

HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA & TRANSYLVANIA GT 2018
with **SAKERTOURS**
5-16 May, 2018



Ural Owl in natural breeding cavity in 2018 (János Oláh)

Leader: József Kecskés

This three-country birding tour in Central Europe is one of the most productive birding tours available in Europe and it is one of Sakertours's classic tours. This tour also gives a superb insight of the fantastic sceneries in the countries visited: Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. From 2020 this fantastic tour will be linkable with either our new Austria-Slovenia-Croatia tour or the revised Danube Delta tour giving the Ultimate Eastern Europe Birding Tour to any overseas visitors! In 2018 we run the GT for the seventh time and we had a slight change in the itinerary for this year and it proved to be a great change. It was a very successful tour once again where we recorded a total of 219 species in ten full days birding while covering almost all major bird habitats of the Carpathian Basin. The weather was variable but generally good during the tour with sunshine on most of the days. However we also had some rainy days with light showers and on the first three days we encountered some extreme strong wind which gave us some hard time. May is certainly a magical month for birdwatching in Eastern Europe and one of the most productive periods of the year when breeding and migrating birds are both present. This year's highlights were nine species of owls including Ural, Eagle, Scops, Pygmy and Tengmalm's Owls, nine species of woodpeckers including superb views of White-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers; seventeen species of raptors including Short-toed, Eastern Imperial and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard, Red-footed Falcon and Saker. We have also seen goodies like Eurasian Capercaillie, Great Bustard, Ferruginous

Duck, Little Crake, Collared Pratincole, Great Snipe, Wallcreeper, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Moustached and River Warblers.



Eurasian Pygmy Owl was one of the 9 species of owls seen on this tour (János Oláh)!

Saturday, 5th May

The tour has started in Budapest Liszt Ferenc Airport and within one hour we were already birding! Our first stop was on the edge of a large gravel pit where Mediterranean Gulls, Red-crested Pochards and Great Crested Grebes showed well plus we had a bonus – very late - Red-throated Diver. Next we glimpsed a female Great Bustard which just showed up from the high grass. We also managed to see three male Great Bustards and had two Collared Pratincoles flying over our head. In the mosaic of grasslands and agricultural fields small water patches held Wood Sandpipers, Ruffs, Pied Avocets and Black-tailed Godwits as they were feeding on the mud. This time of the year the Ruffs are in full breeding plumage and showing an amazing variety! Montagu's Harrier, Green Woodpecker, Turtle Dove, Lesser Grey Shrike and several warblers were all seen along this remote road. After this great introduction to the birdlife of the Great Hungarian Plain we left for the Zemplén Hills in the remote northeast corner of Hungary. The journey time to our hotel was around three hours and all left for us on the first day to enjoy a fine dinner and complete the daily checklist before retired to bed.

Sunday, 6th May

In the next two days we had assistance from our excellent local guide, Zoltán Petrovics who knows every corner of this fantastic area and has been birdwatching here for 30 years. We started the day with a short walk in a beautiful oak forest near to the accommodation where we had excellent view of Grey-headed Woodpecker, Wood Warblers and Collared Flycatchers. Just for a split-second a male White-backed Woodpecker appeared as well high in the canopy. Unfortunately it was just a glimpse because it disappeared quickly. In contrast

a female Tawny Owl was very cooperative with us. Following this good morning we visited a nice valley with huge beech trees where one of them gave perfect home for a breeding Ural Owl family. See the cover image of the report! Two youngsters were seen there and it was a good opportunity to practice our digiscoping skills – from safe distance – so finally everybody had own pictures on phone about the cute owls. Not far from there we managed to see a fine male Black Woodpecker as it gave food into a huge nest hole. This was followed by a delicious lunch in a local Inn where a Black Kite was a bonus in the parking place. The afternoon birding produced a family of Eagle Owls and the shy White-backed Woodpecker which is surely the most difficult to see woodpecker in Europe! It was an action-packed superb birding day!



Tawny Owl is a common bird in the Zemplén Hills (János Oláh).

