

SAKERTOUR fixed date Autumn tour – Hortobágy and the Zemplén Hills

1 - 7 October 2011



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October is among the most exciting bird watching periods in Hungary. The ongoing autumn migration and the mixture of summer residents together with the already arrived winter visitors make it colourful and species rich. During the seven days of the trip we visited two of Hungary's key sites: the Hortobágy National Park and its surrounding and the woodlands of the Zemplén Hills in the north-eastern corner of the country. We also had an opportunity to sample the superb wines of Tokaj!

Weather wise we were really lucky: it was sunny all week long and the temperature was warmer than expected, reaching 20 C° regularly.



Day 1 – 01st of October The group met at the Liszt Ferenc Airport in Budapest around noon. The weather was fine, sunny and warmer than expected for this mid-autumn date. Soon we started our two-and-a-half hours drive toward the Hortobágy National Park, which is one of the biggest remaining grassland in Europe – the National Park itself is about 90.000 hectares. We took the M3 motorway which is fast and the traffic is usually light. We stopped to have our packed lunch at a petrol station. Here we saw our first **Crested Larks** with a lot of migrating **White Wagtails**. A couple of **Common Buzzards** were soaring ahead. Once a big falcon joined one of them and they were soaring together for a while. It was a **Saker Falcon!** We could compare its size to the more or less same sized buzzard – a really huge falcon. It gave us enough time to watch it through our telescope. A great start of the coming week.

Soon we continued our drive and stopped next by a little marshy area at the western side of the park. Here we saw a couple of commoner species like **Shovelers** and **Gadwalls** and also met the first smaller flocks of **Common Cranes** flying above or feeding by the road. We still had enough time to drive through the park and enter the expansive southern grasslands. Our main target species here was the Dotterel. An obliging and scarce European species which returns year-by-year to its traditional grassland sites in the Hortobágy to spent two and a half month in their moulting ground. They prefer the short and dry sheep grazed habitats.

This autumn was very dry so far, so there was no shortage of this kind of habitat, thus we had to drive till the remotest area to give a real chance. And there we found 41 **Dotterels** in one flock both juveniles and adults. On the background two **White-tailed Eagles** were soaring. On a ruin a **Little Owl** was seen and a **Great Grey Shrike** nearby with its prey. A few **Red-throated Pipits** were heard and then seen flying overhead. About a hundred **Stock Doves** were sitting on a wire and it was almost dark when we saw a **Red Fox** hunting for probably a vole or mice in the grass. After this successful half day we checked in the Hotel Trófea near Nádudvar.

Day 2 – 02nd of October We started our morning with a short walk in the hotel garden where we could pick up some of the most common passerines like **Chaffinches** and **Blue Tits**. After the breakfast we visited some grassland near Balmazújváros, as the little town is called at the north-eastern corner of the park. Here we managed to find two **Long-legged Buzzards** a species which's distribution reaches its northern and western limits here within Europe. Beside the buzzards we saw a **Green Sandpiper** a few **Common Snipes** and **Black Redstarts**. From here we went to the famous bird watching site, the Hortobágy Fishponds – 2000 hectares wetland in the heart of the park. We concentrated on the biggest pond, the so called Kondás pond, which was half drained so it was perfect for many different wader and duck species. Nevertheless we concentrated first on our main target, on the globally threatened **Lesser White-fronted Goose**. This species' remaining European breeding population – which consists of no more than a handful of dozen individuals - traditionally spend about one-and-a-half month both in the autumn and in the spring as well in the Hortobágy. We climbed up a small watchtower and to our big pleasure the flock was standing on the dry mud just in front of us. No other birds were closer to us and it was an incredibly good view of this so special species. We counted no less than 74 birds, which is the biggest flock since the early 90's what can be a good sign considering the species' fate in the future. On the pond there were several other birds, including a biggish flock of **Avocets** and many **Eurasian Teals**. On the ground 9 **White-tailed Eagles** were sitting and among them we found a first year **Eastern Imperial Eagle**. In the sky many smaller groups of **Common Cranes** were circling and we noticed a lone bird which proved to be a **White Stork** – a big surprise and a bonus species this time of the year. In the reed small flocks of **Bearded Reedlings** were moving. We visited a nearby wetland where we found mainly Teals, **Shovelers** and **Mallards** but on the muddy bank a few **Ruffs**, **Eurasian Curlews** and two **Wood Sandpipers** (scarce in October) were seen.

