

HUNGARY & SLOVAKIA

Hortobágy, Zemplén & Ore Mountains Sat 30 April-Sat 7 May 2016



*Trip photos: A female Ural Owl in the Zemplén Hills surveying its territory (top) • female **Three-toed Woodpecker** on its drumming tree in the Ore Mountains of Slovakia (bottom left) • a male **White-backed Woodpecker** in its full glory in the Zemplén Hills © Tour leader János Oláh/Limosa Holidays*

**Report compiled by tour leader:
János Oláh**

Hungary & Slovakia | Zemplén, Hortobágy & Ore Mountains

Tour Leader: János Oláh

with Graeme Charles, Bob Timberlake and Nadine Timberlake

This tour is our classic Hungary tour with a little twist – which is a short visit to the Ore Mountains of Slovakia. It was primarily designed to stand a chance of finding all European woodpeckers. The enigmatic Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker does not live in Hungary but can be seen in the coniferous woodlands of the nearby Ore Mountains. In 2016 we were lucky and we managed to see all 10 species of European woodpeckers!

We started our journey in the famous Hortobágy National Park where we experienced full-tilt migration with thousands of breeding-plumaged Ruffs and White-winged Terns moving through. We also had a great selection of special birds here such as the magnificent Great Bustard, Saker Falcon, Red-footed Falcon, Little Crake, Moustached Warbler and River Warbler. Our next destination was the mighty Zemplén Hills where we managed to see Eurasian Eagle and Ural Owls and nine European woodpeckers including the rare White-backed Woodpecker. We also had a short visit to Slovakia where displaying Northern Goshawk, drumming Three-toed Woodpecker, Crested Tit and Rock Bunting were great birds to see.

We enjoyed good weather in both countries. We had virtually no rain throughout the tour but in the last days the wind was very strong. This year it was a cold spring so daily temperature was around 18-24C. It was very nice considering that a few days before our visit it was snowing in the Ore Mountains!

Highlights

- Two immature Eastern Imperial Eagles on our drive to Hortobágy.
- A flock of magnificent male Great Bustards on the first afternoon in the vast Hortobágy grasslands with Eastern Imperial Eagles and Red-footed Falcons at the same location.
- Thousands of breeding-plumaged Ruffs and White-winged Terns on a grazing lake with many Little Gulls and breeding Avocets.
- Red-footed Falcons in a breeding colony.
- Watching a pair of Little Crakes foraging along the edge of the reedbed for as long as we wanted while European Roller hunted above them from a dead willow.
- The successful quest for Great Snipe in the Hortobágy with Jack and Common Snipes seen for comparison.
- Eurasian Eagle Owl female with three almost full-grown chicks.
- Magnificent Ural Owl in the canopy of beautiful oak woodland with Collared Flycatchers singing in the background.
- Drumming Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker and displaying Northern Goshawk in the Slovakian forests of the Ore Mountains.
- Watching the rare White-backed Woodpecker, the huge Black Woodpecker, the mighty Middle Spotted Woodpecker and the tiny Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at a nest site.

Saturday 30 April

The tour started with fine, sunny weather at Budapest Liszt Ferenc airport. After collecting the luggage, we were soon on our way east along the main motorway. As we were approaching the mighty Hortobágy National Park we spotted a large bird coming towards the road. We soon identified it as a juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle and a short stop gave us excellent looks of this sought-after raptor. In fact there were two of them circling above us as the local Hooded Crows were harassing them. We had a few roadside Common Buzzards and Marsh Harriers before but basically the first bird we actually raised our bins for were the Eastern Imperial Eagles. Following this success we soon entered the Hortobágy area and we spent time at a small fishpond system where we picked up a good variety of birds. We had great views of Great Crested Grebe, Little Bittern, Purple Heron, Pygmy Cormorants, Ferruginous Duck, many Cuckoos, Bearded Tits,

Great Reed Warblers and two Cattle Egrets. The latter is a rare bird and 2016 was the first year that they were breeding in the national park. After this very birdy stop we took advantage of the fantastic weather and drove out to the grassland to look for Great Bustard. We hardly left the tarmac when we stopped to check a flock of 150 Cranes when a Bluethroat was also spotted and we could watch it as long as we wanted. Later we arrived at a little higher ground and after some scanning we located a flock of male bustards. They were in and out of the rather tall grass allowing nice looks when suddenly they all flew up and ten male Great Bustards gave us superb flight views. What a bird! Also a male Red-footed Falcon flew by and two more Eastern Imperial Eagles were also seen. There was no doubt that we had arrived at the famous Hortobágy! We followed the bustards and found them again, this time they were as close as they would normally allow humans and we could watch them as long as we wanted. Following the bustard experience we were driving to our hotel when we heard a singing River Warbler from the car. This was the first for the year and we wasted no time in stopping to track down this skulking speciality. It was an amazing start to the tour!

