

Hungary

Carnival of Cranes

Sat 23rd – Sat 30th September 2017



Tour pictures (clockwise from top left): Arctic Skua, White-tailed Eagle, White-backed Woodpecker, Great Bustards, Bearded Reedling, European Penduline Tit © Stephen Daly/Limosa Holidays

Report compiled by tour leader:
Stephen Daly

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Leaders: Zoltán Ecsedi (Zoli) and Stephen Daly

Highlights

With good, warm weather all week, this autumn's tour to Hungary's Hortobágy and Zemplén Hills was filled with all the special bird sightings one could hope for! I hadn't worked together with Zoli our local guide since 2008 when I first came to find Aquatic Warblers. It was a real pleasure to see him once again and a delight to work with. From day one until the last day of the tour we enjoyed ourselves immensely and I think we were all unanimous about the quality, space and comfort at the Bíbic Nature Lodge, lovely buildings that fit in well to the Hortobágy surroundings (The Hortobágy was Hungary's first National Park, established back in 1973.) The homemade meals created by Orsi and helped by her husband Tibor, were delicious and they both made us feel very much at home. Great hosts and lovely people.

- Over 80 Great Bustards seen closely, feeding happily on the open fields.
- Walking across the Puszta to find a flock of over 160 Dotterel.
- The sight and sounds of thousands of Common Cranes flying overhead at dusk.
- Impressive raptor list, with Eastern Imperial Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Saker Falcon, Red-footed Falcon, Hobby and Marsh Harrier.
- Watching a pair of confiding Ural Owls, one of which stayed close to us for some considerable time.
- Super views of White-backed, Middle Spotted, Great Spotted, Syrian, Lesser Spotted, Grey-headed, Green and Black Woodpeckers.
- As well as a few vagrant birds such as Arctic Skua and a Slender-billed Gull.
Not forgetting our final evening, a delicious dinner and wine tasting at a local Tokaj wine cellar.

Saturday 23rd September

London-Budapest - Apaj area - Kiskunság - Balamzújváros

Sunny on arrival at Budapest turning cooler with cloudy skies then light rain. Temp max 18C

Stephen and Zoli met the group at Budapest Airport and introduced everyone to Zoltan our driver and we were quickly on our way south towards the Apaj area, to look for Great Bustards and other birds. In the town of Bugyi we were held up briefly by a traditional Hungarian singing and dancing group in the middle of the town, where the townsfolk were having a harvest festival. There were lots of horses and locals dressed in their colourful national costumes. Soon we were on our way again and it wasn't long before we found a group of around 18 Great Bustards feeding in some stubble fields. After admiring these large, rare birds we came across a few juvenile Marsh Harriers, Common Buzzards, Common Pheasant, Stock Doves, Wood Pigeon and Common Kestrels. We drove on a bit further and came to the main group of bustards and managed to get quite close to them. These are shy birds, so we took our time walking slowly concealing ourselves behind some rolled straw bales that ran parallel to the field track, until finally we could see the full beauty of their plumage and the size of these lovely birds. The total number of birds at this second site was between 60 and 65! An amazing sight and a wonderfully satisfying experience to see this protected species doing so well in Hungary.

Getting back to the minibus we drove a short distance to a gravel pit where we found Great Egrets and a few Grey Herons and, to our delight, a Stone-curlew. Some Brown Hares fed in the fields and a few butterflies were seen that included Knapweed Fritillary, Green-veined White, Red Admiral, Painted Lady and Eastern Clouded Yellow. Dragonflies around the gravel pit included Southern Hawker, White-tailed Skimmer and Common Darter. After eating our picnic lunches we took the motorway most of the way towards Debrecen and the National Park of the Hortobagy, arriving at our lodge on the edge of the park in time for a delicious dinner.

Sunday 24th September

Hortobagy Fish Ponds - Kondas & Ohat area - Tisza River - Cserepes-puszta (Hortobágy National Park)

A misty start cleared away to sun and clouds for most of the day with scattered showers. Temp max of 22C

Most of us managed to see quite a few waders and geese out on the park from our bedroom windows or terraces as the sun came up. There was also a party of five Common Cranes in with the Greylags and they took off from their roost to head for the cut maize fields to feed. Some Yellow-legged Gulls were seen and our first sightings of adult and juvenile Caspian Gull, which had also spent the night close to the geese and a few Black-headed Gulls were also seen. Eurasian Curlew, some Common Snipe, Common Greenshank and Spotted Redshank were also seen before breakfast, and lots of Chiffchaffs and one female Blackcap were looking for insects along the dogwood hedges that lead to the lodge restaurant. Collard Doves, Tree Sparrows and a few

Goldfinches and Common Linnets were also around. A Syrian Woodpecker called from a nearby willow tree and Black Restarts were seen on the lodge buildings.

