

HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA & TRANSYLVANIA GT 2015
with **SAKERTOURS**
5-16 May 2015



Three-toed Woodpecker (Simay Gábor)

Leader: Gábor Simay

This three-country birding tour in Central Europe is one of the most productive birding tours available in Europe and now it is one of Sakertours's classic tours. It is also linkable with our Danube Delta tour and for overseas visitors this combination is unbeatable! We have been running similar tours for many years but it was the fourth time that our GT tour was running with this very same itinerary and it was a successful one once again. We had the second longest ever bird list achieved on a trip with a similar itinerary, which means 227 species and only two of them were heard only. We covered almost all major bird habitats of the Carpathian Basin and the weather was rather good during the 10 and two half days of bird watching, with sunshine on most of the days. However we also had two very rainy days, which affected to some extent the bird watching as well. The temperature was pleasant, usually between 20 and 25°C, but once it was nearly 30°C. We visited three countries: Hungary, Slovakia and Romania, so we had a good overview of habitats and – sometimes gorgeous - landscapes of the region. May is one of the best months to bird watch in Europe when breeding and migrating birds are both present. This year's highlights were nine species of owls including Ural, Eagle, Scops and Tengmalm's Owls, ten species of woodpeckers (all the European breeding species) including superb views of White-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers; nineteen species of raptors including Short-toed and Eastern Imperial, Lesser and Greater Spotted Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard, Red-footed Falcon and Saker; Great Bustard, Little Crake, Corncrake, Collared Pratincole, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Great Snipe, Wallcreeper, Thrush Nightingale, Moustached and River Warblers; and even some local rarities were found by the group, namely Pectoral Sandpiper and Slender-billed Gull.

Tuesday, 5th of May

The group members arrived from different locations so the discussed meet point was the Liszt Ferenc Airport in Budapest around noon. As a few of us arrived a bit earlier they had time to do some bird watching around the terminal and they spot two Saker Falcons around! A very good start of the trip!

Once everyone had arrived we started immediately our three hours drive to the Zemplén Hills. On the way we saw three adult Eastern Imperial Eagles – one of them provided exceptionally good views as it was perched on the top of a dead tree, just 200 meters from us.

In the Zemplén Hills our very first stop produced two nice Wrynecks together, a few Turtle Doves and a singing Woodlark in a vineyard. We also saw here our first Red-backed Shrike and other common passerines, like Linnets.

We drove further into the woods. The last section of the track was too muddy, so we had to walk a few hundred meters when we reached that part of the wood, where we hoped to meet one of our main target of the trip: White-backed Woodpecker. It didn't take long when the male appeared on a nearby tree and it was kind enough to stay for a few minutes around so we had excellent views of this fantastic bird. We still had some time till evening to do some bird watching around and after a while we gained superb views of a singing male Collared Flycatcher, quick views of a Black Woodpecker and also a Tawny Owl was located. We walked back to our van and it was already dark when we arrived to our hotel in Komlóska, a small village in the heart of the Zemplén.



White-backed Woodpecker in the Zemplén Hills (Simay Gábor)

Wednesday, 6th of May

Before breakfast we took a short walk just outside the village. In the woods we stopped in a safe distance from a tree – for not to disturb the birds – where a pair of Middle-spotted Woodpeckers had excavated their nest hole. After about 15 minutes one of them appeared and changed its mate in the hole. We had good views of the latter just before it flew away to feed. Nearby we also saw two Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers and we tried the Grey-headed which

also had a territory nearby, but we had no luck with it. We walked back to the hotel and we had some food just before we drove to our next destination for Ural Owl. On the way we saw a nice male Montague's Harrier and a Black Woodpecker. We had to walk two kilometres in the forest where we had good scope views of a Wood Warbler and also a pair of Grey-headed Woodpeckers. After we arrived to the right place, the female Ural Owl was quickly located and we had prolonged and close scope views of this powerful owl. From here we drove to an abandoned quarry where we had great views of a female Eagle Owl and her four, already huge chicks. Bee-eaters were also seen here perched on a tree.



Ural Owl in the Zemplén Hills (Simay Gábor)

It was a surprisingly hot day for early May but we thought it should have been great for raptors so we drove up a hillside where we had a good view of the surrounding land. We had our picnic lunch here while we had Black Storks and Lesser Spotted and White-tailed Eagles circling around. Unfortunately Short-toed Eagle (for which we had a real chance only in the Zemplén) eluded us.

Our next stop was a damp area where we tried to add a few wetland birds to our list. Our main target was Little Crake here. Probably because of the hot weather, their activity was rather poor. Though we heard a few birds, we couldn't glimpse them. However the area was productive and we added Bearded Reedling, Savi's and Grasshopper Warblers to our list. Our next and last stop was the floodplains of the Bodrog River. Here we heard several Barred Warblers and eventually everyone had good scope views of this huge and beautiful *Sylvia* warbler. Here, our main target was the late arrival River Warbler. We hoped they had already arrived to their breeding habitat. Eventually towards the evening some started to sing. Though, as they just had arrived they sang only shortly. However, after we made some effort we had views of two different individuals, one of which was only a few meters away.

