



SAKERTOURS



*Red-breasted Goose in the Hortobágy (József Kecskés)*

## RED-BREASTED GOOSE SPECIAL TOUR with **SAKERTOURS** 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2021

**Leader: József Kecskés**

Red-breasted Goose is, no doubt one of the most beautiful waterfowl around the world. Observing well this globally threatened species could be a tough job in most of Europe. Eastern Europe has their main wintering sites however, hunting makes all the geese shy, larger flocks are always nervous about people around them in the area. Fortunately, the Hortobágy National Park provides safe grounds for all waterfowl, thus providing good opportunities to observe them, sometimes from a close distance in the tranquil steppe.

Our short tour aims to observe the goose-wonder of the Hortobágy and find the globally threatened Red-breasted Goose and Lesser White-fronted Goose amongst the tens of thousands Greater White-fronted Goose in the area. During this year's tour we successfully tracked down all our target geese species and managed to observe 63 Red-breasted Goose and 6 Lesser White-fronted Goose. However, species wise it is not the richest period of the year, other specialties of the area like Pygmy Cormorant, Saker Falcon, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle, Great Bustard, Syrian Woodpecker and some always good to see species like Merlin, Bearded Reedling, Middle Spotted Woodpecker etc. were also added to our list totalling a 113 bird species recorded in 4 days birdwatching.

## 9<sup>th</sup> November (Saturday)

After meeting each other at Budapest Liszt Ferenc Airport we started driving down to the Hortobágy. Roughly halfway we stopped to start our birdwatching tour at the Lake Tisza which is a reservoir created with damming the River Tisza and could be a paradise for birds in the best times of the year. Knowing the best spots in the area we choose to check the bays with deeper water for waterfowl. On the water we saw countless Mute Swans, several Pygmy Cormorants and more than a thousand Mallards making the base for the composition of birds. We checked the area from several points to maximize our success in finding the best species. It was nice to spot two Black-throated Divers and a Common Scoter which are scarce visitors of the country. A single Smew and about 60 Common Goldeneyes were observed and two Black-necked Grebes and 28 Little Grebes were also added to our list here. Between the points the vegetation around the lake provided some nice views of Great Grey Shrike several woodpecker observations including some of Black Woodpecker and Green Woodpecker. Flocks of Siskins and some nice Bullfinches were a clear sign of movements from the north. In the late afternoon we arrived in dark to our accommodation, the Bíbic Nature Lodge in the Hortobágy.



*Long-eared Owl in roost by tour participant Rob Tizzard*

## 10<sup>th</sup> November (Sunday)

The morning started with a thick fog so we decided to start birdwatching in the nearby park to give some time for the weather to improve. During an easy walk in the centre of the town we saw a Syrian Woodpecker and two Great Spotted Woodpeckers. On evergreen trees we observed a few Coal Tits and a Goldcrest, then we moved to a special spot to check the local roost of Long-eared Owls. We counted a fantastic 57 roosting individuals.

As the weather was improving, we left town and went to the western fishpond systems of the Hortobágy. In the dense reedbeds we managed to see Bearded Reedlings and two Penduline Tits and three Pygmy Cormorants were also observed. As the fog was still down, we drove to the River Tisza to do some birding in the forests on the bank and nicely added a Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Nuthatch and Common Treecreeper to our list before we left to another fishpond system where we expected for geese to come inside to drink in the middle of the day. On the way to our next site, we stopped for a roadside Rough-legged Buzzard and another good



raptor spot produced 6 Eastern Imperial Eagles and 5 White-tailed Eagles. Arriving to the fishponds we finally heard the loud sound of thousands of wild geese. It didn't take us too long to find a nice set of Red-breasted Goose amongst them. Checking the mass of several thousand Greater White-fronted Goose ended up with a total 20 Red-breasted Goose and we were lucky to spot two Lesser White-fronted Goose as well. What a spot and start for geese! We estimated the number of Goose to be more than 15 000 in the lake we were looking at. Additionally, we also saw Northern Lapwings, Dunlins, Eurasian Curlews etc. just to mention a few other species around. Time was running with the geese and we only had enough for one more site as days are getting short this time of the year. We drove to a wetland close to our Lodge where a few hundred Greater White-fronts were grazing. In minutes we found two juvenile Red-breasted Goose in between the closer groups of the flock which we enjoyed until almost the last rays of light.