After breakfast we set up our telescopes outside the restaurant and scanned this rich corner of the National Park. There were a few Teal around with Mallard and a few Shoveler. More geese had arrived and we found the first arrivals of White-fronted Geese in amongst the Greylags. After breakfast we drove through the countryside, stopping a few times to check certain sites for Saker Falcon. We would be doing this quite a few times in and around the Hortobagy area, looking at potential roosts and also checking out distant falcons in the air. Many Common Kestrels were seen as well as European Starlings, Jackdaws, Hooded Crows and Rooks. Driving on to the Hortobagy fishponds we walked around and found a juvenile Slender-billed Gull in amongst a Black-headed Gull flock. New waders along the muddy edges and short grassy sides to some flooded fields included a Temminck's Stint, Little-Ringed Plover, Dunlin and Ruff. In the reed-lined banks of the fishponds we saw and heard Great Reed, European Reed, Moustached and Sedge Warblers. Out on some open water we found Pigmy and Great Cormorants and a good number of Ferruginous Duck, two Garganey, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Gadwall, Pintail and Common Pochard. A Great Grey Shrike and a juvenile Purple Heron were also seen. Black-crowned Night Herons were in the area, as were Grey Herons, Great Egrets, a pair of Little Egrets, Eurasian Spoonbills and good numbers of Mute Swans. We continued down to the larger lakes at the end of the fishponds, taking the train on the narrow-gauge railway. At the little stationhouse we ate our picnic lunch then walked towards the boardwalks and hides where at the first hide we saw more Ferruginous Ducks in flight as well as a Whiskered Tern and we quietly watched Avocets, Spotted Redshanks, Curlew Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and a few Common Snipe feeding. Walking back down the side of the railway track, we climbed the high observation tower and scanned the vast open water on both sides of the track. Moorhens and a good number of Eurasian Coots were feeding and many of the earlier duck species were also well distributed. Our attention was drawn across the water and vegetation by a large dark bird pursuing a Black-headed Gull. To our delight, but not to the gull's, it was an Arctic Skua. This was a pretty rare find in central Europe, although they do move quite far south during the cooler months.

After our exciting find we took the train back to the start of the fishponds and saw a dashing Eurasian Sparrowhawk. We then drove to the edge of the slow-flowing River Tisza where we walked through and explored woodlands near Tiszacsege. Within a short time we heard Green Woodpecker and Black Woodpecker calling. Great Spotted Woodpecker was also calling and one male came in briefly to have a look at us then departed. A pair of Middle-spotted Woodpeckers flew around the canopy area and we managed good views. Long-tailed Tits were calling and a 'troop' came in but didn't stay long and then the Green Woodpecker came in and landed lower down, followed by a second bird. Meanwhile a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker also came in and started to climb, feeding as it went. Nuthatches, one Tree Pipit, several Short-toed Treecreepers and some Grey Wagtails were also seen and then the largest of the woodpeckers - a Black Woodpecker - flew in, calling noisily. So many woodpeckers in such a short time - it was hard to know where to look first! Happily the birds stayed for some time and with patience and lots of directions as to where the birds were, we managed to get good views of most up in the trees. We rested our necks in the minibus after our 'woodpecker fest', then drove out to the Cserepes-puszta area to enjoy the spectacular sight of Common Cranes coming in to roost. As a bonus we spotted a small party of Lesser White-fronted Geese that were feeding there, too and another Sparrowhawk came past as we watched a distant Great Grey Shrike. We later drove back to the lodge for a well-earned dinner.

Monday 25th September

Angyalháza area – Szabolcs-puszta - Balmazújváros - Magdolna - puszta

Some light clouds, blue skies lots of sun, warm with max temp of 24C

We watched Syrian Woodpecker calling and feeding at the front of the lodge before breakfast and saw Chiffchaffs, Common Blackbirds, Eurasian Magpies and Starlings in the gardens. Jackdaws, Rooks and more Starlings searched for food in amongst the two large Mangalica pigs feeding in the mud close to the National Park in front of the lodge. Along the little copse beside the accommodation at the lodge were some Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps feeding and one lovely male Black Redstart was seen. The view from the lodge restaurant terrace is perfect for scanning this part of the park and Tibor (Tibi as he's known) always had his scope on something interesting when we came for breakfast.