This evening we visited a wine cellar, as this region is famous for its white wine. After a superb range of wines and some superb food we retreated to our hotel.



Male Barred Warbler (Simay Gábor)

Thursday, 7th of May

This morning before breakfast we had a short walk in Komlóska. Beside the usual village birds, like Black Redstart and Serin, we saw a nice Wryneck as well. After we had some food we checked out from our hotel as today we had to drive for our one day visit to Slovakia. However we wanted to spend the morning around the Zemplén Hills to try to pick up some of the species we missed yesterday. First we stopped at a nice meadow site where we heard a few Corncrakes, though we didn't manage to see them. After this we managed to add species like Black Kite, Tawny Pipit and Syrian Woodpecker to our list, though the latter was seen only shortly in flight. Also, we had good views of three Lesser Spotted and an Eastern Imperial Eagle and eventually we managed to come across a nice and close Short-toed Eagle, circling low above our head. After a short drive we crossed the border. Our Slovakian visit was planned to be short – one afternoon and one morning - but during this period we hoped to come across some of the higher elevation species. After an hour drive we stopped to have our picnic lunch by a small lake with some nice hills behind with an old castle ruin on the top of one. Above the hills we saw another Lesser-spotted Eagle. On the pond among others we found a Ferruginous Duck drake and also a few breeding plumaged Black-necked Grebe. We still had some driving ahead toward the Slovakian Arc Mountains. First we stopped by a forest where hoped to find Three-toed Woodpecker, which is a secretive inhabitant of the higher mountain forests of the Carpathian Basin. Though this forest was badly hit by a terrible storm last year, a pair of our target species was known to haunt there. The forest was surprisingly silent and it seemed to be rather birdless. We did not have luck with the woodpecker nor with other targets, though we could add to our list some common forest birds, like Coal Tit.



Short-toed Eagle in the Zemplén Hills (tour participant Michiel de Groot)

So we decided to change the habitat and we drove to higher elevation to another Three-toed territory. Though in the open we saw some Mistle Thrushes and a Fieldfare, the activity in the forest was just as low as in the previous location. After an hour hopeless search we decided to change habitat and finish the day along a fast flowing stream. The stream held a few Grey Wagtails and Dippers. Our hotel was close where we – after a nice meal – we went quickly to bed as on the next day we had a lot to do.

Friday, 8th of May

We woke up early in the morning and close to our hotel we visited a nice forest. In the cold mountain air activity was still low. We tried to find Hazel Grouse but this time of the year they are very shy and despite of our effort, they eluded us. Back in the hotel we had some breakfast and we went to a meet point where we changed our vehicle to an old forestry truck which took us up on a long and very steep road to our main birding area. The plan was to walk slowly down a few kilometres where the truck would pick us up and take us down again. On the way up we saw a flying Nutcracker which was a good omen for the rest of the morning birding. At the end of the road, we tried the Three-toed Woodpecker again without any luck. We had more luck though with the Nutcracker, as one perched up on the top of a spruce tree. They are not uncommon in this forest, but while breeding they are shy and silent. Other forest birds were active and we soon had good views of Crested Tits and Bullfinches. Though this year proved to be very poor for owls, we still had a good chance here for Tengmalm's Owl, as previously a territory was detected here. Quite soon all the tour participants had excellent views of this shy species!



Tengmalm's Owl in the Érc Mountains in Slovakia (Simay Gábor)

We gave another chance for the woodpecker but no activity was detected so we started to descend from the mountain slowly walking down on the forest road. After some distance was walked, we heard some very soft and irregular sound of a woodpecker's feeding. We started to search for it and eventually we found a somewhat distant, beautiful male Three-toed Woodpecker. Later it moved towards us where we had really good views of it.

So we took the rest of the walk happily toward the vehicle which took us down again to our van. As it was already early afternoon we started our travel back to Hungary and towards the Hortobágy, where one full day bird watching was ahead. On the way we stopped to have a lunch and we saw another nice Lesser-spotted Eagle and two Rock Buntings feeding on the ground. Before we reached the Hortobágy (after a few hours driving) we stopped to add Short-toed Lark - which is a rare breeding bird in Hungary - to our list. After some search we saw two birds, one of them was singing and display flying. Before evening we reached the Hortobágy, so we still had time to spend. We visited a site good for Saker Falcons, where we found two of these magnificent raptors, which were perched on pylons.

After a short drive we arrived to our hotel near Nádudvar, where we spent the forthcoming two nights.