Monday, 7th May

Next day was a windy one! After breakfast we left for a good observation point for raptors, where we saw a Lesser Spotted Eagles and the nearby bushes held two singing male Barred Warblers. On the way to the next place we noticed a young Golden Eagle in the air from the bus. Wind was still strong but in a nearby village we tracked down two Wrynecks and a Syrian Woodpecker. We could enjoy amazing views of the singing Wryneck as long as we wanted. By noon we arrived to a peaceful forest patch where we had our picnic lunch. Just about two hundred metres away we had fantastic views of Ural Owl – the best looks of this beauty on the tour! Our next port of call was a completely different habitat after the woodland. In the afternoon we visited a wetland area with small ponds and was hoping to see Little Crake. The wind still blowing quite strong so we had to work hard but finally we got excellent views of this European specialty. A fine male walked right in front of us on the floating vegetation. This was quickly followed by two adult Eastern Imperial Eagles! Other goodies included Black Storks, Ferruginous Ducks, Honey Buzzards, Woodlark and Bluethroat. River

Warbler remained heard-only. We finished the day with a most enjoyable wine tasting dinner in the World Heritage Tokaj region.

Tuesday, 8th May

It was time to leave this magnificent foothill area but while packing into the bus we had a Short-toed Eagle circling above us. After this last minute experience we were on our way to the Érc Mountains in Slovakia. We had a few stops en route to look for various birds though the weather got extremely windy. By lunch time we arrived to the Slovensky Raj National Park. Unfortunately the weather has become worse and worse and it was heavy rain by the time we arrived to our first point to look for Pygmy Owl. The birding was almost impossible though the the sub-alpine landscape with pine-covered hillsides were beautiful even in the rain. Later in the afternoon some Grey Wagtails, Mistle Thrushes and Willow Warblers showed up near to our comfortable hotel where we had an early dinner. After this fine meal we visited a nearby area where the enigmatic Tengmalm's Owl has been located by us a few days ago. Fortunately the rain has stopped by now but the wind was still too strong. Finally a Woodcock appeared above our head but the owl only called briefly from the top of the hills so remained a leader-only record.



The diminutive Firecrest was seen well in Slovakia (János Oláh).

Wednesday 9th May

Before breakfast we were out again in a tranquil forest valley. It was very quiet and we had no owls or any sign of Three-toed Woodpecker. A Honey Buzzard, Black Stork, a few Crossbills, Fieldfares and Firecrests were seen but not much else. The weather was still not very kind with us and birdwatching was quite difficult. This year our Slovakia part was rained out and out birding was seriously hampered! So we quickly decided to leave for the famous Hortobágy National Park. By late afternoon we arrived to a fishpond complex where we saw a lot of new species for our list. We got four species of grebes including superb breeding

plumaged Red and Black-necked Grebes, Pygmy Cormorant, Squacco Heron, Whiskered, Black and White-winged Terns, Ferruginous Duck and a very late Greater Scaup which was a write-in for our GT tour. We managed to see a pair of Little Crakes again and a pair of Bearded Reedlings were very obliging. When we arrived to our secluded hotel, we were certainly ready for dinner!

Thursday 10th May

This was a full day in the World Heritage Hortobágy National Park. We started the day with a lovely Barn Owl which was taking up residence in a disused barn. Our next stop was a rookery with a colony of Red-footed Falcons where we could enjoy up to 30-40 birds as they were calling, mating, chasing each other, displaying and occupying nesting places. Next to the rookery we managed to see a family of Eurasian Stone curlews on the dry grassland. Spotted Crakes, Bittern called from the near wetland and some Red-throated Pipits flew up from the grass while we walked back to our bus. What a great spot with three different habitats! The next port of call was a raptor hunting place where a stable souslik population thrives. It did not take long to find a mighty Saker Falcon, a nice adult Peregrine Falcon and an adult Eastern Imperial Eagle as they were all looking for some ground squirrel snack. In the nearby flooded meadow we had Common Shelduck, Curlew Sandpipers, Dunlins, Wood Sandpipers and Black-winged Stilts. Our next bird was a nice male Syrian Woodpecker in town. After a tasty lunch we drove to the Hortobágy-fishponds where we got superb looks of Marsh Sandpiper, Whiskered, Black and White-winged Black Terns, two drake Red-crested Pochards, Red-necked Grebe and a singing Bluethroat. One late migrant White-fronted Goose was also seen in a flock of Greylags.



Male Red-footed Falcons – we had great looks in the Hortobágy National Park (János Oláh).