We set off after breakfast into the countryside around the Angyalháza area, searching for Saker Falcon, where we had brief views of one bird following a large flock of very nervous, speeding Starlings! Unfortunately the flock and the Saker were going away from us all the time so we didn't see the final outcome. Continuing on we found Red-backed Shrike along the hedgerows with a few migrating Whinchats and some local Stonechats along the roadside verges. We drove towards the open steppe of the national park, finding lots of Common Kestrels, Common Buzzards and an immature Eastern Imperial Eagle. A little further on we saw four European Rollers on electricity wires and after watching them for a while we then parked up. From here we took a long walk out along the flat rolling landscape, passing a few isolated farms and outbuildings and the occasional traditional Austro-

Hungarian draw-wells. It's amazing to think that the Great Hungarian Plain includes approximately 56% of Hungary's land area (around 52,000km²). As we walked through the terrain we saw a Hobby come in close and watched as it caught a large dragonfly, shelling it and eating the body. Lots of Barn Swallows and some Sand Martins were seen heading south and a few Red-throated Pipits were put up as we walked onwards, as were lots of Skylarks, some White Wagtails and a female Northern Wheatear.

As we passed by one of the abandoned farm buildings, a Little Owl flew out. We walked on and Zoli found a Fire-bellied Toad, which we photographed before releasing. There were a few butterflies around as the morning heated up and these included Grizzled Skipper, Pale Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady and three different types of Blues: Common, Silver studded and Chapman's. A distant pair of White-tailed Eagle was seen a little further on, as were two Marsh Harriers. Finally we met up with some waders and, to our delight, they were mostly Eurasian Dotterels. Several tight flocks were seen and most landed together to feed in an area where cattle had been grazing. At this point we stopped and scoped the birds from a distance. They seemed quite nervous and one group of about 60 birds took flight (including one Dunlin!) and put on an amazing show, wheeling high into the air and circling a few times before settling in with other Dotterel who didn't seem at all bothered by our presence. Taking our time we managed to get fairly close to one group and stayed for a while to enjoy this amazing spectacle of over 160 Dotterel feeding together. It really was a very special moment. On our walk back to the minibus, we had another Hobby fly past and saw more Skylarks and a few Red-throated Pipits.

We drove back to the hotel, where a hot lunch was prepared for us and, in the afternoon, we took the back road to the old clay pits. From this spot we could look back across the park and saw many Greylag Geese coming in to land close to the lodge. Our second sighting of White-tailed Eagles came with two birds seen flying over the distant forest. There were lots of Black-headed Gulls feeding on flying insects and feeding on the ground with one juvenile Mediterranean Gull identified in amongst the flock. The flocks of Starlings were wheeling around the old clay pits road and across to the National Park where a female Sparrowhawk was attempting to take one. Our last birding spot was in the village of Balmazújváros where we visited a roost of around twenty Long-eared Owls that were perched quietly in some large walnut trees. We had wonderful views of these lovely creatures of the night that seem to gather close to human habitation out of their breeding season, in an effort to keep away from predating Goshawks of the forest. Back at the lodge, another lovely dinner was being prepared! I think we all slept well after our long walk to the Dotterel site and back.

Tuesday 26th September

Balmazújváros - Tisza Lake - Poroszlò – Cserepes-puszta

Overcast early but clearing to sun and clouds later with light to strong winds. Max temp. 21C

During the night, more migrants had arrived around the lodge with many more Blue Tits, Great Tits, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and a Willow Warbler out feeding around the woodland and bush-lined paths. Black Redstarts that had roosted overnight at the accommodation block were also around, on top of the roofs, then dropping down to the ground to feed. After breakfast we drove back to the clay pits road and we found a juvenile Red-footed Falcon, a Honey Buzzard and an adult male Pallid Harrier. Another Red-footed Falcon was spotted on the ground, this time a lovely adult male watching us for a while before taking to the air. From the clay pits, we drove further through the Hortobágy, followed the Tisza River for a bit then stopped at the reservoir where we took a short boat trip to the eastern reedbeds, which has a good layout of boardwalks and hides. A Marsh Harrier was quickly spotted quartering back and forth over the reeds. A Sparrowhawk and a Common Kingfisher were seen in flight as Common Moorhens and Eurasian Coots, Mallard, Shoveler, Pintail, Teal and Common Pochard fed on the water or along the edges of the vegetation. A Water Rail called and a juvenile Little Crake came out of the reeds briefly before quickly going back out of sight. Some dragonflies were seen and we noted, Lesser Emperor, Broad-bodied Chaser, Four-spotted Chaser, Green-eyed Hawker, Migrant Hawker and Southern Hawker.