Sunday 1 May

Following a few common birds in the hotel grounds like Golden Oriole and Red-backed Shrike we were quickly on our way. Our first stop produced a flock of 250 Eurasian Spoonbills and a very busy gull colony nearby held several breeding-plumaged Mediterranean Gulls. The supporting cast included Black-necked Grebes, Ferruginous Ducks and many Northern Shovelers. Our next stop in the Hortobágy National Park was Magdolna Puszta where there was a colony of Red-footed Falcons in a small woodland. They were using nest boxes in a rookery but appeared to be tolerating their noisy neighbours. They have just arrived and courtship was at its height, with males chasing the females in the air all the time or presenting a fine cricket or frog close to a nestbox to attract them. We spent quite some time appreciating these most graceful and special falcons. However the falcon colony was not the only attraction at this location. Following the wet spring the nearby grazing lake was packed with birds and we had an unforgettable sight of several thousand breeding-plumaged Ruffs mixed in with Pied Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Black-tailed Godwits and Common Redshanks while 'above' the waders hundreds and hundreds of White-winged, Black and Whiskered Terns were swirling around with about 100 Little Gulls mixed in. It was an unforgettable sight!

Lunch in Balmazújváros next, with a breeding-plumaged Horned Grebe amongst many Black-necked Grebes, Garganeys, some lingering White-fronted Geese and a fine Marsh Sandpiper from the restaurant balcony. Not bad at all and the meal was also excellent! In the afternoon we drove to a remote corner of the park and walked into a tussock grass wetland in search of snipe. The local buffalo were rather inquisitive but fortunately there was an electric fence between us. We covered only a few meters when the first Great Snipe was flushed and it was followed by a total of four birds with several flight views. We also had several Common Snipe and a Jack Snipe as well, completing the hat-trick of European snipe in a few minutes. Amazing! We had several fly by Red-throated Pipits but it was back at our car we found about 20 foraging on a freshly ploughed field, allowing great scope views in their crisp breeding plumage. But it was still not the end of the day. Another wetland produced a pair of Kentish Plovers, breeding-plumaged Spotted Redshanks, Whimbrel, hundreds of Dunlins, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpipers and more Ruffs. The reedbed was full of activity and after some work we managed to see Moustached Warbler and many Bearded Tits. The best of all however was a confiding pair of Little Crakes at the edge of the vegetation. The blue-grey male was preening for several minutes while the female was feeding along the reed edge. We could watch these little skulkers as long as we wanted though the viewing was interrupted by the first Roller of the year as it was catching insects from the top of a dead willow bush. We soon realized that not only had we seen many top quality birds today, but we had also recorded 113 species! What a day on the Hortobágy!

Monday 2 May

Following yesterday's action-packed but long day we started more leisurely with a little walk around the hotel garden after breakfast. We saw several Red-backed Shrikes, Golden Orioles

and also had a nice Wood Warbler. There were many singing Nightingales in the scrub and some allowed nice looks. Our next stop was in search of Saker Falcon. We were in an active territory where the adults already have chicks to feed so it was only a matter of time before we spotted one of the adults. We had distant but good scope views of this special bird. Our next stop was a small wetland area where a Taiga Bean Goose was reported the previous day but we could not find it, so we quickly continued to Hortobágy Fishponds. We had a lovely walk at this wonderful location, picking up a variety of fine birds like a flock of 11 Glossy Ibises, Squacco Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Pygmy Cormorants, Ferruginous Ducks, a fly by Caspian Tern as well as a range of small birds in the reeds and willows like Bluethroat, Savi's Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and a fantastic Penduline Tit as he was building his amazingly constructed little hanging nest. High in the sky we had a Black Stork and several White-tailed Eagles. This was followed by a tasty Hungarian lunch in Hortobágy village and a short visit to the national park visitor center and the nine-arched bridge. After lunch we drove to Ohat Fishponds, primarily for Red-crested Pochard. We found about 24 birds quickly and also picked up another breeding plumaged Horned Grebe – for the second consecutive day, although the Common Grasshopper Warbler was probably more appreciated as it was the last of the *Locustella* warblers to see on the tour. Another wetland at Rókás was extremely good for birds with summer-plumaged Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes, a large variety of ducks including Pintail, Teal and Tufted Duck plus lots of White-winged Terns again. On the edge of the wetland there were hundreds of Common Cranes. Last stop on this very full day's birding was a search for Syrian Woodpecker and it did not take long to see a fine male before driving back to our hotel.