Friday 11th May

The previous evening a report on the Sakertours guideline came in that four Great Snipes were found by a fellow guide Gábor Simay. It was a lucky news as we were heading towards the Romanian border anyway. So we wasted no time to pack up the bus and meet Gábor. He was guiding us through a maze of dirt tracks to a well-hidden wetland area where after some work we finally connected with two Great Snipes. Success! Another spot in the same area yielded a foraging Moustached Warbler too as it was collecting insects in the reed. Last but not least a female Long-eared Owl was seen in nest box. Thank you to Gábor for the great experience! It was time to leave for Transylvania as we had some distance to cover. Not much later when we crossed the border to Romania and soon stopped at the Élesd's reservoirs where we saw several new birds for our list. We got Common Ringed Plovers, Little Stints and numerous Common Terns. The best birds however were the singing male Ortolan Buntings and two Northern Grey Shrikes. We continued into Transylvania and we arrived to Torockó in late afternoon. Close to our accommodation we heard Grey Partridge, Common Quail and Scops Owls.



River Warbler is a real specialty of the region (János Oláh).

Saturday 12th May

The pre breakfast walk gave us Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Eurasian Crag Martins, Alpine Swifts and majestic pair of Golden Eagles on the top of the rocks. Not a bad tally for a short birding! It did certainly got our appetite going and we had a great breakfast! Later we drove to the nearby Kőköz area where another Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and three Red-rumped Swallows were seen. This was followed by fantastic views of Eurasian Scops Owl which was roosting in a hole of the restaurant's roof. It was so funny to observe this stunning bird while loud speech and clink came from the kitchen through the near window but the bird did not mind that at all. The next destination was a beautiful hillside with fresh grass, lots of wild flowers and many butterflies. Sadly the hoped for much localised Sombre Tit did not show up this time. We heard a calling Corncrake but it was impossible to see. The best sighting and a

great surprise was a huge European Wild Cat. It was not a very long sighting as it quickly ran to the bushes but we were all very happy! Our final bird in this lovely area was a singing River Warbler. It was time to move towards the Hargita Mountains and our local guides were waited for us in the Hargita Bear Lodge when we arrived. We quickly dropped our bags and were ready for the bear watching. After a short ride from the lodge we were already in pine-covered mountains again and the weather turned to cooler. We got into the hides and the next two hours were really great as we could enjoy superb looks of two three-year old bears for a long time. This experience with the Carpathian Brown Bears was followed by a delicious dinner in the lodge. It was an exciting day with great birds as well as two superb mammal species!



Carpathian Brown Bear in Transylvania (János Oláh).

Sunday 13th May

Before breakfast we drove on a tranquil forest trail and search of Hazel Grouse but without any success. Not easy to see them this time of the year, you need much luck. The females already sitting on eggs and the males are non-responsive and shy. After breakfast we drove to higher elevation in search of some hard-to-find birds! Our other main target was much more cooperative this morning as we had a fine female Eurasian Capercaillie walking slowly in front of the bus. Magical! Later we also had a male bird in flight along the forest trail. Our next species was the Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker. We managed to see a male and a female very well. We just followed them for a while enjoying great looks then we continued to walk in this fantastic spruce forest. Eurasian Nutcracker showed well, Common Crossbills were numerous and several Ring Ouzels allowed good views. This morning we were in luck and a nice Eurasian Pygmy Owl was quickly found in a territory nailed down by our local birders a few days ago. Following the horrendous weather and unluck in Slovakia earlier on the trip it was a joyful moment when this tiny owl just sat on a pine tree right above our head. We did not want to disturb the bird and some minutes later we left him in peace. We went

back to the lodge in the afternoon where Common Redstarts, Mistle Thrushes were seen in the garden. It was a very successful day indeed but it was not finished for everybody! Those not feeling tired after an early morning start we offered an optional owling. A few of us were very enthusiastic to go out as another Sakertours guide Zoltán Ecsedi found a Tengmalm's Owl just a few days ago. So still before dinner we decided to try our luck and we drove to the very same place where Zoli found the bird. We were still in luck and as soon as we reached the spot at dusk the owl just sat up to a nearby pine tree and started to call just metres from us. WOW! We scored on Tengmalm's Owl and this was the ninth species of owl on the tour! What a superb day with most of the regions special and hard-to-find birds seen!



Female Capercaillie on the roadside – we got great looks (Gábor Simay).