We walked along the boardwalks, spotting Penduline Tits and Reed Buntings. At a watchtower we climbed to the top platform and managed to get distant views of another Little Crake. Our lunch stop was at a local restaurant at Poroszlò where we had traditional, delicious, homemade fish soup and pancakes. Travelling towards Besenyőtelek we stopped to check out a Saker Falcon area and saw a juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle perched on top of a small tree some distance from the main road. A Saker Falcon was also seen on an electricity pylon resting inside an old nest box. The front of these boxes are open so we walked down the field to get a better view. The Saker eventually flew off and wheeled about the sky for a while before heading out of sight. As we walked back from the field we saw a few large mounds of earth with lots of holes and tunnels around the base, extending out into the fields. No animals were visible but Zoli pointed out that they were in fact lodges and burrows of European Hamsters (*Cricetus cricetus*), mainly nocturnal creatures which seem abundant in parts of Hungary but are in decline in many other European countries and require more measures to protect them from extinction in other areas. Later in the afternoon we drove back to Balmazújváros but before reaching the lodge we found a Lesser Whitethroat feeding on a rose bush on the clay pits road and a Little Owl on some straw bales at a nearby farm. With dinner taken, we retired happily for the night.

Wednesday 27th September**Transfer to Komlóska - Bükk National Park and the Zemplén Hills**

Mainly sunny all day with a light breeze. Max temp. 20C

Our pre-breakfast walk around the lodge produced the same list as previous mornings and as a bonus Tibi had found a Peregrine Falcon sitting out on the ground in the park and had it in his scope for us. Huge flocks of Common Starlings flew around the area and some Common Snipe and a few Dunlins flew off at speed. A few Common Cranes had been seen earlier at first light and there were a few more White Wagtails around than previous mornings. Greylag, White-fronted Geese and more flocks of Common Cranes were already on the move and their calls drifted towards us over the lodge. We finished breakfast, said our goodbyes and gave thanks to Tibi for our enjoyable stay, then took another quick look at the Long-eared Owls in the village before the drive across to the Zemplén Hills. Before reaching our second hotel we took a walk through the forest at Bükk National Park. This park is situated in Hungary's highest mountain range and is famous for its extensive woodlands, caves and animal life. Here we watched Spotted Flycatchers, European Robins, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers but our target bird, the White-backed Woodpecker, wasn't seen, although it did call in response to a gentle bit of playback from Zoli, it just wouldn't show itself and hid most of the time. Chaffinches and some Long-tailed Tits came past and a Eurasian Treecreeper was later heard as we took a picnic lunch in the woods. Chiffchaffs were feeding lower down on the edge of the forest and a Willow Warbler was also seen.

After our woodland walk we drove the short distance to our next hotel at Komlóska where we quickly checked in then took a walk through the village. The bird life had changed from that down on The Hortobágy and Eurasian Jays flew around in profusion. A couple of Ravens flew overhead as did Tree Sparrows, Coal Tit, Syrian Woodpeckers, Great Spotted Woodpeckers and some House Sparrows. Our last birding site was at an abandoned quarry above a steep-sided Tokaj vineyard. We climbed up the chalky path leading to the top of the quarry where more Ravens were seen and heard of course. A few Common Linnets were seen and it wasn't long before Zoli found a very well camouflaged Eagle Owl on the stone face of the old workings. The bird was partly obscured by small saplings that had taken root along the old cuttings where there were a few suitable ledges for such a large bird to safely roost during the day. We then slowly changed our viewing position to a little bit further up the slope and once we had the bird in our scope we could see the wonderful detail of this magnificent owl. We then left the site and made our way down to the valley where Zoltán our driver was waiting. Late afternoon back at the hotel we saw a few welcoming Black Redstarts on the village rooftops and could hear the baying call of Red Deer somewhere in the forests.