*Juvenile Red-breasted Goose in perfect light taken by tour participant Rob Tizzard*

## **11<sup>th</sup> November (Monday)**

The morning was foggy again making us going to Debrecen for some forest birding. We sat into a hide where we could enjoy very close views of common songbirds like Great Tit, Marsh Tit or Blue Tit from behind a special glass while Great Spotted Woodpecker, Chaffinch and a Eurasian Jay was also coming to drink in front of us. After the hide session we took a walk in the old oak forest. A roosting Tawny Owl was welcoming us in a broken, dry branch of a huge tree just after a few meters we started birding. Later we managed to see 4 different Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, several Short-toed Treecreepers, Mistle Thrush, Hawfinches and a nice male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. We again were hoping that the sun will help and dry up the fog out in the steppe, so we drove south to the northern edge of the Bihar Plains where a nice wetland was waiting us to explore it. When arriving smaller and bigger flocks of White-fronted Goose were coming continuously onto the water to refresh themselves in the middle of the day. We did a great job and found a single Barnacle Goose in the mass, while picking out two Tundra Bean Goose was a magic, however after spotted we could enjoy nice views from them, one could never believe how hard is to find them between the Greater White-fronts. Of course, our primary goal here was also to find some of our main targets, the threatened Lesser White-fronted and Red-breasted Goose. We were lucky and found 28 beautiful Red-breasted Goose in total and 4 Lesser White-fronted Goose

making this area to the magical ones of our tour. Besides geese we saw 4 Eastern Imperial Eagles, 3 White-tailed Eagles, a Peregrine Falcon and a few Hen Harriers too. On the way back to the Hortobágy we stopped to check an electric pylon if the local Saker Falcon pair is already there preparing for their roost – again we were lucky and we were treating ourselves with the setting sun and these magnificent raptors in our scopes.



*Rough-legged Buzzard (Rob Tizzard)*



*Great Bustards in flight (Rob Tizzard)*



## 12<sup>th</sup> November (Tuesday)

Finally, we had sunshine in the morning which later was lasting the whole day. After breakfast we drove to a wet meadow close-by where we saw 3 Jack Snipes and 12 Common Snipes to start the day with. We drove to the southern Hortobágy where we had chance to spot the emblematic Great Bustards, the heaviest flying birds of the world. We were lucky and spotted 4 males flying and landing in front of us. From this spot we drove into the middle of the pristine puszta to explore the vast grassland. We saw several Hen Harriers hunting around, White-tailed Eagles crossing the sky and a Merlin, which feels home in the treeless habitats around. After a few kilometers driving around we found a flock of 156 European Golden Plovers before leaving this site. Early afternoon we drove to a fishpond system we hadn't check before and saw several Great Crested Grebes and Pygmy Cormorants, however the true highlight was long scope views of an adult Greater Spotted Eagle nicely perched in the trees around one of the ponds. After leaving we checked again the Saker pair and also saw an Eastern Imperial Eagle on the top of a pylon.



*Saker Falcon pair (Rob Tizzard)*

Our final birding spot was the wetland close to the lodge, this time giving fantastic views of 13 Red-breasted Goose. A proper finish for our tour on our last full day. *Little Gulls were common in the Dobrudja (Dániel Balla)*

