<b>Bearded Reedling</b>	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	6
89	<b>Eurasian Skylark</b>	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	1 flock
90	<b>Crested Lark</b>	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	H
91	<b>Long-tailed Tit</b>	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	C
92	<b>Goldcrest</b>	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	C
93	<b>Eurasian Wren</b>	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	3



94	<b>Eurasian Nuthatch</b>	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	3
95	<b>Eurasian Treecreeper</b>	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	3
96	<b>Short-toed Treecreeper</b>	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	2
97	<b>Common Starling</b>	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	C
98	<b>Common Blackbird</b>	<i>Turdus merula</i>	C
99	<b>Fieldfare</b>	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	C
100	<b>Song Thrush</b>	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	H
101	<b>Mistle Thrush</b>	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	8
102	<b>European Robin</b>	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1
103	<b>House Sparrow</b>	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	C
104	<b>Eurasian Tree Sparrow</b>	<i>Passer montanus</i>	C
105	<b>Alpine Accentor</b>	<i>Prunella collaris</i>	4
106	<b>Dunnock</b>	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	H
107	<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	C
108	<b>Water Pipit</b>	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	C
109	<b>Common Chaffinch</b>	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	C
110	<b>Brambling</b>	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	2
111	<b>Hawfinch</b>	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	3
112	<b>Eurasian Bullfinch</b>	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	1
113	<b>European Greenfinch</b>	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	8
114	<b>Common Linnet</b>	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	8
115	<b>European Goldfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	C
116	<b>Eurasian Siskin</b>	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	H
117	<b>Corn Bunting</b>	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	9
118	<b>Yellowhammer</b>	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	2
119	<b>Common Reed Bunting</b>	<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	<b>European Roe Deer</b>	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	C
2	<b>Mouflon</b>	<i>Ovis orientalis</i>	1
3	<b>European (Brown) Hare</b>	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	C



*Flock of Greater White-fronted Geese on grassland (Attila Szilágyi)*



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