We drove back to Balmazújváros and checked a small alkaline pond – a special habitat in the Carpathian Basin, similar to some Central Asian steppe ponds – where 19 **Spoonbills** were busily feeding and two **Little Stints** and a **Little Ringed Plover** joined the mixed wader flock which – among others - contained some **Spotted Redshanks** and **Greenshanks** as well. In the

town we visited the traditional **Long-eared Owl** roosting site. Here the first owls appear in late summer and as we get closer to the winter the numbers increase rapidly. We counted 32 owls in a small group of *Robinia* trees just above a playground where children were playing.

Autumn is the time when maybe the Hortobágy's most spectacular phenomenon, the mass migration of the northern breeding **Common Cranes** takes place. Though they over summer in lower numbers, the first big flocks usually appear in mid-September and their number grows usually till late-October. They use several different night roosts, but we tried to choose the biggest one which was used by more than 20.000 birds from the 90.000 present in the region this time. It was amazing how they arrived from all directions in V-shaped lines after lines landing on the pond of which we had a good overview so we could appreciate the size of this roost, together with the several thousand **Greylags** which were already in. A truly memorable moment!

Day 3 – 03rd of October Today we departed earlier from the hotel, because we had to reach to the opposite side of the park quite early, as **Great Bustards** become more difficult to find later on the day. On the way we spotted a juvenile **Purple Heron** (as a migrant very unusual in October) which just caught a vole and flew away with its prey in its beak. In the village we picked up Kovács Gábor, the local ranger who follows the daily movements of the Bustards. First we had excellent views of a **Stone Curlew**, sitting motionless 100 meters from us and about 5 **Hen Harriers** hunting above the fields. As we reached the right habitat we climbed up a watchtower and scanned the surrounding fields where we found two groups of male Great Bustards (7 and 8 birds, respectively). Great Bustards are shy but we had good cover to walk a bit closer to the group which was in better light and we were really lucky as the other group flew up and came closer and closer and eventually joined the others. A great performance from such a shy bird!

In the late morning we visited the southern ponds of Hortobágy Fishponds. The closest two were drained with biggish flocks of gulls. Here we had a good opportunity to compare the adults of the **Yellow-legged** and **Caspian Gulls**. A **Common Shelduck** was observed here as well – a relatively scarce bird in Hungary. In the willow tree among the many-many **Chiffchaffs** we found a **Wood Warbler** as well (very unusual in October). Along the main track here there is a Water Buffalo grazed area, and here is a small pond with old willow and poplar trees which had become one of the favourite places of the **Pygmy Cormorants**. They were drying their wings on broken twigs just 40 meters from the track. In the nearby village we stopped for a while and spotted a female **Syrian Woodpecker** which mainly stayed in a large oak tree but twice it moved to a wooden electric post.

In the afternoon we planned to visit a small flooded grassland in the north. On the way we saw **Saker Falcon** flying close to our car. We drove in small dirt roads till we reached the flooded area – a rare habitat in a dry autumn like this, but in other years big parts of the “puszta” can be wet. It was in nice grassland habitats where many of the traditional Hungarian breeds of different livestock could be seen as well. In the flooded area many pipits were flushed - mainly **Meadow Pipits**, but **Red-throated Pipit** was almost equally common. **Common Snipe** was numerous, but suddenly a smaller one flew up just a few meters from our feet and made a big circle around us before it landed again – a **Jack Snipe**.

We arrived back to our hotel at dusk where on a nearby building’s chimney we saw a **Little Owl** sitting.

Day 4 – 04th of October In the morning we took a bigger walk around the hotel. We found a **Long-eared Owl** on a willow tree and a **Green Woodpecker** flying. The bushes were full of the commoner passerines, especially **Chiffchaffs** and **Robins** but we saw a **Blackcap** as well. We drove next to Balmazújváros where we saw again a **Long-legged Buzzard**. In a small wetland we saw four **Water Rails** and a flock of about 400 **Woodpigeons**. The late morning was spent in the vicinity of Debrecen in the so called Great Forest. We did not spend too much time here as we knew we would easily return here the next day on the way driving to the hills. We checked a small drinking pool where we had incredibly good views of **Hawfinches**. **Marsh Tit** was also common in the forest. We had a lunch in one of Debrecen’s restaurants before we headed to the south to visit some further wetlands.

Near Kaba there is a former sugar factory which’s water treatment ponds are still good bird watching sites. On the pond there were about 300 **Shovelers** and among them a **Pintail**. It is a good place for diving ducks as well so beside **Common Pochards** and **Tufted Ducks** we saw 5 **Ferruginous Ducks** – a migrant species which number can be quite low this time of the year in swallower ponds where it otherwise breed. Among the many **Little** and **Great Crested Grebes** about a dozen **Black-necked Grebes** were also seen.