Thursday 28th September**Komlóska - Lebjúj - Bodrogkeresztúr - Tokaj Hill - Southern Zemplén area**

Cooler at first light warming up to a lovely warm day with clear skies. Very light breeze. Max temp. 19C

Some took an early morning walk and others did a bit of birding from their bedroom windows. Certainly the Jays, Great Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers, Common Blackbird, Song Thrush, Siskins and Serins, some in groups of six or so and larger flocks of 20 birds or more were seen. Black Redstarts and Tree Sparrows around the hotel were lovely to watch! A few had heard a Tawny Owl call during the early hours of the morning. After breakfast we left to explore the next valley from our hotel. We parked up and took a woodland track into a large clearing to see what bird species were visible. The early clouds were clearing and the weather was set to be another fine day. A flock of Hawfinches flew overhead as did some European Goldfinches. Two distant juvenile White-tailed Eagles were seen flying together over the next tree-lined ridge and we watched the youngsters tumble and dive at each other, playing happily until they went out of sight. Great Spotted and Grey-headed Woodpeckers called and it wasn't long before we saw our first Grey-headed. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was heard calling as was a Middle Spotted which flew in quite close and we managed to watch it climb and feed on an older bough. Black Woodpecker was heard calling from the wooded hillside below our vantage point and was seen briefly and a few European Green Woodpeckers finally made an appearance with two birds seen in flight.

Later that morning we went to another forest trail trying to find Ural Owl which proved unsuccessful. The sun was shining and we did see Spotted Flycatcher and a very bright male Grey Wagtail in the forest, not the usual habitat but it was feeding around some large puddles, which had attracted lots of flying insects. Later on we saw a migrating Common Redstart and our walk in the forest clearings had produced some damselflies, which included Common Bluetail, Variable Bluetail and Blue Featherleg. Afterwards, we drove to the top of Tokaj Hill then walked part of the way down. During the warmest part of the day there were a few butterflies around, mostly on the open sunny patches of the forest and along the open meadows and these included Peacock, Red Admiral, Brown Argus, Speckled Wood, Large Wall Brown, Woodland Ringlet, Pale Clouded Yellow and Silver-washed Fritillary. We stopped at another site on the way down the valley in open, rough pasture and small shrubs. Here we found Corn Buntings, Red-backed Shrikes, more Serins and Siskin flocks.

We took a delicious meal at a local restaurant and went to have another look for those elusive Ural Owls. The good thing about them is that they are active hunters during daylight as well as night. Winding our way up the

heavily forested hill we were all looking out of the minibus, intently trying to spot a large grey owl! Suddenly Matt shouted out that we'd just past one sitting in a tree. We drove past the site and slowly got out the vehicle, walking quietly back down the hill. The Ural Owl was of course watching us and decided to fly off through the trees, but it was quite far off and hidden by a lot of foliage. Zoli decided that a little bit of Ural Owl playback would perhaps entice the bird back, or at least bring it a little nearer. Happily it worked; the bird responded and flew in closer. We all stayed very quiet and as still as we could, with the owl changing its position, coming a little nearer to where we were grouped. Now everyone managed to get a good view and some managed a few photos of this very special owl. We made our way to the area around Lebuj where we found a White Stork on the outskirts of town. The bird was wearing a colour-coded ring, originating from the Coto Doñana in southern Spain. This female stork had wintered twice, presumably somewhere in Africa and this year it had returned to Europe, ended up in Hungary and mated with her new partner. After successfully rearing a brood of two chicks, the male seems to have gone south already and the good weather and abundance of food was keeping her in the area. This was the only white Stork we saw on the tour.

Friday 29th September

Komlóska - Fáslegelő - Sima - Aranyos Valley - Prügy

Some early morning light cloud, which cleared quickly to a bright, sunny day with light breezes. Max Temp. 22C
 One or two came out on the pre-breakfast walk though the village environs. We had another good look at the numerous Tree Sparrows and Coal Tits of which more seemed to be around the gardens. We looked too at the feeding Great Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers and watched many of the Jays flying back and forth. Within no time at all it was time for breakfast. Our first stop leaving the village was to Fáslegelő where we had another chance to watch Great Grey Shrike. The bird was moving about from bush to bush and always kept its distance but we did have the scopes on it for long enough to admire this handsome and declining species. At other sites there were some fly-by Hawfinches, Serins and Siskins and we saw Woodlark too. Watching and listening for woodpeckers brought us good views of Middle Spotted, Great Spotted, Green, Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers. More elusive were the Lesser Spotted and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers but eventually we managed to get all of them, thanks to Zoli's local knowledge and patience. There were a few butterflies around, mostly on the open sunny patches and these included Peacock, Red Admiral, Brown Argus, Speckled Wood, Large Wall Brown, Woodland Ringlet, Pale Clouded Yellow and Silver-washed Fritillary.