Tuesday 3 May

This morning we left for the Debrecen Great Wood after breakfast. It was only a short drive to reach the mature oak woodland where a fly-over Eurasian Honey Buzzard was the first bird, just as we stepped out of the vehicle. The woodland was surprisingly quiet and we only heard Middle and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. However we soon located several Short-toed Treecreepers, Nuthatch and various tits. The best however was a fine male Collared Flycatcher as he was flying around us in the canopy while continuously advertising its territory with his sweet, simple song. After this short woodland break, we were back once more at the Hortobágy, where we made another visit to the Magdolna wetland. We added nothing new to the list but it was special again with 1200 'marsh terns' – mostly White-winged - flying around and many Red-footed Falcons catching dragonflies too. This was our final image of the Hortobágy and we started to drive north. We had lunch by the Tisza River, adding Serin to our trip list before driving on to the Zemplén Mountains of northern Hungary. When we arrived at the rolling hills our first task was to see Eurasian Eagle Owl. We drove to a nearby quarry and soon enough we were watching a fantastic female Eagle Owl as she was guarding three owlets on the rock face. The nearby bushes held many Red-backed Shrikes while Linnets and Yellowhammers were singing from the vineyards. We slowly drove along some deserted roads where we could do some relaxed birding. Our first good bird was a Eurasian Wryneck just a few meters away, which was followed by a Lesser Spotted Eagle hunting and catching a lizard at close range. We finally arrived at our comfortable hotel in Komlóska and after a nice dinner we were out again, this time in search of night birds. Our secret location did not disappoint with a superb displaying male Nightjar to finish the day!

Wednesday 4 May

Waking up without the sounds of the Nightingale song of the Trofea garden was unusual this morning. They were replaced by singing Black Redstarts (common in the town of Komlóska) and Golden Orioles in the wooded Zemplén Hills above the hotel. The latter is always the first bird to start singing! After breakfast we left for the Ore Mountains for a one-night stay. After crossing the border into Slovakia we made roadside stops for a very close, perched Lesser Spotted Eagle near Krasna Horka and several fine Fieldfares. Around noon we arrived at the little village of Rejdova at the base of the Stolica Mountain – the highest peak of the Ore Mountains. Here we changed transport and with a 4x4 car we drove up high on the mountain. The ride was bumpy but necessary as in recent years the pine forest has been seriously shrinking due to insect attack. So

we drove to our Three-toed Woodpecker stake-out and let our driver leave. Our plan was to find our main target and slowly walk down the mountain in search of other goodies. It was lunchtime, but we had decided to have a look around first and it only took two minutes to lure a female Three-toed Woodpecker into view. She quietly arrived on a broken spruce and after a few moments started drumming. We had amazing looks for several minutes before she dove back into the depths of the forest. Wow! It was probably the quickest and easiest encounter with this enigmatic woodpecker for any of our Limosa tours to this region.

On the walk back down to the village we saw a Peregrine, Willow Warbler, Firecrest, Eurasian Bullfinch and Eurasian Siskin. We visited another coniferous valley in the hope of finding Eurasian Nutcracker but we only had one very briefly as it was hiding in the trees. But we had a displaying Northern Goshawk and several Crossbills. Now it was time to leave for our hotel for the night at Stratena. As usual we enjoyed a fine meal reliving the day's events.