Male Tree-toed Woodpecker in the Slovakian Arc Mountains (tour participant Michiel de Groodt)

Saturday, 9th of May

Early in the morning we had a short walk in the hotel garden, where we found our first Long-eared Owls for the trip – tree birds were sitting on a willow tree and provided excellent views. We also saw Common Nightingale, Great Reed Warblers and a singing male River Warbler which was rather a surprise to find it here. We had great scope views of the latter as it was singing from the top of a small bush. After breakfast we drove to a nearby town where we saw singing Lesser Whitethroat and a male Syrian Woodpecker from a very close range as it was busy around its nest hole. On a nearby grassland we found many Red-footed Falcons as they were flying around their breeding colony. We spent a little time to study the perched birds from such a close range. We also saw nice Long-legged Buzzards here and a couple of other new for the trip species like Common Cranes, Pied Avocet and Hoopoe.

Our next goal was to get to a remote marshy area where we hoped to find Great Snipe, though the date was a bit too late for this scarce migrant. En route we stopped to have a look at a nesting Short-toed Treecreeper which was carrying food to its nest frequently. Around the marsh we saw our first White-winged Black Terns, a flock of seven birds. As we had a very dry spring we had very few locations for marsh terns, while on a wet year literally they are everywhere in the Hortobágy this time of the year.

When we arrived to the right habitat, Jack and Common Snipes were readily seen (though only one of each), while a few Red-throated Pipits were flying around. After the whole area was thoroughly searched we were about to give it up. As a last chance we checked one more place and to our relief, a Great Snipe was found here. All the field characters were well seen as it was flying around.

It was time to have lunch in a fish restaurant by the river Tisza. After lunch we headed to a rather small fishpond system. Here we saw a few Lesser Grey Shrikes, a Marsh Warbler and several Penduline Tits. All three species of marsh terns were flying above the ponds in good numbers. Probably most common was the Black Tern. We had also some Little Gulls, several

Pygmy Cormorants and Ferruginous Ducks, a surprisingly late Goldeneye, Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes, Purple Herons and many more wetland species. We saw a Black Stork and a Saker Falcon as well, and a freshly fledged Long-eared Owl family in the bushes.



Whiskered Tern (Simay Gábor)

Our next destination was a Great Bustard leking site. Though mid-May is rather late for leking and as time progress they are more difficult to find. Nevertheless we had luck as one male was found displaying and eleven more were around. We even saw these huge birds flying. The area also held Rollers, Little Owl, and Bluethroat, though for the latter we had to work rather hard.

Towards our hotel we made a little detour for a Short-eared Owl which was found recently. In some years several breed in this region but this year it was the only known bird around. We saw a Little Owl and Tawny Pipits but the Short-eared Owl eluded us. It was almost dark while driving out when our target was detected and it was positively identified at least by some of us.

Sunday, 10th of May

Today we had to leave the Hortobágy and go to Transylvania. So after a short walk which produced this time three Little Bitterns around the hotel, we started our drive, though we stopped first by a wetland which was en route. The area was productive with many waders, especially Pied Avocets and Black-winged Stilts. Big flocks of Dunlins were further away, but too far to try to detect different species in the flock. Spoonbills, Greylags and a few Common Shelducks were around, while Purple Herons were rather common. Three Temminck's Stints and a few breeding plumaged Spotted Redshanks were also seen. Raptor-wise it was also interesting as we saw here more Red-footed Falcons and an adult Peregrine perched on a dead tree. Best of all we found an actively singing Moustached Warbler which provided close walk away views.

Our next stop was already in the third country of the trip, namely in Romania. We had our packed lunch near Élesd by one of two big reservoirs. Though they were not full of birds, we picked up some interesting one. Among the many Great-crested Grebes we counted seven Red-necked. We also found two Black-throated (one in summer plumage) and one winter plumaged Red-throated Diver. These are regular winter visitors here but one need some luck to find them here as late as May. In a small Ruff flock we found a breeding plumaged Turnstone which is a rather scarce migrant around. The bushy fields were also interesting around, as alongside with a Great Grey Shrike and three Ortolan Buntings we found three Grey Partridges. The latter, because of the ever more intensive agriculture, became incredibly rare in this region just like in many other European countries.

From here we still had a few hours drive ahead and towards the evening the – so far good - weather started to deteriorate and eventually it started to rain. It was still raining when we arrive to our rural but highly comfortable hotel with a fantastic landscape around. As it was not a bird watching weather outside, we had a rather early dinner. Afterwards the weather became somewhat better, so we decided to go out to try to come across a Scops Owl. As it was still drizzling and a bit windy too, the owls were silent. Though later we heard a few whistles, they were too inactive to give us a real chance to see them.

Monday, 11th of May

Early in the morning it was still raining, but later it stopped so we decided to go out and try to detect some of the more interesting Hirundines which are scarce breeders around. As the weather was still cold, wet and very cloudy, activity was low. At a nearby gorge we saw a high flying Golden Eagle and then also a few Craig Martins flying around the cliffs. We heard a very close Corncrake as well, but we couldn't track it down. We returned to the hotel to have breakfast and after it we visited the barren limestone mountain behind our hotel. We had to climb up on a steep road shortly, but from here we managed to find a beautiful male Rufus-tailed Rock-Thrush which later came closer and it was display flying around.