Though this year has been quite dry so far, the last year’s precipitation was so high, that some of the flooded areas still provided good bird habitats. Tetétlen is located not far from the previous site with the remnants of a huge flooded area. Here, on the mudflats we saw many wader species, among them about a hundred **Spotted Redshanks**, a **Golden** and several **Grey Plovers**, **Dunlins** a few **Little Stints** and best of all a very late **Temminck’s Stint**. At the edge of the bulrush vegetation we saw further three **Water Rails** and among the many **Great White Egrets** we saw a **Little Egret** as well (again quite scarce in October). Just before leaving the area we noticed a **Great Bittern** flying above the reed bed.

We had to hurry to give a chance – as the last birding action of the day – for the **Red-footed Falcons**. These social little falcons gather sometimes in big flocks for the evening from late-

August till late-September in traditional sites. However one has to be lucky to find some as late as early October. We arrived just in time to the place before it got too dark and realised that we did have enough luck as a lone adult female was sitting on the wire sometimes mobbed by a **Common Kestrel**. Later it was joined by other two in the air before they flew into the forest where they spent the night.

Day 5 – 05th of October This day we had to drive to the Zemplén Hills, but we still had enough time to stop at the Great Forest again and concentrate on the woodpeckers this time. Though, in the beginning the forest seemed to be very quiet, as we spent some time in it we realised that woodpecker activity was far from low. First we saw a **Middle Spotted** which was followed by further sightings, then a beautiful **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** came into sight and remained in our vicinity for several minutes, feeding actively on the thin side branches of the huge oak trees around. At the same site a male **Green Woodpecker** appeared as well and later another one (or the same) was seen too. It was not easy to find the resident **Short-toed Treecreepers** but eventually we had good views of three different birds.

From Debrecen it took about one and a half hours to reach the Zemplén Hills. Here, after we had had lunch in a restaurant by the River Bodrog, we picked up our local guide, Zoli. With him we drove directly to a well wooded part of the hills, where we found nice and old beech forest. We decided to spend the rest of the day with the search of one of the Zemplén's most characteristic and sought after species – the **Ural Owl**. In the daylight we tried to find the owl in the canopy of the forest. Passerines, like Nuthatches and Jays often mob the owl and their alarm calls can draw the birders attention and give some information of its where about. However this time small birds didn't help, though they were abundant in the forest. For the last half an hour of the daylight we stopped by a bigger clearing hoping to see a flying owl – and we did see one. It landed about 30 meters from us on a lower side branch of a tree. It was motionless for about 5 minutes, so we could enjoy prolonged scope views. After a while it flew back to the dense forest and when it was dark enough it started to call together with its mate. While we were walking out the forest we heard another two calling from the distance.

After a good start of the woodland birding we arrived to our small and quite hotel in the little village called Komlóska in the heart of the Zemplén Hills.

Day 6 – 06th of October It was another fine morning with sunny weather and clear blue sky. So the circumstances suggested it must have been a good birding day. And soon we realised our suggestions were right! From Komlóska we drove toward Mogyoróska where we made a short roadside birding with the beautiful scenery of the old castle on the top of the hill. Here we saw big flocks of **Yellowhammers**, **Mistle Thrushes** and three **Great Grey Shrikes** – it is

quite rare to see more than one or two together. A bit further away we noticed a big raptor sitting on the ground. We set up our scopes and managed to have great views of this immature (three or four years old) **Eastern Imperial Eagle**. Nearby a couple of **Ravens** were sitting on the ground or the top of the trees. We drove through a couple of more small villages and drove till the edge of a mature oak and beech mixed forest with some pine patches inside. We did not have to walk too far when we heard our first woodpeckers tapping and drumming. We heard **Great, Middle and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** and we saw some smaller birds like **Coal Tits** and **Goldcrests**, which were new species for the trip. The oak wood was full of **Hawfinches** and a **Grey-headed Woodpecker** appeared by the road. Though it was difficult to find it in the canopy, eventually we had clear views of it. A Black Woodpecker was drumming continuously nearby, but in the dense forest it remained invisible. Suddenly we heard two tapings which were very much like **White-backed Woodpeckers**. We moved towards one of them but unfortunately it flew to the direction of its mate and we heard them calling for a while. We started to follow them but they always flew further before we could have a really good view. Eventually – after climbing up a steep hillside – one of them (a female) was patient enough to let us have good and sufficiently long views. It is always a big pleasure to see Europe's rarest woodpecker, especially in autumn, when pairs wander freely in their big territory.