Thursday 5 May

Our early morning walk in the cool Ore Mountain air produced Black Woodpecker for some, Dunnock, a pair of White-throated Dippers and lovely Crested Tits. After a fine breakfast we drove to a nearby forest track and walked the coniferous forest once again in search of Pygmy Owl. Playing a recording attracted a tit flock, mostly Coal Tits but there were a few Crested and finally a few Willow Tits as well. The wind was picking up and by mid-morning it was rather strong. We arrived at the territory of a Pygmy Owl but the extensive search came to a halt as there we no sign of the little creature this morning. On the way back we had Tree Pipits and Mistle Thrushes and a Black Woodpecker as well. We were back at the hotel for lunch and then left for the Zemplén Hills. In the early afternoon we made a short stop at a rocky hillside and despite the strong wind we managed to see a nice male Rock Bunting. We crossed back over the border into Hungary and drove towards Komlóska, where we would spend the rest of the tour. In the late afternoon our target was the rare White-backed Woodpecker. This time we quietly positioned ourselves at a nesting hole just on the edge of a forest road. We only had to wait a few minutes when the male bird came to feed the chicks, which was followed by the female. They were back and forth with food and we could enjoy excellent looks of this declining species! After this great experience we drove to the Bodrog floodplain, which produced Black Kites, White-tailed Eagle, Western Marsh Harrier, a leader-only Green Woodpecker and a displaying Common Snipe. It was again a memorable day with some quality birds!

Friday 6 May

Our last full day in the Zemplén Hills. Although the wind slowed down from gale force, it was still very strong and we had to look for a sheltered valley. So the post breakfast excursion took us into the stunning sunlit oakwoods at Sötétes, not far from our base at Komlóska. We were in search of Ural Owl and some remaining woodpeckers this morning. As we were slowly walking a track we arrived at a spot where we could watch a Middle Spotted Woodpecker and a Black Woodpecker hole at the same time. In only about 40 minutes we had repeated great views of both species as they were busily feeding young ones. Later this track led us to a huge nestbox and inside a fine female Ural Owl was sitting. We could watch her via a mirror but she had no intention of leaving the box and we did not want to disturb her too much. We saw two Grey-headed Woodpeckers and a Wren on our way back to the car. Our next destination was the Szarkakút oak woodland. Here we tried another nestbox, this time looking for Tawny Owl. We found two almost fully-grown chicks in the box but the adult birds were only heard nearby. We took a short woodland walk where a male Collared Flycatcher kept us busy before we entered the main arena for the next attraction. A small path was the site of nesting Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. We were not kept waiting long before the pair appeared, one bird with food, and entered the nest hole. We watched two more appearances from a safe distance without disturbing them. The late afternoon was mostly spent in search of Barred Warbler but unfortunately the still strong wind was not in our favor. On the way back to the hotel we had several Golden Orioles and a Eurasian Sparrowhawk. We returned slightly earlier as we were invited for wine tasting near Tokaj. It was a special evening indeed. Touring the cellars and

sampling some fine wines of the region, as well as the best food of the tour, in delightful settings was indeed a fitting end to the last evening of the trip.

Saturday 7 May

It was our last day of the trip and even after the previous night's festivities we had a leisurely breakfast. We had some rain overnight and the colder than usual air stifled early morning bird activity. We started the day with a puncture while still at the hotel. After a quick wheel change we realized the wind had dropped after two days so we decided that our final morning would be dedicated to Barred Warbler and trying to get a better view of Ural Owl. We left Komlóska for the last time and very soon we found a displaying, singing Barred Warbler close to the road. They can be easy to see if the conditions are right! Time was flying and we only had a few hours left before the flight back to London so we took no chance but to go to our most reliable site for the Ural Owl. After a short ride and a short but steep walk up the Oak woodland we were indeed very lucky to find a superb Ural Owl roosting in the canopy. We viewed this most stately of owls for some time using the telescope in the morning sunshine. It was a superb look and no doubt one of the stars of the tour, even though it kept us waiting until the very last minute! Sadly we had to leave the Zemplén now. On the way back to the airport we had many Red-backed Shrikes and the usual Western Marsh Harriers but our very last bird of the trip was a fine adult Eastern Imperial Eagle along the M3 motorway! At the airport we said goodbye to some while others were ferried into Budapest for a few days of private sightseeing. All in all we had an action-packed tour with lots of nice wildlife experiences. Many thanks to our little enthusiastic party with a great deal of good humor. I hope to see you again in Eastern Europe for another Limosa trip.

János Oláh

ANNOTATED CHECKLIST **(198 bird species recorded on the trip)**

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

Heard in Hortobágy and at Erdöbénye in the Zemplén Hills.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Common and widespread in all lowland areas visited during the trip.