Golden Eagle with it's pray near Torockó (tour participant Michiel de Groodt)

Along the road we heard a River Warbler and eventually we managed to see a nice Corncrake. After some search we managed to find the breeding place of a pair of Red-rumped Swallow which were busy to collect mud to build their new nest. A few Craig Martins were also around and a nearby Rock Bunting was singing when suddenly every bird around started to panic. A Golden Eagle dropped down from the cliffs and just a few dozen of meters away from us it caught a Feral Pigeon and took it to the ground. Very soon it noticed us and decided to fly away with the pray. It was one of the most memorable moments of the trip!

We go back to the hotel to have lunch. After it, we started our four hours drive to our next hotel in the Hargita Mountains. There was no time for bird watching, so soon after we checked in our hotel we met our local „bear guide”, who took us to a bear hide. Beside the birds, to see Brown Bears was another goal of the trip, so everyone looked forward the result of the forthcoming evening. We drove for a while but afterwards we approached the hide on foot – very silently. We were lucky as a mother bear with its two cubs had been already in front of the hide. Unfortunately the direction of the wind wasn't good and while we were entering the hide they could smell us and after a little thinking they decided to walk away. Then we had to wait another hour, while only a few Stock Doves and a Red Fox entertained us. Suddenly the Fox started to smell something and ran away. In a few second a Brown Bear appeared from the forest and soon after another one and another one. The three bears spent more then an hour in front of us which was a great experience for everyone!



Brown Bear (Simay Gábor)

Tuesday, 12th of May

In the morning we had a little walk around the hotel which was surrounded by some farm buildings, orchards and spruce forest. Fieldfares were common around, we saw a Marsh Tit and at least three singing male Common Redstarts. After this, we drove towards the magnificent Békás Gorge. On the way we managed to add Honey Buzzard to our list. It was quite a long drive to get to the gorge but we had to wait no more then a minute for the first

Wallcreeper to appear. We spent about one-and-a-half hour here and we saw at least three of these beauties (we saw all three of them together, chasing each other along the cliffs). Unfortunately they didn't come really close but we had excellent scope views. We also saw a Dipper and Grey Wagtails around.

We had lunch on a nearby restaurant and after that we tried to find Common Rosefinch at a nearby location. Though they are late arrivals, we still hoped to come across an early one around. At the first location we found a couple of Garden Warblers but none of our targets, but our next stop produced a fine singing male. We also saw here a nice Great Grey Shrike.

The last two hours of the day was spent on different locations while we were trying to locate Thrush Nightingale on the dense cover which they prefer. To our disappointment around the first location we couldn't find any of these skulkers. We saw Honey Buzzard and Lesser Spotted Eagle, while we moved to a different site. Here we heard a Thrush Nightingale and quite soon we managed to see two different individuals. We returned to our hotel a bit earlier as for the next day we planned an early start and a late finish.



Common Rosefinch, adult male (Simay Gábor)

Wednesday, 13th of May

Early in the morning we dove up on a winding road to a mountain where we walked into the nice conifer forest along a small trail. Unfortunately the trail was still half covered by thick snow, so we could walk only slowly forward and eventually it was not possible to walk all the way along this trail. Though the surrounding forests are usually good habitats for Eurasian Pygmy Owl, this year for some reason – most probably food shortage – none of them stayed here for the breeding season. Along this trail we saw a Nutcracker, couple of Ring Ouzels, a nice singing male Firecrest and some Crested Tits. We walked back to our van and we took a short walk around a mountain meadow where we picked up easily some breeding plumaged Water Pipits. We drove from this site to another well forested area where we saw a Nutcracker flock and some confiding Willow Tits.

En route towards a nearby, small fishpond system we saw a couple of Lesser Spotted Eagles, two Black Storks, an Eurasian Hobby and a flock of 35 Ravens. By the fishponds we found some of the singing warblers like Marsh and Savi's and we also found a small drained pond with some fresh mud. Here small flocks of waders included Ruffs, Little Stints and seven breeding plumaged Temminck's Stints. On other small ponds we had very good and close views of Ferruginous Ducks, a mixed flocks of Black and Whiskered Terns and an immature Little Gull. We went back to our hotel to have an earlier dinner just to get back in time (at dusk) to an old oak forest patch where we soon had very close and good views of a calling Eurasian Scops Owl.