Monday 14th May

This was the last full day in Transylvania and now it was time to drive to the fabulous Békás (Bicaz) Gorge. This is a fantastic location – apparently the most scenic of all Carpathian Gorges – and one of the easiest to see the sought-after Wallcreeper. It is not only easy to get to (by car) but holds several pairs of these unique birds. We were not disappointed because after some work we located two Wallcreepers. Additional birds in the gorge included Peregrine Falcons, Alpine Swifts, White-throated Dippers and Grey Wagtails. We spent our lunch in a fancy restaurant in the gorge. On our way back we have visited a marshy, boggy area where we tracked down singing Marsh Warbler and Garden Warbler. We also found a beautiful singing male Common Rosefinch which could be the first arrival from the wintering area. On the same place Fieldfares fed their already big chicks. In the late afternoon the weather turned rainy so we decided to quit early after some very long birding days.

Tuesday 15th May

It was time to leave Transylvania behind and after breakfast we started our long return journey back to Hungary. We still had one mission to do and after some drive we made a

short detour to a nearby beech woodland. We quickly located a fine male Red-breasted Flycatcher which was our target! We also had several singing male Collared Flycatchers and Marsh Tits as well. After this successful stop we arrived to the famous small town of Segesvár (Sighisoara). Here we stopped and visited its castle area with the original Dracula's House – where he was born. It started to rain again so we continued our journey towards Hungary. Later we stopped for a quick picnic lunch at Radnót Fishponds where we had Little Gulls, Pochards and Great Crested Grebes. Back in Hungary we saw European Rollers, Hoopoes, Little Owls and one Tawny Pipit. It was late when we arrived back to our hotel at the edge of the Hortobágy National Park.



Saker Falcon in the Hortobágy (Zoltán Kovács).

Wednesday 16th May

This was the last day of an epic tour and we still had a few things in mind! Everybody wanted to see Saker Falcon again so we started the day with watching a pair of these magnificent falcons! The national bird of Hungary. Attila the Hun learnt the basic rules of hunting from his wolf and Saker! This was again an unfriendly and rainy day but on the next stop at a wetland we still managed to see some new species for our list. Notable birds we had were Grey Plover, Turnstone and Northern Pintail. At last a nice female Long-legged Buzzard was finally seen after so many attempts! This was our last new species of this fantastic tour. It was time to say goodbye to the Hortobágy and started our drive towards the Liszt Ferenc Airport of Budapest. We said goodbye to each other at the airport after a really bird rich and action packed trip. We saw 9 species of woodpeckers and 9 species of owls and wide range of other special birds!



Tengmalm's Owl was seen well in Transylvania (Gábor Simay).

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).

Eurasian Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*: Great views of a female walking slowly on the road in front of our bus and one male was flushed off the forest track in Transylvania.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix* (H): One bird was heard close to Torockó village in Transylvania.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H): It was only heard on one occasion in Transylvania.

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

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*: It was numerous in the Hortobágy area. This is the eastern *rubrirostris* race in eastern Hungary.

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

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: It was common in the Hortobágy area. A rapidly spreading and increasing species.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: We had a couple in flooded meadow in the Hortobágy area.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: It was regularly seen on the fishponds of the Hortobágy region.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*: We had several individuals on the Bihar Plains in Hungary.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: It was very common throughout the tour in Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: Small numbers recorded in Hungary and in Transylvania too.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*: Just two birds were seen in the Hortobágy National Park.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*: We had several individuals on various parts of the Hungarian lowland.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*: We saw a few birds in Transylvania and large flocks in Hungary.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*: One late migrant was seen on the Polgár-fishponds.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*: Regular encounters with this globally threatened species on the tour with most sightings in the Hortobágy area. Around 80+ birds were seen in total.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*: We had very good looks of fine males near Budapest and Hortobágy area.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*: We have seen one late individual near Budapest.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: We had several individuals almost every wetland during the trip.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: We saw one breeding plumaged individual on the Polgár-fishponds.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: It was common on the fish ponds in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy area.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*: About 7 birds were seen in the Hortobágy-fishponds.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*: It was recorded in all three countries we have visited. The best looks were obtained in the Zemplén Hills.

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

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*: We regularly saw little flocks in the Hortobágy area typically 10-50 individuals.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*: We had two sightings of this skulking species in the Hortobágy area.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: It was not easy to find them this year but finally two were seen in the Hortobágy.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: Small flocks were recorded in the Hortobágy area.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: Five were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Small numbers were recorded nearly at all the visited wetlands both in Hungary and in Transylvania.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Up to four birds were seen daily on the Hortobágy.