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Three sightings of the nominate race in the Hortobágy area.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Common in the Hortobágy area.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Recorded on four days on large water bodies.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Seen in the Hortobágy area on three occasions.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Seen in the Hortobágy area on three dates.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Up to 40 were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Seen daily in the Hortobágy area.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Up to 200 were counted in the Hortobágy area.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Just six were seen at Rókás wetland in the Hortobágy area.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Good numbers were seen in Hortobágy.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Quite numerous on one grazing lake in Hortobágy.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A flock of 24 birds were seen at Ohat Fishponds in the Hortobágy area.

Common Pochard *Aythya farina*

Quite numerous at Ohat Fishponds. Small numbers elsewhere in the Hortobágy area.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Good numbers were seen in the Hortobágy area. A globally threatened species.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Just six were seen at Rókás wetland in the Hortobágy area.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

It was heard only in the Hortobágy area.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

We saw three smart summer plumage bird at Rókás wetland in the Hortobágy area.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Small numbers seen in the Hortobágy area.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Several summer plumaged birds in the Hortobágy area.

Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

Two sightings of this scarce species in the Hortobágy area.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Several sightings at a number of locations: Hortobágy, Zemplén, Ore Mountains.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Common and widespread; seen every day with many nesting in towns.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

A flock of 11 were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Up to 250 were seen together in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellarus*

It was heard on several occasions in the Hortobágy area but remained unseen.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

A total of three were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Just a few sightings in the Hortobágy area including the grounds of Hotel Trofea.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Seen at two sites in the Hortobágy area.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Just a few were seen on the trip.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Several great sightings in the Hortobágy area.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Commonly seen in the Hortobágy area and a few in the Zemplén area too.

Little Egret *Egretta garze*

Small numbers seen every day in Hortobágy.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Two were seen in the Hortobágy area. A few pairs breeding in 2016 for the first time!

Pygmy Cormorant *Microcarbo pygmeus*

We had excellent looks in the Hortobágy area.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Just a few were seen on the tour.

European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Just one was seen in the Debrecen Great Wood.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina*

We had several excellent looks in the Zemplén Hills and in Slovakia.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

Two seen as we travelled towards Hortobágy and two more while watching the Great Bustards. Later we had another one which proved to be the final bird of the tour.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Four different sightings.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

A displaying male in the Slovakian Ore Mountains was a great bonus!

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Fairly common in suitable fen-like plains east of Budapest, Hortobágy and the plains below the Zemplén. Just a few were seen in Slovakia.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Up to three daily in Hortobágy with just one, very distant bird in the Zemplén area.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

One was seen near Olaszliszka in the Zemplén area.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Small numbers seen every day.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

We had excellent looks at 10 males on our first afternoon near Nagyvíván in the Hortobágy.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

We heard this species twice in the Hortobágy area.

Little Crake *Porzana parva*

We had absolutely amazing walk-away views of a pair in the Hortobágy area.

Corn Crake *Crex crex*

Only heard in the Zemplén Hills – the very strong wind made it impossible to look for it.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Just a few were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

A few on wetlands in and around Hortobágy.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

We had many great sightings with up to 300 daily in the Hortobágy area.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Numerous this year in the Hortobágy area.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Numerous this year in the Hortobágy area – up to 150 were counted.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Seen every day but not particularly numerous at any sites.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

A breeding pair was seen in the Hortobágy area. A write-in for this tour!

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

We saw 8 birds on the 1st of May in the Hortobágy area.

Great Snipe *Gallinago media*

We had repeated flight views of four birds in the Hortobágy! This was our second tour running to see this scarce migrant.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Two were seen at the same locations as the other snipe species so we could compare them!

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Just one was seen at our sniping location in the Hortobágy area. Very nice to do the 'snipe hat-trick' on this tour.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

About 30 were seen in the Hortobágy area. Mostly breeding pairs.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Only five were seen on the tour.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Yet another write-in, we had three in the Hortobágy area.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Small parties of this graceful bird, most in summer plumage, were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Small numbers in the Hortobágy area.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Just two were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

We saw one at Nagy-szik in the Hortobágy area. They migrate through in early April so it is a rare bird by May!

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Flocks of 5-50 were seen in the Hortobágy on suitable pools.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Just five were seen on the tour.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

A singleton was seen at Andaháza wetland.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

A single distant bird was seen by the leader only at Andaháza.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Three lovely brick-coloured birds were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

The largest flock was around 600 in the Hortobágy area.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Thousands in Hortobágy including some fantastic displaying males. A real tour highlight!