Eurasian Scops Owl (Simay Gábor)

Thursday, 14th of May

During the trip as a whole we were rather lucky weather-wise as we had only seldom rain and it was sunny but not too hot. Unfortunately as we woke up this morning we had to realise that the weather changed a lot and it was rainy and cloudy. Though, it was a travel day, as we had to cover all the distance back from the Hargita Mountains to the Hortobágy, we still wanted to stop at a couple of birding sites en route. We started our drive as soon as it was possible, hoping for a better weather around other sites. However as we arrived to our Red-breasted Flycatcher site the rain was really heavy. Though we tried for a while this species in a mature beech forest, we didn't have a real chance in this terrible weather. After a few hours of driving the weather improved so we stopped by the road to check a nice looking wetland habitat. Here we saw plenty of waders, among them one Eurasian Oystercatcher, a locally scarce species. Other birds included Avocets – already with some chicks -, Black-winged Stilts and plenty of Ruffs. Also small flocks of Little Gulls and a few Pygmy Cormorants were around. A Lesser Grey Shrike was rather a surprise (as it is widespread only in the lowlands of Hungary) at this location, which was sitting on a nearby electric wire.

We had picnic lunch nearby a spectacular gorge but unfortunately the weather turned rainy again which spoiled our bird watching plans. So we continued our drive towards Hungary.

Later in the afternoon, soon after we crossed the border we had two more stops as the rain had stopped and it was nice and sunny again. We had couple of waders and plenty of herons around. Some breeding plumaged Spotted Sandpipers were also present. Some of the group members saw a Great Bittern in flight and a few Red-footed Falcons were hunting around. As a new species for the trip, nine adult Mediterranean Gulls were seen in a bigger gull flock. In the evening we returned to our familiar hotel in the Hortobágy for the last two nights of the trip.

Friday, 15th of May

Our last full day of the trip started with a lot of planning as – fortunately – we had already built up a fairly long species list. So we had to decide where to spend our time and where would we had the best chance to find the few missing species – and of course to have a pleasant bird watching after a great trip... and it turned out to be a fantastic end with full of surprises. After breakfast we drove directly to the Hortobágy Fishponds where we planned a few kilometre walk to a half drained fishpond with some mudflats. The bushes and reedbeds held Penduline Tits, an Icterine Warbler and singing male Bluethroats. Squacco Herons and Pygmy Cormorants were flying and overhead about twenty White-tailed Eagles were counted along with two Black Storks. When we arrived to the first pond a flock of distant raptors were spotted. Through our scopes we saw that most of them were Marsh Harriers and White-tailed Eagles, however a smaller eagle was also spotted among them. As it was circling, then gliding toward us – however the distance remained considerable – we could identify them as an immature Greater Spotted Eagle, with all the spots – contrasting lines from this distance – on the upper wings. A very late record of this regular winter visitor and a real bonus species!

On the pond there were plenty of birds, like Ferruginous Ducks and in the huge flocks of Greylags, we found a Greater White-fronted Goose, which was also quite a late record. From here we walked to the next pond where we found again a couple of interesting birds - e.g. another Eurasian Oystercatcher – among the many other waders. More importantly among the gulls we managed to find a Slender-billed Gull, a real local rarity, and only the 14th Hungarian record. Within a few minutes the first local twitchers arrived...

From this pond system we drove to another where we found a nice flock of Red-crested Pochards (both, nice breeding plumaged males and females), a new species for the trip. From here we went to a small wetland system, which we had visited before, but it was a good migration period and we thought it might have been worth to visit it once more.

On the way we added Barn Owl (*sp. guttata*) to our still growing bird list. And just after we arrived to a stake out, we had prolonged and extremely good and close (2 meters) views of a male Little Crake – a species we had tried hard before without any luck.

Around the wetland there were a couple of other goodies, like White-winged Black Terns, but our attention was soon drawn by a flock of Dunlins. The flock contained one Curlew Sandpiper and a few Little Stints as well. In the same flock two Broad-billed Sandpipers were picked up to keep us entertaining, and eventually another local rarity, a Pectoral Sandpiper was also found among them. What a day!

Saturday, 16th of May

After breakfast we had to say goodbye to the Hortobágy and started our drive towards the Liszt Ferenc Airport of Budapest. We had one stop en route on farmlands and paddy fields around Kisújszállás where we had good looks of several Collared Pratincoles, the last new species for the tour. We said goodbye to each other at the airport after a really bird rich and action packed trip to these three lovely European counties, which are really worth to visit for their magnificent birdlife and natural heritage.



Broad-billed and Pectoral Sandpiper with Dunlins (Simay Gábor)