We stopped for our picnic lunch close to a Tawny owl nest box. It was well past the breeding season so we decided to see if we could see any sleeping bird inside. A Tawny Owl appeared and stood on the edge of the entrance hole and stared out at us. We kept still then after a few minutes walked quietly back to the road. The bird then eventually went back inside and settled back to sleep. Later on during the day, we travelled towards Prügy where we sighted an Eastern Imperial Eagle fairly high over the edge of the town. Heading in the direction of this huge raptor we caught up with it and watched it soar in the clear skies. The eagle had attracted a few Common Buzzards that were doing their best to make it change direction, but to no avail. The eagle continued on and we travelled a bit further as well. Some of the rough pasture had Skylarks, White Wagtails with Yellowhammers on the trees and some Stonechats around the field edges, sitting up taller, dried out stalks. We came back to the hotel a bit earlier as tonight we had an appointment for a Tokaj wine-tasting and traditional Hungarian dinner. We had a little tour of the cellars, then a tasting of 10 or so different white wines with our meal. We had seen two examples of the Mangalica Pigs at the Hortobágy lodge and now we could try the meat! Both wines and the pork were delicious! Needless to say we all slept well on our last night up at Komlóska.

Saturday 30th of September

Komlóska - Apaj and Bugyi areas - Budapest Airport

Cooler morning. Mixed sun and clouds warming in the afternoon. Max Temp. 22C

Giving the pre-breakfast walk a miss, we had a slow breakfast before collecting our bags and loading them into the minibus. We said our thanks and farewells and took the motorway back for some birding around Apaj county. We had quite a lot of time before the flight check-in at the airport so this area was the best logically for us. *En route*, Matt spotted an Eastern Imperial Eagle, two Hen Harriers another male Pallid Harrier was seen from the motorway. We had seen the Great Bustards here and it was great to find at least 40 birds feeding in rough set aside pasture fairly close to the road. Quite a few Common Buzzards, Common Kestrels and Marsh Harriers were around and some Stonechats, one Red-backed Shrike a few Red-throated Pipits, some Meadow Pipits, Tree Sparrows and lots of Skylarks were seen.

We took our picnic lunch at the Great Bustard area then drove to another field where there was a large herd of Water Buffalo in a protected area. Out in the distance we could see several large eagles, which turned out to be two Eastern Imperial Eagles and two White-tailed Eagles. It was quite warm and the thermals had built up across the dry flat landscape, giving the large eagles plenty of thermals to work with. To finish off, we had some European Stonechats, Whinchats and two Corn Buntings. After a short drive to Budapest airport, we said our farewells at the departure lounge and went our separate ways.

A big thanks to all who participated and helped spot some of the wonderful birds we saw during our week in Hungary. The weather was just great and your good company and enthusiasm was much appreciated and hopefully our paths will once again cross on another Limosa tour one day.

Annotated Bird Species list

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

The commonest goose seen on the Hortobágy.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Small groups were arriving from the north each day while at the Hortobágy.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*

Two birds arrived on the 24th at the Hortobágy. (First Northern arrivals)

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Common at ponds, lakes and some riversides.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Seen at the fishponds on the 24th.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

As above.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common and widespread.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Seen on four days at the Hortobágy.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Seen on two days.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Observed on three days.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Six birds seen on the Tisza Lake on the 26th.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Seen twice.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Good numbers seen on the 24th in flight and feeding at the Hortobágy.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Common on the Hortobágy agricultural plain.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Seen on two days at the Hortobágy fish ponds at Lake Tisza.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Seen on two days at the Hortobágy fishponds at Lake Tisza.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

One adult bird seen near Lebuj which had a colour ring from the Biological Station at the Coto Doñana, Huelva Province, Spain. The bird had wintered in Africa for two successive years then settled this year after migrating to Hungary where it had successfully reared two chicks.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

A few small groups (total 16 birds) were seen on the 24th at Hortobágy fishponds.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

One juvenile Bird seen at the fishponds, Hortobágy.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Fairly common, seen most days.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

One juvenile bird seen in the Hortobágy.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Fairly common in wetlands and through the Hortobágy.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