Driving to the south we stopped by an old orchard where we saw two (male and female) **Grey-headed Woodpeckers** and a **Black Woodpecker** which was the last to complete our woodpecker list, as we had seen all the eight species possible in Hungary this time of the year (Wryneck is a migratory, otherwise common species). By the road we saw two juvenile **Red-backed Shrikes** (another common but migratory species and one have to be lucky to find them in October) and a soaring adult Eastern Imperial Eagle in the companion of about a dozen **Common Buzzards**. In a side valley we stopped to see a **Tawny Owl**.

Our last target species was the **Eagle Owl** for the day. We visited a quarry with an enormous cliff. We found the owl easily sitting quite obviously on the wall. We had good scope views of it and as we were walking away at dusk we could here its deep calls which created a nice atmosphere at the end of this fantastic and very productive day. At the evening we visited a wine cellar, as the surrounding of the Zemplén Hills, especially the so called Tokaj area is famous not only for its birds but also for its white wine. In that nice family run cellar we had a wonderful dinner and tasted no less than 10 different kind of local wines.

Day 7 – 07th of October On our last day we still had a full morning to spend with bird watching. We took a short walk in Komlóska village. In a garden we found a few **Serins** feeding on the ground and eventually we had great views of it. Later we saw several in the village which was a nice surprise as they usually leave their breeding habitat by late summer and they wander in small flocks in the lowland. At the edge of the village, where the forest

starts we saw a **Grey-headed Woodpecker**. We walked a little bit uphill on a small forestry road. Here beside the common forest birds we soon found a nice **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**. It was time to walk back to our hotel pack our luggage into the car and leave this beautiful and silent corner of the Zemplén. On our way to the airport we made one more stop near Szerencs where a small stretch of ponds provides some good bird watching opportunities. Here we saw beside some duck species a **Dunlin**, a **Green Sandpiper**, two **Spotted Redshanks** and many **Common Snipes**. The weedy banks were full of passerines and **Dunnock** was especially common, but we saw small flocks of Serins, **Linnets** and a lone **Great Grey Shrike**.

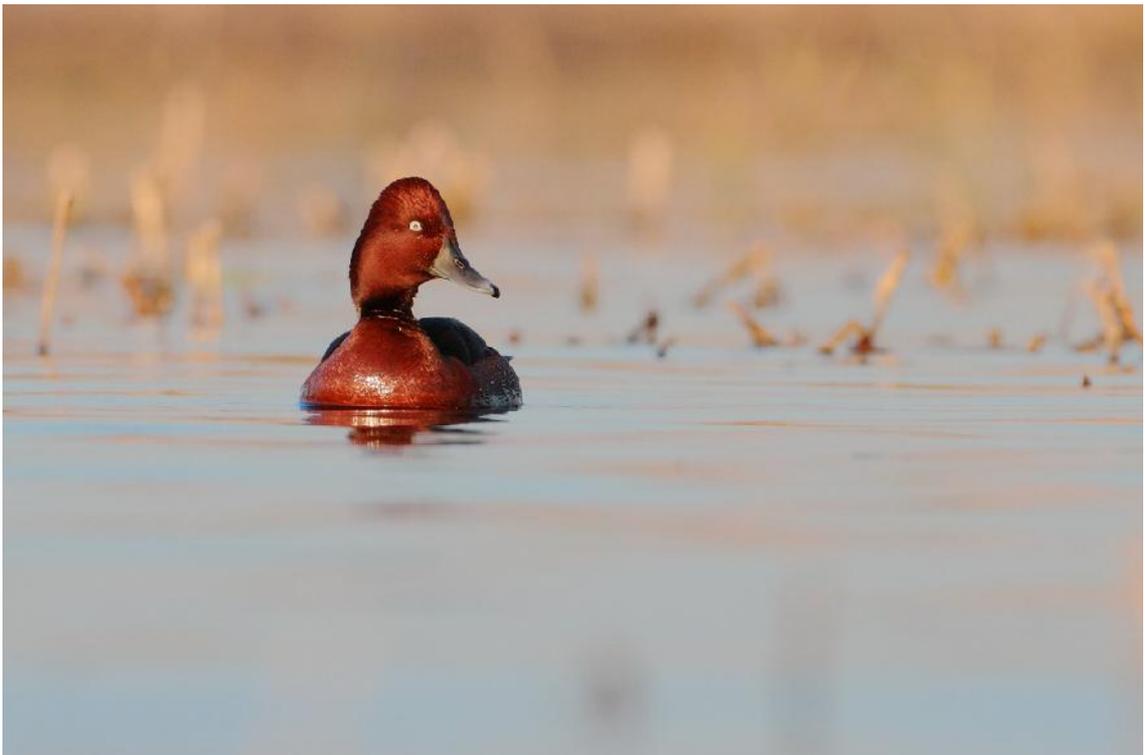
We left the area around noon and it took about three hours to reach Budapest, where we said goodbye after a week of truly fine bird watching with many good species and great moments behind.