SYSTEMATIC BIRD LIST

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species which were recorded only by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*: Three birds were seen well in Transylvania. A seldom seen and declining species.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H): It was only heard on three days.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*: Common throughout the tour.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*: It was numerous in the Hortobágy area with flocks of several hundreds around certain wetlands. This is the eastern *rubrirostris* race in eastern Hungary.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*: We had only one bird at Hortobágy Fishponds among Greylag Geese.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: Several of this rapidly spreading and increasing species were seen.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: We saw three birds, twice during the trip.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: Regularly seen in the Hortobágy region.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*: We had only a few individuals at wetlands in the Hortobágy area.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: It was very common throughout the tour.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: It was recorded in small numbers on four days.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*: We saw them only on two days around the Hortobágy area.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*: We had several individuals on four days in the Hortobágy area.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*: It was common around various wetlands.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*: Small flocks at fishponds and at Élesd Reservoir in Romania.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*: We recorded this species on six different days, sometimes in flocks more than 40-50 individuals.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*: 13 birds were seen at a fishpond in the Hortobágy.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala calngula*: One very late male at a fishpond in the Hortobágy.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*: Two birds – one in breeding plumage - at Élesd Reservoir in Romania.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*: One eclipse bird at Élesd Reservoir in Romania.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: We recorded them on only three days.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: We recorded three, then seven birds on two different dates.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: It was common at different wetlands.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*: All together more than 30 birds were seen during the trip.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*: We recorded them both in Hungary and in Transylvania on five dates.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*: Recorded every day. Still a very common breeder in villages in Transylvania and Hungary.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*: We saw them every day in the Hortobágy area, usually a few dozen in one flock.

Eurasian Bittern *Botarus stellaris*: We heard them regularly but we saw only one individual.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: They were regularly seen around the Hotel Trófea in the Hortobágy, and usually very good views.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: Few of them were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: All together 12 were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Recorded almost every day during the trip.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Several were seen in the Hortobágy area on four days.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*: It was very common everywhere during the tour near wetlands.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: It was recorded in rather small numbers (max. 10 ind./day), but on most of the days.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: In the Hortobágy region on the best day we saw 40 birds, but a few individuals were seen even in Transylvania.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Small numbers were regularly seen on the tour.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Fairly common throughout the tour.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*: It was recorded on no less than five days, and – especially around colonies – in good numbers.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: We had four different sightings throughout the tour.

Saker *Falco cherrug*: Five birds were seen on three different days: two of them only by few of us at the airport, and three in the Hortobágy area.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: We saw two birds near Torockó in Transylvania, and two more adults in the Hortobágy region.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*: A pair were seen in the Zemplén Hills.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: Recorded on five days with a max. 20+/day in the Hortobágy.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: It was very common in Hungary, especially in the Hortobágy. Recorded on 11 days.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: Two adult males were seen, one in the Zemplén Hills and one in the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: All together we saw four birds.

Northern Goshawk: One immature female was seen very well in the Hortobágy.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: It was very common and recorded every day.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*: We had very good views of two birds in the Hortobágy.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: Surprisingly we saw only two birds in Transylvania.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*: We had very good views of this range restricted species, and we saw them on no less than seven days!



Lesser Spotted Eagle in Transylvania (Simay Gábor)

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*: It was a real surprise to find a nice immature bird among other raptors at Hortobágy Fisponds.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*: We saw four individuals (all adults) on this trip. The best views were gained of an adult perched on the top of a dead tree close by the road.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: Three birds were seen near Torockó in Transylvania.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: We had a very good view of one bird in the Zemplén Hills.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*: We had great views of 12 males. One of them was still displaying, so they provided us a real experience!

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*(H): A few were heard.

Little Crane *Porzana parva*: We had a few desperate but unsuccessful attempt to see this skulker, before we managed to gain excellent and very close views of a nicely colored male.

Corncrake *Crex crex*: Several birds were heard in the Zemplén and one was seen in Transylvania.



Corncrake in Transylvania (tour participant Michiel de Groot)

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: It was recorded on five dates in small numbers.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: Common at most of the visited wetland sites.

Common Crane *Grus grus*: Two flocks were seen in the Hortobágy, max. 25 in one flock.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*: One was seen in Transylvania at the Radnót Fishponds and another one at Hortobágy Fishponds. This is a scarce migrant in Central Europe.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: It was regularly seen at wetland sites, sometimes in bigger numbers. The highest count was over 150 at one place.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: It was seen commonly at swallow wetlands. The highest count was above 100 individuals.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: We stopped on the way back to the airport at the farmlands and paddy fields near Kisújszállás to see this much localised bird. We had several good views of them.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: Commonly seen in bigger numbers around wetlands, and in lower numbers at farmlands.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: Several were seen on five different days around various wetlands (daily total: 10 individuals).

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: Two birds were seen at two different locations.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: All together three individuals were seen on this trip.

Greta Snipe *Gallinago media*: The date was a little bit late for this species but we had luck. After a long search one individual was found in the Hortobágy.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: Small flocks were seen only twice during the trip.

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*: One was seen at a wetland site in the Hortobágy area while looking for Great Snipe.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*: Good numbers were seen at several different locations in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*: We had a few encounters with this species. Max. 20 birds were seen at Hortobágy Fishponds.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*: Several were seen at different wetlands. Daily maximum was 15 individuals.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*: Good numbers were seen around wetlands, especially in the Hortobágy area.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: Three birds were seen at three different wetland sites.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: Smaller flocks were regularly seen at different wetland sites. Recorded on six days.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: Several were seen at different wetland sites. The highest count (10) was at a fishpond in the Hortobágy area.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: One summer plumaged bird was seen with Ruffs at Élesd Reservoir and then one and another three at the Bihar Plains.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: Three were seen in Transylvania and one at the Bihar Plains.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*: Several were seen very well on four different days. The biggest flock (7) was recorded in Transylvania.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: Regularly seen at various wetlands and up to 500 were seen in the Bihar Plains.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: Just one was seen in the Bihar Plains.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*: One was found in a mixed wader flock in the Bihar Plains. A fairly regular, but still a rare bird in the Carpathian Basin.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*: Two birds were seen in a mixed wader flock in the Bihar Plains.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: Flocks of a few dozen were seen regularly around most of the wetlands visited during the trip.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*: Common, mainly in the Hortobágy.