One seen at the fishponds, Hortobagy on the 24th. Scarce.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

Plentiful and an expanding species in central Europe. Seen at the fish ponds, Hortobagy on the 24th and at Lake Tisza on the 26th.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Common seen most days at appropriate habitats.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Single sighting only.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

Seen on five days of the tour.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Seen on three dates.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

One sighting at Zemplén.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Common on the Hortobágy.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Only two birds recorded.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

Two sightings, one on the Hrtobágy and the other en route to Budapest on the last day.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Huge eagles like this are a real joy to watch and we had luck with sightings on four days.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

A regular sighting on all days.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

Great views of eighty birds on day one and what better way to finish the tour by calling in again and finding forty on the last day.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Heard once at Hortobágy fishponds on the 24th.

Little Crake *Porzana parva*

Two birds seen at Tisza Lake.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

A single one at the Hortobágy Fishponds and a small numbers at the Hortobágy around Tisza lake.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

A few small groups observed in the wetlands.

Low sightings and numbers on the Hortobágy and Tisza.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Daily observations in the Hortobágy area, where small flocks and family groups

recorded during daytime. The roost we visited at Virágoskút.

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

One bird only, seen at Bugyi area on 23rd.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

About a dozen birds at Hortobágy fishponds.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Good numbers in the Hortobágy region.

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Recorded on three different days at the Hortobágy.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Recorded on three days.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Seen only at the Hortobágy.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

As above.

Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

This certainly was like the Lord Mayor's Show! A flock of 160 observed on the Hortobágy.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Low numbers but seen every day on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Observed in low numbers in the Hortobágy region.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

There was a small flock at Hortobágy and at the Fishponds.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Birds seen on four days from Bíbic Lodge, Hortobágy.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Recorded just once on the 24th at the fish ponds.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Seen twice at the Hortobágy.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

One bird seen on the 24th at the Hortobágy.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

One bird seen from the Bíbic Lodge on the 25th.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Seen on three days.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Seen on four days.

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*

One bird feeding with Black-headed Gulls on the 24th.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Huge flocks in excessive of five-hundred at the Hortobágy.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

One juvenile found with other gulls on the old clay-pits Hortobágy.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Seen just one time.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

Probably the commonest gull. Seen on five days.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Seen on three days.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*

One seen at Tisza Lake.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

As above.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Lovely surprise to find one chasing a Black-headed Gull at the Hortobágy.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Widespread.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Fairly common, seen most days.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Seen every day fairly widespread.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Seen daily mostly near human habitation.

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*

One roosting bird was found at a quarry near Tokaj.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

One bird sleeping in a nestbox in Zemplén woodland.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*

Good views of two birds on the 28th.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Three sightings in the Hortobágy.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Two visits to the wonderful Balmazújváros roost with up to twenty birds seen

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*

Four birds seen at the Hortobágy.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One only seen at Lake Tisza.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*

Seen on three days and heard on one other day in the Zemplén Hills.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

Observed once at the Tisza River and seen twice and heard calling once at the Zemplén Hills.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

Watched and heard around the Bíbic Ecolodge and at other sites. Another bird that favours human habitation.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Seen on six days, most in the Zemplén hills

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*

Observed and heard three times at the Zemplén Hills.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

Watched five times on tour. We also heard their loud calls often.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

We saw this bird on six days of our tour.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Observed on two days with good views at the Zemplén Hills.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Fairly common at the Hortobágy less so in the Zemplén area.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

One juvenile and one lovely male seen on the 26th at the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

One three birds sighted on two days.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*

Distant sightings on two days with one juvenile bird on the 26th.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

On perched bird seen from Bíbic Lodge on the 27th.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Seen on four different days.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Seen on three different days with three birds seen on the 29th.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Good numbers observed daily in the Zemplén hills and the Hortobágy forest areas.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Observed every day.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Seen on seven days.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Large numbers, often flocks of 200 or more.

Hooded Crow *Corvus corone*

Seen most days, often moving in medium sized flocks.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

A few pairs seen on the Hortobágy but most in the Zemplén Hills.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Fairly common sighting in the Zemplén Hills.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Watched twice only.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Seen most days often moving through forested areas in the Zemplén

Great Tit *Parus major*

Daily observations of this widespread species.