Systematic list of species recorded

(A total of 132 species was recorded by the group)

- 1. Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***
Seen every day in a variety of habitats.
- 2. Greylag Goose *Anser anser***
Seen on a couple of dates. The biggest numbers were seen on the 3rd at Virágoskút Fishponds, where several thousands were roosting along with Common Cranes.
- 3. Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus***
One of the star birds of this trip. It was a special year for this species as no less than 74 birds were seen together in one flock. The biggest flock since the early 90's after a successful breeding season! And they were really close, feeding about 150 meters from the watchtower we were standing on.
- 4. Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***
A small group was seen on the 3rd at Virágoskút Fishponds.
- 5. Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***
Seen twice in the Hortobágy area, lone individuals in both occasions.
- 6. Gadwall *Anas strepera***
Seen in small numbers at different wetland sites in the Hortobágy area.
- 7. Eurasian Wigeon *Anas Penelope***
Small flocks were seen on two dates at Rókás, Tetételn and Kaba sites.
- 8. Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***
Seen daily in big numbers in the Hortobágy area at almost all wetland sites.

9. **Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata***
Seen most of the days in the Hortobágy area. The biggest flock - about 300 – at Kaba, on the 4th.
10. **Northern Pintail *Anas acuta***
Seen only on the 4th at Kaba and Tetétlen respectively.
11. **Common Teal *Anas crecca***
The most common duck species and seen every day in the Hortobágy area. Some days several thousands were seen in big flocks.
12. **Common Pochard *Aythya ferina***
Seen only at Kaba on the 4th, where it was numerous.
13. **Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca***
This beautiful migratory duck was seen well at Kaba on the 4th. Though it is areasonably common breeder and can gather in big flocks in early autumn, before the cold weather numbers drop quickly. Both males and females were observed in a small party of 6.



14. **Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***
About ten individuals were seen on the 4th at Kaba.
15. **Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***
Seen at Kaba where it was common and more than 60 birds were seen.

16. **Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***
About 10 birds were seen at Kaba on the 4th.
17. **Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis***
More than 10 birds were seen at Kaba on the 4th.
18. **European White Stork *Ciconia ciconia***
One was seen on 2nd soaring above the Kondás pond at Hortobágy Fishponds. Later one bird was seen in Bodrogkeresztúr standing on its nest built on the top of a chimney. Though it is an early migrant species and one have to be lucky to find one this time of the year, the latter one is a well known individual overwintering in this village year by year.
19. **Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia***
19 birds were seen feeding in an alkaline pond near Balmazújváros on the 3rd.
20. **Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris***
One bird was seen well as it was flying low above the bulrush vegetation in the evening near Tetétlen on the 4th.



21. **Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax***
Most of them had gone already. Just one juvenile bird was seen at Hortobágy Fishponds on the 3rd.

- 22. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***
Seen daily from 1st to 4th at and around the Hortobágy area, where it was common.
- 23. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea***
Another migrant species which usually leave till the first half of September, though some juvenile bird may stay longer. We found two of these juveniles, one on the 2nd near Nagyiván – which was seen hunting and catching a vole some 30 meters from our car - and the second one on the 4th near Tetétlen.
- 24. Great Egret *Ardea alba***
Seen daily from 1st to 4th at and around the Hortobágy area, where it was common.
- 25. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***
Almost all had gone earlier as it is a migrant species too. Just one was seen on the 4th near Tetétlen.
- 26. Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus***
Eight birds were seen especially well and very close on the 3rd at Hortobágy Fishponds. They were perching on dead trees on a small wetland where water buffalos graze.
- 27. Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***
Several birds were seen around fishponds and other wetlands in the Hortobágy area.
- 28. Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***
Quite common and seen every day.
- 29. Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus***
We were really lucky with this speciality bird as by October usually the bulk of the gathering flocks had gone. We tried a nearby roosting area in the evening of the 4th a bit south of the Hortobágy. We were lucky enough to find three long staying birds of which one adult female was seen very well, perched on a wire.
- 30. Saker *Falco cherrug***
We saw this key species on two dates. On the 1st we had a prolonged view of a circling bird by the motorway during our drive to the Hortobágy. On the 3rd, we saw another bird in the Hortobágy much closer than the previous one.
- 31. White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla***
Seen from 1st till 3rd in the Hortobágy. Maximum number of birds recorded per day was ten on the 2nd.
- 32. Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***
Recorded daily in the Hortobágy and its surrounding.