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*: A real rarity in Hungary! The bird which was found by the group at the Hortobágy Fishponds was only the 14th record to the country.

Common Gull *Larus canus*: One bird was seen at the Élesd Reservoir in Romania.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*: Nine adult birds were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*: A few smaller flocks (max. 8 birds) were seen during the trip, on four different days.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michaellis*: Small numbers were seen at Élesd Reservoir and the Hortobágy area.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*: Commonly seen at various wetlands along the tour.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Regularly recorded in small numbers around wetlands.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*: Common in the Hortobágy, especially at one fishpond site where all three marsh tern species were present in good numbers.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: It was recorded regularly at different wetland sites in good numbers.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*: Small number of migrants were seen throughout the tour. Max. about 10 birds a day.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: A very common resident throughout the tour.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*: One was seen in the Zemplén Hills and more in Transylvania.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*: Common and recorded every day.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Still a fairly common sight in most parts of Hungary and Transylvania. We recorded it on nine days.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*: Very common in the villages and farmlands.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: Common and recorded almost every day from a wide range of different habitats.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*: One bird was seen well in the Hortobágy. Race *guttata*.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*: One was seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*: We had very good and prolonged views of one bird in the Zemplén Hills.

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*: One female bird with four chicks were seen well in the Zemplén Hills.

Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus*: We had an extra 4x4 truck drive for this species in Slovakia, and eventually we had good views of it, though it was a very poor year for them and for owls in general in the Carpathian Basin.

Long-eared Owl *Asia otus*: We saw them twice, all together 9 birds. A few adults were seen in our hotel garden in the Hortobágy, and later a family with freshly fledged chicks were found at a fispond site.

Short-eared Owl *Asia flammeus*: One was seen at dusk in the Hortobágy area.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: We had four different sightings in the Hortobágy.

European Scops Owl *Otus scops*: Though at our first stake out we had rainy weather and no owl activity, later at another site in Transylvania we had very good view of one bird.

Common Swift *Apus apus*: Recorded on three days, mainly in Slovakia.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: They were just arriving back from the wintering grounds, but we had good looks in the Zemplén Hills.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: Six birds were seen in the Hortobágy area on three different dates.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: Several of them were seen, especially in the Hortobágy.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (LO): One was seen in the Hortobágy at a fispond site.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: We had great views of four birds in the Zemplén Hills.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*: Two birds were seen well, though not easily in the Zemplén Hills, near our hotel.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*: We had excellent walkaway views of a male of this rare and declining species in the Zemplén Hills.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*: Three birds were seen in the Zemplén Hills

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*: We had very good views of this species. Three birds were seen on three different days.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: The most frequently recorded woodpecker on the trip.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*: We had very nice views of this difficult to see bird in Slovakia.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: We had four encounters with Europe's largest woodpecker during the tour.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: We saw only one bird on this trip.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*: We had excellent views of a pair in the Zemplén Hills.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*: Commonly seen, especially around bushy areas. Recorded on eleven days.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*: We had a few in the Hortobágy area and as a surprise, one in Transylvania.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*: We saw five different birds in Transylvania.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: We heard its song commonly. We also saw them many times, though less frequently than we heard them.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: It was commonly seen throughout the tour.

Common Magpie *Pica pica*: We saw them every day throughout the tour.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*: We had very good views of this often secretive breeding bird in Slovakia and in Transylvania, all together seven individuals.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Very common in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: A commonly encountered bird throughout the tour.

Hooded Crow *Corvus corone*: A very commonly encountered bird throughout the tour.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: Several individuals were seen in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania too, where we saw more than 30 in one flock.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*: We saw a few in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania too.

Willow Tit *Parus montanus*: It was heard in Slovakia and we had good views in Transylvania.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Though a common bird, this time of the year they are not so obvious, though several were seen in the Carpathians.

Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*: We saw plenty in Slovakia and a few in Transylvania.

Great Tit *Parus major*: It was common throughout the tour.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: It was common throughout the tour.

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*: We had a few encounters in the Hortobágy where we also saw a pair around its beautiful nest.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*: Many were seen, though locally. The biggest flock was over 500 birds in the Hortobágy.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*: Six of them were seen in front of cliffs near Torockó.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Very common throughout the tour.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*: We saw two birds as they were collecting nest material in Transylvania. This is a rare breeder in the Carpathian Basin.