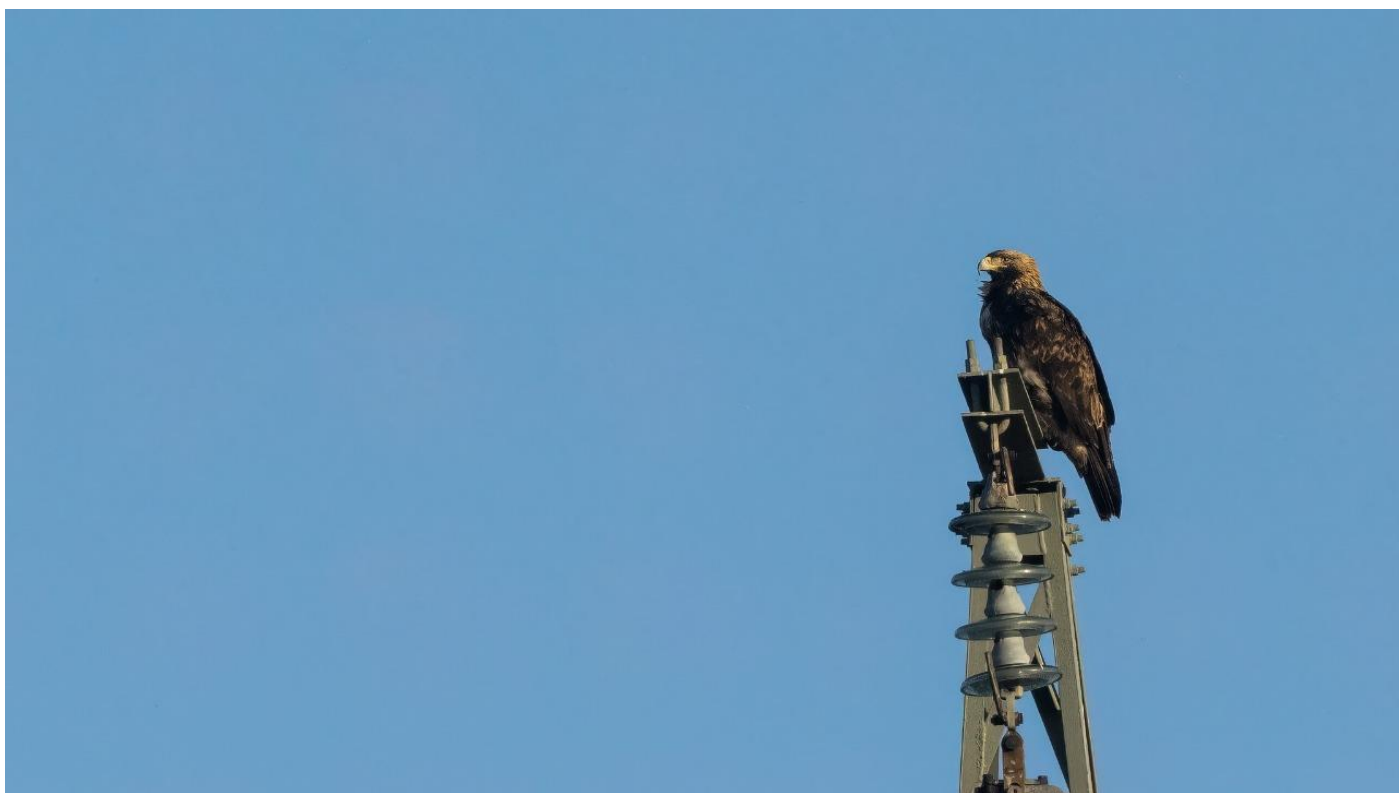
## 13<sup>th</sup> November (Wednesday)

Unfortunately, the day started with the worst fog of the tour, which made us skipping the visit of the hills to try the Wallcreeper and we straight and slowly drove to the airport after having a nice breakfast in the Lodge.

Even with the unfortunate weather on the last day we had a fantastic and successful tour giving memorable sightings of all the target species we came for.



*Mass of Geese from our watchpoint (Rob Tizzard)*



*Eastern Imperial Eagle (Rob Tizzard)*

# 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>
2	<b>Barnacle Goose</b>	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>
3	<b>Greylag Goose</b>	<i>Anser anser</i>
4	<b>Tundra Bean Goose</b>	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>
5	<b>Greater White-fronted Goose</b>	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
6	<b>Lesser White-fronted Goose</b>	<i>Anser erythropus</i>
7	<b>Mute Swan</b>	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
8	<b>Common Shelduck</b>	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
9	<b>Northern Shoveler</b>	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>
10	<b>Gadwall</b>	<i>Mareca strepera</i>
11	<b>Eurasian Wigeon</b>	<i>Mareca penelope</i>
12	<b>Mallard</b>	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
13	<b>Northern Pintail</b>	<i>Anas acuta</i>
14	<b>Eurasian Teal</b>	<i>Anas crecca</i>
15	<b>Common Pochard</b>	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
16	<b>Tufted Duck</b>	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
17	<b>Common Goldeneye</b>	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
18	<b>Common Pheasant</b>	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
19	<b>Black-throated Loon</b>	<i>Gavia arctica</i>
20	<b>Little Grebe</b>	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
21	<b>Great Crested Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
22	<b>Black-necked Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
23	<b>Grey Heron</b>	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
24	<b>Great Egret</b>	<i>Ardea alba</i>
25	<b>Pygmy Cormorant</b>	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>
26	<b>Great Cormorant</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
27	<b>Greater Spotted Eagle</b>	<i>Clanga clanga</i>
28	<b>Eastern Imperial Eagle</b>	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>
29	<b>Eurasian Sparrowhawk</b>	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
30	<b>Western Marsh Harrier</b>	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
31	<b>Hen Harrier</b>	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
32	<b>White-tailed Eagle</b>	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
33	<b>Rough-legged Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>
34	<b>Common Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
35	<b>Great Bustard</b>	<i>Otis tarda</i>
36	<b>Water Rail</b>	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>
37	<b>Common Moorhen</b>	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
38	<b>Eurasian Coot</b>	<i>Fulica atra</i>
39	<b>Common Crane</b>	<i>Grus grus</i>
40	<b>Pied Avocet</b>	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
41	<b>Northern Lapwing</b>	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>