- 33. Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus***
The first bigger waves of migrating birds had reached already the Hortobágy, so a couple of birds were recorded almost every day in there.
- 34. Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***
From the beginning of the season this woodland breeder becomes common in the lowland as well. It was recorded almost every day during the trip.
- 35. Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***
Common and seen every day.
- 36. Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus***
Recorded on two days near Balmazújváros. On the 2nd two birds were seen, while on the 4th one individual.
- 37. Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca***
One juvenile bird was seen above the drained Kondás pond in the Hortobágy together with several White-tailed Eagles. On the 6th an immature (3 or 4 years old) bird was seen very well sitting on a field at the western foothills of the Zemplén. The same day an adult was also seen nearby circling high in the companion of about a dozen Common Buzzards.
- 38. Great Bustard *Otis tarda***
This shy and magnificent bird was seen very well near Nagyiván in the Hortobágy area on the 3rd. Thanks to the dry weather and good road conditions this time we could obtain reasonably close views without any walking efforts. We saw all together 15 males in two flocks (7+8).
- 39. European Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***
At least 4 birds were seen near Balmazújváros on the 4th, while another 2 were seen near Tetétlen in the evening of the same date.
- 40. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***
Small flocks of mainly juveniles were seen on a couple occasions in the Hortobágy area.
- 41. Common Coot *Fulica atra***
A common bird in the Hortobágy and was seen daily from 1st till 4th.
- 42. Common Crane *Grus grus***
Arguably it is among the biggest birding spectacles when thousands of these magnificent birds arrive to their night roost against the red sky created by the setting sun. One evening about 20.000 birds were seen, but common during the days as well.



43. **Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus***
One was seen very well near Nagyiván on the 3rd.
44. **Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***
About 50 were seen on the Kondás pond at Hortobágy Fishponds, while another 5 at Tetétlen flooded area on the 5th.
45. **Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***
Common in the Hortobágy area from 1st to 4th.
46. **Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola***
Seven birds were seen on the flooded area near Tetétlen on the 4th.
47. **European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria***
Just one was seen at Tetétlen too, flying in a Ruff flock.
48. **Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***
Two birds were seen near Tetétlen in a flooded area on the 4th.
49. **Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius***
Recorded on three dates on the Hortobágy. Daily maximum was 10.
50. **Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus***
We visited the extensive southern grasslands for this species on our first afternoon on the 1st. We found 45 birds in one flock feeding on a sheep grazed, remote area.



- 51. Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***
Common and seen daily in the Hortobágy area.
- 52. Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minmus***
We put some effort to try to find this skulker and eventually we managed to flush a bird in the northern part of the Park at the flooded grasslands of Vókonya on the 3rd.
- 53. Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***
Smaller flocks on the grasslands and bigger ones at different fishpond sites were seen daily in the Hortobágy area.
- 54. Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus***
Recorded in small numbers on the 2nd at various wetland sites, but seen a flock about 100 near Tetétlen on the 4th. On the 7th we saw two birds near Szerencs.
- 55. Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia***
4 were seen on the 2nd and another 5 on the 4th.
- 56. Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus***
Recorded on three dates: one seen on the 2nd near Balmzaújváros and another one was heard there on the 4th. We saw one again on the 7th near Szerencs.
- 57. Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola***
Though it is a very common migrant earlier, by this time of the year it becomes

scarce. We managed to find it on two dates: 2 birds at Rókás in the northern part of the Hortobágy on the 2nd, and 1 near Tetétlen on the 4th.

58. Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

2 birds were seen on the Nagyszik – an alkaline pond near Balmazújváros – on the 2nd, and another 2 on the 4th near Tetétlen in a mixed species wader flock.

59. Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

We were surprised to find one bird on the 4th at the Tetétlen site, as it is an extremely late date to find this otherwise common migrant.

60. Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Smaller and bigger flocks were seen at all the suitable sites in the Hortobágy area, where the biggest flocks were somewhat above 100 birds. On the 7th we saw a lone bird near Szerencs.

61. Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Recorded from 2nd till 4th and it was common at all wetland sites. The biggest flock was about 50 birds near Tetétlen on the 4th.

62. Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

Recorded every day in the Hortobágy where it was common. It was possible to compare side-by-side with the previous species.



- 63. Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis***
Seen on three consecutive days in the Hortobágy area. Best views and the biggest flock (20 birds) were seen at Kaba.
- 64. Common Gull *Larus canus***
A few individuals were seen at most of the fishpond sites in the Hortobágy area.
- 65. Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus***
Very common and seen daily from the 23rd.
- 66. Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***
Seen every day mostly around human habitations and farm buildings.
- 67. Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***
Recorded every day. A particularly big flock – about 400 birds – were seen near Balmazújváros on the 4th.
- 68. Stock Dove *Columba oenas***
About 100 birds were seen on the 1st and another 16 on the 4th.
- 69. Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***
Very common, especially in villages and farmland.
- 70. Little Owl *Athene noctua***
Seen twice in the Hortobágy on farm buildings on the 1st and on the 3rd.
- 71. Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo***
One bird was seen very well on the wall of a quarry in the Zemplén area in the evening of the 6th. Later this individual was heard calling as well.
- 72. Tawny Owl *Strix aluco***
One seen well in the Zemplén Hills on the 6th afternoon.
- 73. Ural Owl *Strix uralensis***
After arriving to the Zemplén Hills on the 5th we spent the evening looking for this huge and enigmatic species. Eventually our efforts were rewarded with superb views of a perched bird sitting motionless about 50 meters from us, letting us to have scope views before flying back into the dense forest. Walking out we heard another 3 Ural Owls calling!



74. Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Fantastic views of 32 birds sitting on acacia trees in their classical roost sites in the neighbourhood of Balmazújváros. One more bird was found sitting on a willow tree on two successive days in the garden of the Trófea lodge.



75. Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

This beautiful bird was seen by the river Bodrog on the 6th.

76. Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

First heard on the 5th in the Zemplén, and seen on the 6th in the northern part of the hills.



77. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

We had very nice and prolonged views of a female on the 5th in the Great Forest near Debrecen. We heard another one on the 6th in the Zemplén Hills.

78. Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*

Two were seen well in the Great Forest near Debrecen, while heard several times later in the Zemplén Hills and seen again in the morning of the 7th near our hotel in Komlóska.

79. Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

An adult female was seen in Hortobágy on the 3rd, and heard on the 6th in Bodrogkeresztúr as well.

80. Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Seen regularly in the Zemplén, but also one at the Hortobágy Foshponds on the 3rd.

- 81. White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos***
In the morning of the 6th we planned a walk for the woodpeckers – and especially for this species – into the northern forests of the Zemplén. Spending some time there we managed to hear two birds feeding nearby. Following them (in a steep hillside) eventually we were rewarded with good views of Europe's rarest woodpecker.
- 82. Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***
First seen in the garden of the Trófea Lodge and later in the Great Forest near Debrecen as well.
- 83. Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus***
We heard one in the evening of the 5th in the Zemplén, and 3 birds were seen on the next day. Two of them (a pair) spent their time in an old orchard feeding on the trees around us, thus let us to have exceptionally good views. On our last day we saw another one near Komlóska.
- 84. Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio***
Though most of them had already gone we hoped to find some juveniles and we did so as we found two on the same day (on the 6th) in the Zemplén.
- 85. Great Grey Shrike *Lanius minor***
Seen a couple of times both in the Hortobágy and in the Zemplén. In the latter we saw three together which is quite unique from this otherwise solitary species.
- 86. Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius***
Common in the Great Forest and in the Zemplén Hills too, but seen and heard regularly elsewhere as well.
- 87. Common Magpie *Pica pica***
Common and seen every day.
- 88. Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula***
Small flocks were seen in the Hortobágy especially near farms or in bigger Rook flocks.
- 89. Rook *Corvus frugilegus***
Very common in the Hortobágy and seen every day. Smaller flocks were seen around the Zemplén as well.
- 90. Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix***
Seen every day.
- 91. Common Raven *Corvus corax***
3 birds were seen (and a few more heard) in the the Zemplén Hills on the 6th.

92. **Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris***
It was common in the Great Forest both on the 4th and the 5th, later seen in the Zemplén Hills too.
93. **Coal Tit *Periparus ater***
Seen only in the 6th in a pine forest patch in the Zemplén Hills.
94. **Great Tit *Parus major***
Common and seen daily.
95. **Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***
Common and seen daily.
96. **Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus***
Though it was heard elsewhere as well, we had good views at Hortobágy Fishpond on the 3rd.
97. **Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica***
Lone birds and smaller migrating flocks were seen in a couple of occasions.
98. **Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus***
About 15 were seen in one flock in the Hortobágy area near Tiszacsege on the 2nd.
Both *ssp. caudatus* and *europaeus* were seen in the flock.
99. **Crested Lark *Galerida cristata***
Seen regularly, especially in the Hortobágy area and also around petrol stations.