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Small numbers seen daily in Hortobágy.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Up to 100 were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

About 25 were seen at a breeding colony in the Hortobágy area.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Just one was identified in the Hortobágy area.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

A few at various sites in the Hortobágy area.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

Common in the Hortobágy area.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

Usually the least common of the 'marsh terns' in Hortobágy but this year we saw up to 200 in the Hortobágy area.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

This exquisite tern was seen in huge numbers this year in Hortobágy area. Our largest 'flock' was about 800 birds. It was an amazing sighting with the thousands of Ruffs together!

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

A few were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

One was seen in flight at Hortobágy Fishponds.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Seen every day.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Only seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Small numbers seen daily.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Small numbers recorded almost daily – common in the Zemplén Hills.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Seen daily throughout the tour.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Common and ubiquitous throughout the trip.

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*

Good views of an adult and three owlets in a quarry in the Zemplén Hills.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Two almost fully-grown chicks were seen in the nest box while the adult was heard only.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*

We had two females in the Zemplén Hills. Certainly a trip highlight to watch these fantastic creatures at length.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Just two were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

It was a very poor breeding year for this species but we saw a female in a nest box in the Hortobágy area.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

A fantastic calling and displaying male was seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Small numbers seen on three dates during the tour.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*

A late arrival and we saw the first for the Hortobágy area in 2016. We could watch it while admiring a pair of Little Crakes. The Roller was fly catching from a dead willow top.

European Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Regularly encountered in the Hortobágy area.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

We got excellent looks of this aberrant woodpecker in the Zemplén Hills.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

We saw a pair feeding youngsters in the Zemplén Hills.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos media*

Like the previous species we had a pair feeding youngsters in the Zemplén Hills. We could also watch a Black Woodpecker nest from the very same spot!

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*

This rarest of Europe's woodpeckers gave us excellent looks in the Zemplén Hills. Again we had a pair feeding youngsters and we had repeated great views!

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

A nice male was seen in the Hortobágy area.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Only a few were seen in wooded habitats.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*

We saw a female very well on its drumming tree in Rejdova. So we completed our set of all European woodpeckers for the tour! One of the main reasons for our excursion into Slovakia and well worth the effort!

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

We had several superb looks of this crow-sized woodpecker in the Zemplén Hills and in Slovakia. Stunner!

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

It was only seen by the leader in the Zemplén Hills. Others were heard.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Two were seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Common and widespread with daily sightings.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

One male was seen on our first afternoon as we were watching Great Bustards. Later we had extremely good views of the birds around a colony in Hortobágy. Surely one of the trip highlights to see this charismatic special raptors (colonial breeder, sexes highly dimorphic and migrate in huge flocks). Later we saw more around the various parts of the Hortobágy.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

One was seen briefly in Slovakia.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*

A pair was seen in the Hortobágy area at their breeding area. The views were somewhat distant but very enjoyable in the scope! The national bird of Hungary and it can be found on the back of the '50 Forint' coin.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

This handsome species was seen every day in small numbers. It was great to have these as 'garden birds' near our hotels in Hungary.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

A late arriving bird and we only saw two in the Hortobágy area.

European Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Common in the broad-leaved woodlands of Hungary. We had seen several throughout the trip.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

A few seen on the tour, almost daily in the hills.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Small numbers daily.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

We only had a brief view of one in flight. They are very shy and skulking in late April and early May – when breeding.

Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

Regularly seen in Hortobágy only. Small numbers elsewhere on the trip.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Common around the colonies, especially in the Hortobágy area.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Rather common and widespread.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

Small numbers were regularly seen in the hilly country.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*

Only really common in the Ore Mountains of Slovakia.

European Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*

It was great to see a few of this delightful species in the Slovakian Ore Mountains.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Excellent looks of this one in Debrecen Great Wood.

Willow Tit *Poecile montana*

Finally we had superb looks in Slovakia.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Small numbers daily throughout the trip.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Seen regularly but maybe not as common as Great Tit.

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

One at a nest gave us superb looks at Hortobágy fishponds on 2nd.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Daily sightings of this beauty in the Hortobágy area!

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Common in open country habitats.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Common and widespread in open country throughout the tour.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Small numbers in the Hortobágy area.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen daily and very numerous.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Common and widespread.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Several encounters throughout the tour!