*Middle Spotted Woodpecker (Rob Tizzard)*

42	<b>European Golden Plover</b>	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>
43	<b>Eurasian Curlew</b>	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
44	<b>Ruff*</b>	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>
45	<b>Dunlin</b>	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
46	<b>Jack Snipe</b>	<i>Lymnocyrtus minimus</i>
47	<b>Common Snipe</b>	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
48	<b>Black-headed Gull</b>	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
49	<b>Mew Gull</b>	<i>Larus canus</i>
50	<b>Caspian Gull</b>	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
51	<b>Yellow-legged Gull</b>	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
52	<b>Feral Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba livia f. domestica</i>
53	<b>Stock Dove</b>	<i>Columba oenas</i>
54	<b>Common Wood Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
55	<b>Eurasian Collared Dove</b>	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
56	<b>Tawny Owl</b>	<i>Strix aluco</i>
57	<b>Little Owl</b>	<i>Athene noctua</i>
58	<b>Long-eared Owl</b>	<i>Asio otus</i>
59	<b>Common Kingfisher</b>	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
60	<b>Middle Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>
61	<b>Lesser Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dryobates minor</i>
62	<b>Syrian Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>
63	<b>Great Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
64	<b>Black Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
65	<b>European Green Woodpecker</b>	<i>Picus viridis</i>
66	<b>Common Kestrel</b>	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
67	<b>Merlin</b>	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
68	<b>Saker Falcon</b>	<i>Falco cherrug</i>
69	<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>





*Jack Snipe (Rob Tizzard)*

70	<b>Great Grey Shrike</b>	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
71	<b>Eurasian Jay</b>	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
72	<b>Eurasian Magpie</b>	<i>Pica pica</i>
73	<b>Western Jackdaw</b>	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
74	<b>Rook</b>	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
75	<b>Hooded Crow</b>	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
76	<b>Northern Raven</b>	<i>Corvus corax</i>
77	<b>Coal Tit</b>	<i>Pariparus ater</i>
78	<b>Marsh Tit</b>	<i>Poecile palustris</i>
79	<b>Eurasian Blue Tit</b>	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
80	<b>Great Tit</b>	<i>Parus major</i>
81	<b>Eurasian Penduline Tit</b>	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>
82	<b>Bearded Reedling</b>	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>
83	<b>Eurasian Skylark</b>	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
84	<b>Crested Lark</b>	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
85	<b>Long-tailed Tit</b>	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
86	<b>Common Chiffchaff*</b>	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
87	<b>Goldcrest</b>	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
88	<b>Eurasian Wren</b>	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
89	<b>Eurasian Nuthatch</b>	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
90	<b>Eurasian Treecreeper</b>	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
91	<b>Short-toed Treecreeper</b>	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
92	<b>Common Starling</b>	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
93	<b>Common Blackbird</b>	<i>Turdus merula</i>
94	<b>Mistle Thrush</b>	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
95	<b>European Robin</b>	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
96	<b>Black Redstart</b>	<i>Phoenicurus ochrurus</i>
97	<b>European Stonechat*</b>	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>

98	<b>House Sparrow</b>	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
99	<b>Eurasian Tree Sparrow</b>	<i>Passer montanus</i>
100	<b>Dunnock</b>	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
101	<b>White Wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
102	<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
103	<b>Common Chaffinch</b>	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
104	<b>Brambling</b>	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
105	<b>Hawfinch</b>	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
106	<b>Eurasian Bullfinch</b>	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
107	<b>European Greenfinch</b>	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
108	<b>Common Linnet</b>	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
109	<b>European Goldfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
110	<b>Eurasian Siskin</b>	<i>Spinus spinus</i>
111	<b>Corn Bunting</b>	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
112	<b>Yellowhammer</b>	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
113	<b>Common Reed Bunting</b>	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>



*Adult Lesser White-fronted Goose by tour participant Rob Tizzard*



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