- 100. Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis***
Small flocks were seen in the grasslands of the Hortobágy.
- 101. Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus***
Despite of the late date two birds were observed: one on the 3rd near Nagyiván and another on the 4th near Tetétlen.
- 102. Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***
Only heard in the Hortobágy but a few individuals were seen in the Zemplén on the 6th.
- 103. Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita***
Very common.
- 104. Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix***
One was seen on the 3rd at Hortobágy Fishponds on a willow tree.
- 105. Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla***
Seen twice in the Hortobágy area.
- 106. Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus***
Heard in the reed beds of Hortobágy Fishponds and seen there by the Kondás pond on the 2nd.



- 107. Northern Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***
Seen and heard regularly both in the Hortobágy and Zemplén Hills.
- 108. Dunnock *Prunella Modularis***
First seen on the 5th in the Great Forest, and later also in the Zemplén. It was especially common near Szerencs in a weedy area where about 30 birds were seen.
- 109. Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea***
Common in the woods of the Zemplén area and also in the Debrecen Great Forest.
- 110. Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla***
Three birds were seen well in the Debrecen Great Wood on the 5th.
- 111. European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***
Very common and seen every day.
- 112. Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula***
Seen every day in bushy and wooded habitats.
- 113. Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***
Though it was common by call, it was difficult to have eventually good views of some in the gardens of our lodge in the Hortobágy.
- 114. Mistle Thrush *Trudus viscivorus***
One was seen in the Great Forest on the 5th and 3 other in the Zemplén on the 6th.
- 115. European Robin *Erithacus rubecula***
Common in the bush both in the Hortobágy and in the Zemplén as well.
- 116. Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros***
Seen reasonably commonly during the week.
- 117. European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola***
Migrants were commonly seen among weedy vegetation by the roads.
- 118. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***
Common and seen every day.
- 119. Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus***
Common and seen every day.
- 120. White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba***
A very common migrant in the Hortobágy, but a few were seen in the Zemplén as well.

121. Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

Common around different wetlands in the Hortobágy area.



122. Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Only one was seen in the Great Forest near Debrecen on the 5th. The peak of its migration is in early September so this otherwise common migrant had become scarce by this time.

123. Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

It was common around some of the wetlands in the Hortobágy. Often together with the previous species.

124. Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common both in the Hortobágy and in the Zemplén.

125. Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

We had extremely good views of some birds drinking from a small pool in the Debrecen Great Forest where it was otherwise common. Flying birds were commonly seen in the Zemplén as well.



- 126. European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris***
Surprisingly seen only a couple of times and only in low number.
- 127. European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***
Small flying flocks were seen often basically everywhere. Seen perched only a couple of occasions.
- 128. Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus***
Two were seen at Hortobágy Fishponds on the 3rd. On the 5th a flock were seen flying above the forest in the Zemplén.
- 129. Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina***
Seen well at Hortobágy Fishponds on the 3rd. A small flock was observed also on the 7th near Szerencs.
- 130. Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra***
Only a few individuals were seen in the Hortobágy on two dates.
- 131. Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella***
Bigger flocks were seen in the Zemplén area on the 6th.
- 132. Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***
Just a few birds were seen well in the Hortobágy area.

List of other animals recorded

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Common in the Hortobágy and seen daily.

Weasel *Mustela nivalis*

One ran across the road in the Hortobágy on the 3rd.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

One was seen in the Hortobágy on the 1st.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

It was seen regularly in the Hortobágy area and in the Zemplén as well.

Mouflon *Ovis aries orientalis*

Three were seen in the Zemplén on the 6th. (introduced).

Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*

One at the Hortobágy Fishponds.

Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*

A few at the Hortobágy Fishponds.

Fire-bellied Toad *Bombina bombina*

One in the Hortobágy.

European Tree Frog *Hyla arborea*

Heard regularly.

Common Marsh Frog *Pelophylax ridibundus*

Most of the frogs we saw in aquatic habitats were probably of this species but they are included in a difficult complex with Pool and Edible Frog, *P. lessonae* and *P. kl. esculentus*, which are notoriously difficult to separate.

Dalmatian Frog *Rana dalmatina*

One in the Zemplén.