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

We had good looks of singing birds in the Ore Mountains of Slovakia.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Regularly heard and few seen in the hills.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

One was seen well in the garden of our hotel in the Hortobágy and later regularly heard in the Zemplén Hills and Slovakia.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

We had great looks in the Hortobágy area – even on our first afternoon!

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

Finally one was tracked down in the Hortobágy area.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Several seen in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Commonly encountered in reedbeds.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

We heard one singing in the Zemplén Hills but could not see it – the wind did not help!

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

We saw one at Ohat Fishponds in the Hortobágy area.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

Seen at the lake outside the Hotel Trofea as well as at various fishponds in the Hortobágy.

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*

We had excellent looks of a singing bird in the Hortobágy early on the tour. It was a very early record, usually arriving after May 1st. Later we heard one in Slovakia as well briefly.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Common and widespread.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

Finally after much searching we saw a fine male near Komloska.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Seen or heard most days but nowhere numerous.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Just seen briefly on the last day though we did not put much effort into tracking one down.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

One was seen by some in the hotel garden in the Zemplén Hills.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

A few of these 'jewels of the forest' seen in the Ore Mountains of Slovakia.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Several were seen in the Slovakian conifer forests.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Often heard but only one seen.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

A few sightings in wooded habitats.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

One was seen in Slovakia.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*

We saw three in the Debrecen Great Wood.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Seen every day.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

A few seen daily.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

We had excellent looks of this stunning thrush in the Ore Mountains of Slovakia.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Recorded every day.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

A few were seen in the Ore Mountains of Slovakia.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Nowhere numerous but more readily seen in the Ore Mountains in Slovakia and the Zemplén Hills in Hungary.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

We had two sightings in the Hortobágy area.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Very common in all scrubby habitats of Hortobágy. Less common in the Zemplén Hills. Our best looks were in the hotel garden in Nádudvar.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Common bird throughout the trip.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

A few seen in the Hortobágy area.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Seen daily in open country.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A few seen in the Hortobágy area.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

One was seen in the Trofea garden in the Hortobágy.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*

Great looks of this stunning species in Debrecen Great Wood and the Zemplén Hills.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

We had two on the river near Stratena in Slovakia was our sole record.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Seen every day.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montana*

Seen every day.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Regularly heard and two were seen singing by our hotel in Slovakia.

Blue-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava flava*

Many seen in the Hortobágy wetlands.

Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava thunbergi*

A few seen in the Hortobágy area, probably under-recorded on our trip.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Regular sightings in the Zemplén Hills.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Seen daily in small numbers.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Two were seen well in the Hortobágy area.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

It was seen in the Zemplén Hills and Slovakia.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

A migrating flock of 20 was seen at the Great Snipe area in the Hortobágy. Excellent scope views as they were foraging on a freshly ploughed field.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common. Seen almost daily.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

What a treat to see so many of these both in Hungary and Slovakia! Easily seen near the hotels in Hungary and flying over nearby wooded valleys.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

We had several sightings in Slovakia.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Seen daily.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Regularly recorded throughout the tour, especially in the Zemplén area.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

About 14 were seen in the Ore Mountains of Slovakia.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Common.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Regularly seen in the Zemplén area.

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Numbers fluctuating but particularly numerous in Slovakia this year.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Common in open country.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Appears to be a forest edge bird in Hungary; several seen in the Zemplén area.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

Just one male was seen in a limestone area in Slovakia.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

A few in the marshes of Hortobágy.

MAMMALS**European Hare** *Lepus europaeus***Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus***Red Deer** *Cervus elaphus***Red Squirrel** *Sciurus vulgaris***BUTTERFLIES****Wood White** *Leptidea sinapis***Painted Lady** *Vanessa cardui***Red Admiral** *Vanessa atalanta***European Peacock** *Aglais io***Brimstone** *Gonepteryx rhamni***Camberwell Beauty** *Nymphalis aniopa***Orange-tip** *Anthocharis cardamines***Small Heath** *Coenonympha pamphilus***Scarce Swallowtail** *Iphiclides podalirius***Pale Clouded Yellow** *Colias hyale***OTHER WILDLIFE****Fire-bellied Toad** *Bombina bombina***Yellow-bellied Toad** *Bombina variegata***Agile Frog** *Rana dalmatina*