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

Small flock at the Tisza Lake and heard calling at the fishponds

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*

Recorded twice on tour.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*

Seen only on the 28th.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

We saw a few migrating flocks in the Hortobágy region and a few in the Zemplén area.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Seen on three occasions.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

A few migrating birds seen on the 24th and 25th on the Hortobágy.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen every day in small numbers.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*.

Heard at the Hortobágy.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

One sighting on the 27th.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* - observed daily in low numbers.

Seen on seven days, plentiful at Bíbic Lodge.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

Good views of three birds at the Hortobágy fishponds and Tisza Lake.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

Some late migrants or perhaps northern bids en rout south were seen and heard.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Observed twice at the Hortobágy fishponds on the 24th and again on the 26th at Lake Tisza.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Two birds seen at the Hortobágy fishponds.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Seen twice around Bíbic Lodge on the 24th & 25th and again once in the Zemplén Hills

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

One male seen on the 26th at the claypits road.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* - recorded in small numbers in the forested areas.

Seen and hear only once.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Heard at the Tisza woodlands and later observed and heard daily in the Zemplén hills.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Two birds observed only at the Tisza woodlands and every day in the Zemplén Hills.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Seen and heard on three days in the Zemplén Hills.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*

Two birds observed only at the Tisza woodlands

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Seen daily with huge flocks on the Hortobágy.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen in small numbers during the whole trip.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Observed in the hills where a few were seen.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Seen only in the Zemplén.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Four birds seen on the 27th.

European Robin *Erithacus rubicola*

Heard or seen very day especially in the forests.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Low numbers, seen every day.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

One bird seen on the 28th

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Seen on the 25th on the Hortobágy and again on the 30th near Bugyi.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Seen daily in low numbers.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Only one bird seen on the 25th on our Dotterel outing.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Fairly common most days.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Good sightings every day often small flocks in towns and villages.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Heard on four dates.

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Observed twice on two separate days.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Seen on the 24th and again on the 28th.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Many in and around the Hortobágy and a few in the Zemplén.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Good numbers observed in the Hortobágy region.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

One bird seen on the 24th near

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

A few seen in the Hortobágy and others around Bugyi.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen in low numbers.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

A single bird heard the seen briefly at Tisza riverside. More widespread in the Zemplén hills with a few flocks seen passing over us.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Not so common as one would expect. Recorded only on three dates.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Observed on three different days.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Seen or heard in flight in the Zemplén Hills only.

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Forest sightings in the Zemplén Hills.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Seen only around the Hortobágy areas.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Fairly common in both areas and seen or heard most days.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Heard and seen in the Hortobágy.

Mammals**Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*****Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*****Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*****Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*****Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*****Noctule Bat sp.****Pipistrelle Bat sp.****Amphibians****Danube Crested Newt *Triturus dobrogicus*****Fire Salamander *Salamandra salamandra*****Fire-bellied Toad *Bombina bombina*****European Tree Frog *Hyla arborea*****Common Frog *Rana temporaria*****Butterflies****Small White *Pieris rapae*****Green-veined White *Pieris napi*****Common Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*****Pale Clouded Yellow *Colias hyale*****Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*****Small Copper *Lyceana phlaeas*****Large Copper *Lycaena dispar*****Osiris Blue *Cupido osiris*****Silver-studded Blue *Plebejus argus*****Common Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*****Chapman's Blue *Polyommatus thersites*****Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*****Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*****Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui*****Peacock *Aglais io*****Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*****Knapweed Fritillary *Melitaea phoebe*****Woodland Ringlet *Erebia medusa*****Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*****Large Wall Brown *Lasionymata maera*****Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*****Moths****Hummingbird Hawkmoth *Macroglossum stellatarum*****Silver-Y *Autographa gamma*****Nine-spotted Amata *phegea*****Bordered Gothic *Heliothis reticulata*****Kentish Glory *Endromis versicolora***

Dragonflies

Common Bluetail *Ischnura elegans*
Variable Bluet *Coenagrion pulchellum*
Blue Featherleg *Platycnemis pennipes*
Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*
Green-eyed Hawker *Aeshna isoceles*
Blue Hawker *Aeshna cyanea*
Blue Emperor *Anax imperator*
Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope*
Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*
Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*
White-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum albistylum*
Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*
Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*
Broad Scarlet *Crocothemis erythrea*

Other Taxa of Interest

Saddle-backed Cricket *Ephippigerinae sp.*
Stick Insect *Phasmatodea/Phasmida sp.*
Dung Beetle *Scarabaeinea sp.*
Roman Snail *Helix pomatia*