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

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: Small numbers were recorded nearly at all the visited wetlands both in Hungary and in Transylvania. Particularly common in some parts of the Hortobágy.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: Up to 20 birds were seen in the Hortobágy area daily.

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 tinnunculus*: Daily sightings of these very special colonial breeders on the Hortobágy. Sometime we had up to 30 circling together or occupying their abandoned rook nest or an artificial nest box for breeding.

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

Saker *Falco cherrug*: We had excellent looks of a single bird and later a pair in the Hortobágy area.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: One bird was observed in the Hortobágy area, one near Torockó and two another at Békás Gorge in Transylvania.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*: Two individuals were seen in the Zemplén Hills.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: The first observation of two birds were in the Zemplén Hills and later three more were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: Small numbers were seen throughout the tour. It was very common in Hungary, especially on the Hortobágy, where the daily maximum number were up to 15 individuals.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: We had three different sightings of both sexes on the tour.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: One bird was seen in Slovakia and later another on the Hortobágy.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: It was very common throughout the tour in all three countries.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*: We had good views of one on our last day on the Hortobágy Plain.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: We saw 6 birds in Zemplén Hills and two another in Slovakia but our very best experience was on the Hortobágy when one slowly flew overhead on the Polgár-fishponds!

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*: We had a very good view of a hunting bird in Zemplén Hills in strong wind. Three another were seen high in the air in Transylvania.



Lesser Spotted Eagle in Transylvania (Sándor Borza).

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*: Two adult were seen in Zemplén Hills and an immature in Hortobágy.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: At first we saw a juvenile in Zemplén Hills and later four birds near Torockó in Transylvania.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: We had an amazing view of one bird in the Zemplén Hills just before we started to go Slovakia.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*: We saw some of them on our first day in the Kiskunság.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* (H): One was heard on the Bihar Plain.

Little Crane *Porzana parva*: We had superb looks on two occasions in Hungary.

Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana* (H): We heard them in three different places in the Hortobágy National Park.

Corncrake *Crex crex*(H): Several birds were heard close to Torockó.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: We saw several birds along the tour.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: Commonly seen in most wetlands we have visited throughout the tour.

Common Crane *Grus grus*: We saw several flock in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*: Two adult birds were seen very well in the Hortobágy area.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: It was seen in the Hortobágy National Park and also in Transylvania.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: It was seen in the Kiskunság National Park and also in the Hortobágy area.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: We managed to see two birds on the first day on the tour in the Kiskunság.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: Fairly common near the wetlands and grasslands in Hungary and Transylvania too.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: Several were seen on the various wetlands, reservoirs and fishponds both in Transylvania, Kiskunság and Hortobágy area.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: We saw five individuals at the Élesd Reservoir and 16 more on the fishponds in Hungary.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: We saw two individuals on the Bihar Plains.

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*: We have seen two single birds in Slovakia and Transylvania at sunset time when we have searched owls.

Great Snipe *Gallinago media*: We managed to see two different birds in the Bihar Plain. Thank you for help to Gábor Simay. Great job!



Great Snipe showing its white tail-side when landing (János Oláh).

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: Two were seen while looking for Great Snipes.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*: Good numbers were seen on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*: A few were seen in the Kiskunság National Park and on the Hortobágy.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*: Usually difficult to see by early May but this year we had several sightings at various wetlands.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*: Good numbers were seen in the Kiskunság National Park and on the Hortobágy.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: One was seen in the Hortobágy area.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*: One was seen very close by on the Hortobágy-fishponds.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: We regularly had flocks of 5-25 birds on most visited wetlands in the Hortobágy area.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: We observed this species on the shingle islands of Élesd Reservoir in Transylvania and a few birds were also seen on the Hortobágy.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: One bird was located on a wetland site in the Bihar Plains.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: Up to 10 were seen on Élesd Reservoir.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: Regularly seen on the various wetlands in small number.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: We found 4 of them on a wetland near to Balmazújváros in Hungary.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: In good numbers were seen daily on the various wetlands we have visited. Some different breeding plumaged males with great ruffs were also observed.

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

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*: Up to 100 birds were seen in the Kiskunság.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*: We saw many of them in the Hortobágy and Bihar Plain in Hungary later on Élesd Reservoir and Radnót-fishponds in Romania.