Red-rumped Swallow. (Simay Gábor)

Northern House Martin *Delichon urbica*: Very common throughout the tour.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: We saw only one during the tour and it was the cute white-headed nominate race.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: A frequently encountered roadside bird.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: A very common bird, especially numerous on the Hortobágy.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*: We had good views of them both in the Zemplén Hills and later in Transylvania as well.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*: Two of them were seen. A scarce and very localised breeder in the Carpathian Basin.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*: One was seen quite well and a few more were heard in Hungary.

River Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: We had a few short views around the Zemplén Hills, but later we had very good views twice in the Hortobágy.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: We had a couple of good views of this reedbed bird.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: Common in reedbeds, especially in the Hortobágy.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*: We had great and close scope views of this little skulker in Hungary.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*: We saw plenty of them in the lowlands.

European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: It was fairly common in extensive reed beds.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*: We saw and heard a few both in Hungary and in Transylvania.



Singing Marsh Warbler in Transylvania (Simay Gábor)

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*: We had one bird at Hortobágy Fishponds.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*: We found it to be common in Slovakia and we heard it singing in Transylvania.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: It was commonly encountered in wooded habitats.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*: We had good views at several locations, both in their breeding ground and on migration.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: We heard them singing basically every day and we also saw a few.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*: We saw one and heard more in Transylvania.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*: We saw at least five singing bird in the Zemplén Hills.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*: We had several good views of them.



Lesser Whitethroat in the Hortobágy (Simay Gábor)

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: Fairly common at different locations.

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*: We saw them several times in Hungary, though only in smaller numbers.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*: We saw a single singing male in Transylvania.



Firecrest in the Hargita Mountains (Simay Gábor)

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: It was found to be common in coniferous forests.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: It was recorded on five days in forested habitats.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills.

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*: We saw three birds in Transylvania. We had good scope views of them, however this time they kept the distance and remained on the cliffs high above our heads.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*: We saw one in Slovakia and one in Transylvania.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*: One bird was seen in Hungary as it was carrying food to its nest behind the bark of an old oak tree.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: One of the most common species along the tour.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*: We saw a total of seven birds in Transylvania. This is the more scaly *alpestris* race here.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*: A commonly seen species. Recorded on twelve days.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*: A few were seen in Slovakia and many more in Transylvania.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: A common bird in the Zemplén Hills and in the Carpathians.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: We saw them in Slovakia and Transylvania as well.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: Several were heard and a few were seen.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*: We saw two of them in Transylvania.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: It was very common – especially in Hungary – by its song. We had good views of them around our hotel in the Hortobágy.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*: First we had to spend some time to had quick views of them in the Hortobágy area, but later we had extremely good views of some more active birds. This is the white spotted *cyanicula* race.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: A very common bird of the villages all along the tour. Recorded on eleven days.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: Few of them were seen in Transylvania.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: We saw a few in Hungary and in Transylvania as well.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*: A common bird throughout the tour.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: Recorded in small numbers on eight different dates.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: One displaying male was seen near Torockó in Transylvania.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Several were seen at Hortobágy Fishponds.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*: Three migrating birds were seen at Hortobágy Fishponds.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*: We had very good views of this beautiful bird in the Zemplén Hills. We heard singing in Transylvania and we saw a male at Hortobágy Fishponds on migration.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: We had two birds in Slovakia and another two in Transylvania.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: It was common in or around human settlements.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: It was common and we recorded it every day.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: We saw one in Slovakia and another one in Transylvania.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*: The nominate race was common in Hungary and we also had a black-headed *feldegg* in Transylvania.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: It was common in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*: It was fairly common throughout the tour.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: We saw one in the Zemplén Hills, two in the Hortobágy and another one in Transylvania.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: We saw some in Slovakia and in Transylvania as well.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*: Four of them were seen in the Hortobágy area while sniping in a wetland.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*: Four were seen on the top of the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: A very common bird in most wooded habitat.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*: Fairly common in the Zemplén Hills and the Hortobágy area as well.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*: It was a common bird throughout the tour.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: It was recorded every day.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: It was fairly common at different kind of habitats in all three countries.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: We saw four birds in Slovakia and we heard a few more in Transylvania.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: We had good views of them in the Zemplén Hills and we saw a few in Slovakia.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*: We saw two beautiful singing males in Transylvania.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*: It was recorded on nine days.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*: We had good views of two birds in Slovakia and we heard one singing in Transylvania.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: We saw three males at Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*: It was fairly common around wetlands.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: Common in lowland habitats but it was regularly seen in Transylvania as well.

MAMMALS

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*: It was regularly seen throughout the tour.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: A few were seen in Hungary and one around the bear hide in Transylvania.

Pine Martin *Martes martes* (NL): One was seen in Slovakia.

Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*: Six of them were seen from a hide in Transylvania.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* (LO): Two individuals were seen in Transylvania.

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*: It was commonly seen in Hungary.

Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*: A few sightings in the mountains.