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

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*: We saw several individual at the various wetlands we have visited on the tour.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Up to 70 were counted at Élesd Reservoir in Romania and we also had a few birds in the Hortobágy and Kiskunság.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*: It was very common on the Hortobágy with up to 200 seen daily.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: Small number of migrants were seen throughout the tour.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*: It was especially common on the Hortobágy with up to 50 seen daily.

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

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*: A few were seen in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*: Fairly common in Transylvania and in Hungary too.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Still a fairly common sight in most parts of Hungary and Transylvania. We had our biggest numbers in the Zemplén Hills.

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

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: A very common bird throughout the tour from the flat Hortobágy to the top of the Carpathian Mountains.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*: We had excellent looks of one in the Hortobágy area.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*: One was seen close to our accommodation and two others heard in the Zemplén Hills.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*: We had three sightings in the Zemplén Hills.

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

Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus*: We had to work for this bird but finally we got to see one very well in Transylvania.

Eurasian Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum*: Absolutley superb view in daylight in Transylvania.

Long-eared Owl *Asia otus*: We saw a female in nest box in Bihar Plain.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: We managed to see two individuals in a farm in Bihar Pain.

European Scops Owl *Otus scops*: Excellent looks of a roosting bird in the Torockó area in Transylvania.

Eurasian nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*: Leader-only sighting near the accommodation in Torockó.

Common Swift *Apus apus*: Small numbers were seen above Rejdova in Slovakia and at Békás Gorge in Transylvania.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: About ten were seen at Békás Gorge in Transylvania.

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

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: Singletons were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: We saw several in the Hortobágy area.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: Twice were seen in the Zemplén.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: We had four different sightings in the Zemplén Hills.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*: Excellent views of this rare and declining species in the Zemplén Hills. A male was seen at a breeding hole.



Male White-backed Woodpecker (János Oláh).

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*: One bird was seen on feeder in the Bear Lodge garden in Transylvania.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*: There were three sightings during the tour. First we had one in the Zemplén Hills and later another two in Hortobágy.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: Regularly seen in Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania throughout the tour.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*: We had a brilliant prolonged looks of a male bird in Transylvania.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: Several sightings of this largest European woodpecker throughout the tour.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: We heard it and seen it a few times but our best views were in Transylvania.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*: We got two excellent looks of male and female in Zemplén Hills.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*: This lovely bird was commonly encountered on the tour.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*: We had a few birds in the Hortobágy area.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*: We saw two birds in Élesd Reservoir.



Female Eurasian Woodpecker in Transylvania (János Oláh).

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: It was commonly seen throughout the tour. Daily maximum were estimated to be around six individuals.

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

Common Magpie *Pica pica*: A very commonly encountered bird throughout the tour.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*: One great view of this often secretive breeding bird in Transylvania.

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

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

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

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: A several individuals were seen in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania too.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*: A few were seen in Transylvania.

Willow Tit *Parus montanus*: A singleton was seen in Transylvania.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Fairly common in the Carpathian Mountains.

Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*: We had good view of this magnificent little bird at higher elevations 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*: A fairly common bird in the reedbeds of the Hortobágy.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*: Small numbers at various locations but the biggest concentration was seen on the Hortobágy where up to 50 were counted.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*: Up to five birds were observed during a pre-breakfast-walk near Torockó, Transylvania.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Very common throughout Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*: We had good views of three birds in Transylvania. This is a rare breeder in the Carpathian Basin.

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

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: A party of ten were seen in the Hortobágy and later some more in Transylvania. This is the lovely white-headed race here in the Carpathian Basin though there are some intermediate birds too.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: Small numbers were seen in Hungary and in Transylvania too. Mainly near to the roadside or around farm areas.

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

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*: We had good views of one in the Zemplén Hills and another in Transylvania.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* (H): One was heard in the Hortobágy area but refused to show itself.

River Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: We had to work really hard this year as we had horrible windy weather in the Zemplén Hills but we heard two birds but later and we managed to see one in Transylvania.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: It was commonly heard almost every wetland place throughout the tour and several gave good looks too.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: It was a fairly common bird on the Hortobágy.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*: One was seen foraging in the Bihar Plains. They are feeding young in early May and can be very tricky to see.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*: We saw it in wet places throughout the tour but it was particularly very common on the Hortobágy.

European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: A fairly common bird of the extensive reed beds of the Hortobágy with daily sightings there.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*: A total of ten birds were seen in Transylvania and in the Hortobágy area.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*: We had great looks of one bird next to the Hotel Trófea.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*: We observed a few birds in Slovakia and some late migrants on the Hortobágy.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: It was commonly encountered throughout the tour.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*: Fairly common in the beech woods of the Zemplén Hills and later we heard in Slovakia and Transylvania too.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: It was commonly heard throughout the tour and several were seen.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*: We saw two different birds in Transylvania.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*: Good views of this striking warbler in the Zemplén Hills.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*: It was commonly heard throughout the tour and several were seen as well.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: We saw this species regularly in Hungary and Transylvania.

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*: It was common on the Hortobágy where we had several good views.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*: It was seen a few times in the coniferous forests of the Carpathian Mountains in Slovakia and Transylvania.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: Like the previous species, it was seen in the Carpathian Mountains both in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: It was regularly heard in the mountains but only seen twice.

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

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*: Two were seen at Békás Gorge in Transylvania. Always a great bird to see!

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*: It was seen in the Zemplén Hills, in Slovakia and in Transylvania.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: One of the most common species and was seen all along the tour virtually in every habitat.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*: We saw a total of six birds on the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania. This is the more scaly 'alpestris' race here.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*: Fairly common in Hungary and in Transylvania, rare on the Hortobágy.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*: The first two were seen in Slovakia, later we had plenty more in Transylvania.

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

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: A few were seen in Slovakia and Transylvania.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: Several sightings of this shy forest bird in the Zemplén Hills and in the Carpathians.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: It was very common in Hungary. We heard it daily and seen a few at various places.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*: Most of them were busily feeding young but we managed to see three of them very well in the Hortobágy area and Zemplén Hills. This is the 'white spotted' Central European race.



Male Bluethroat in the Hortobágy area (János Oláh)

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: A very common birds of the villages al along the tour. We saw several at various places but usually in small numbers.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: Three birds were seen in Bear Lodge garden in Transylvania.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: It was seen in small numbers in Hungary – we had up to 15 birds on a single day.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*: A fairly common bird in Hungary and in Transylvania too especially numerous on some parts of the Hortobágy.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: A few were seen in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: We managed to see two fine males near Torockó in Transylvania.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Several were seen in Hungary and Transylvania.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*: A superb adult male was giving excellent looks in Transylvania.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*: We had several excellent looks of different males of this very handsome species throughout the tour.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: We had one in Slovakia and a few more at Békás Gorge in Transylvania.

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

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills and on the Hortobágy but distinctly less so in Transylvania.

Duncock *Prunella modularis*: Two were seen in Slovakia.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*: It was common in Hungary throughout the tour.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills, Slovakia and in Transylvania.

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

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: There was one bird in the Kiskunság National Park and later one was seen near to Torockó too.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: Several birds were seen in Slovakia and on the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*: Several were seen at the wetlands in the Hortobágy area while looking for snipes in the marsh.



Breeding plumaged Red-throated Pipit is usually easy to see in May (János Oláh).

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

European Serin *Serinus serinus*: Fairly common in the Zemplén Hills and a few were observed in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy too.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*: It was seen frequently in human settlements.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: It was seen frequently in human settlements.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*: good numbers were seen this year on the Hargita Mountain in Transylvania.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: It was common in Transylvania and in the Zemplén Hills.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: Excellent looks of two birds in Transylvania.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: We saw lots of birds in the Carpathian Mountains throughout the tour.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: Regular encounters throughout the tour with this unobtrusive bird.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*: One beautiful male were seen in Transylvania.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*: It was common in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*: We managed to get good looks of a nice male in Zemplén Hills and later we saw some near Torockó in Transylvania.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: A total of four birds were seen in Transylvania.



Male Ortolan Bunting in Transylvania (János Oláh).

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*: It was fairly common in suitable habitat on the Hortobágy and a few were seen near the Zemplén Hills.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: Fairly common in the Zemplén Hills and on the Hortobágy.

MAMMALS

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*: It was regularly seen throughout the tour but it was especially common on the Hortobágy.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: Several were seen all along the tour from the Zemplén Hills to the Hortobágy.

Wild Cat *Felis Silvestris*: One was seen near Torockó. It was a big surprise!

Carpathian Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*: Two were seen from hide.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*: Four of them were seen in Zemplén Hills.

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*: It was regularly seen throughout the tour but it was especially common on the Hortobágy.

Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*: Several sightings in the mountains.