

HORTOBÁGY-ZEMPLÉN 2012 SPRING TOUR
with **SAKERTOUR**
12-19. May 2012



All pictures by Robin Edwards

Leader: Tamás Zalai

Our 2012 tour was blessed with great weather for most of the tour and we managed to see all available specialties of the region. This tour is running in the middle of May which is one of the most productive periods of the year. We recorded a total of 187 species in just 6 days birding on the 2012 tou! This year's highlights were eight species of woodpeckers including superb views of the rare and declining White-backed Woodpecker; eighteen species of raptors including Eastern Imperial Eagle, Red-footed Falcon and Saker; six species of owls including the enigmatic Ural Owl and other goodies like Little Crake and Corncrake, Collared Pratincole and Great Snipe and a wide range of warblers including River Warbler and Moustached Warbler. Sadly there were no breeding Aquatic Warblers in the

Hortobágy – we will see what will happen in the future with this most sought-after bird. We do hope it is not lost yet!!

Saturday, 12th of May

The group was picked up by the leader and the driver late morning and drove to the Zemplén Hills. This fantastic area in northeastern Hungary is one of the finest birding area in the region. The weather was fine, sunny and warm, which is usual at this time of the year in Hungary.

We did our two hours drive along the M3 motorway to the east towards the World Heritage Tokaj region situated on the most southern tip of the Zemplén Hill range. We only had a short lunch stop on the way where we had a beautiful performance as a Common Buzzard chased by an adult Eastern Imperial Eagle.



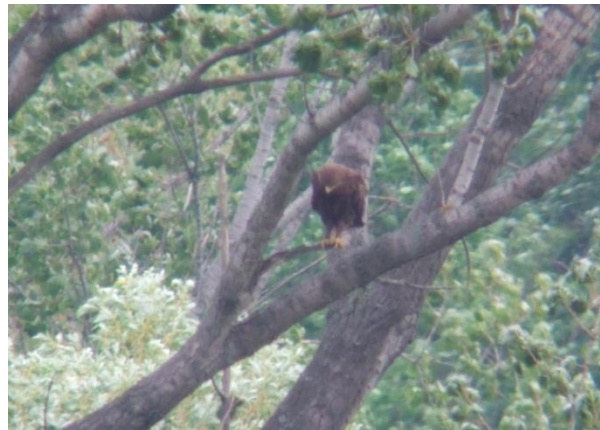
Late afternoon picked up Zoltán Petrovics, our local guide (nicknamed as the ‘woodpeckermen’ for the next two days). We headed immediately to an old quarry, where we had three European Eagle-Owl chicks hidden in a large hole at the edge of the quarry.



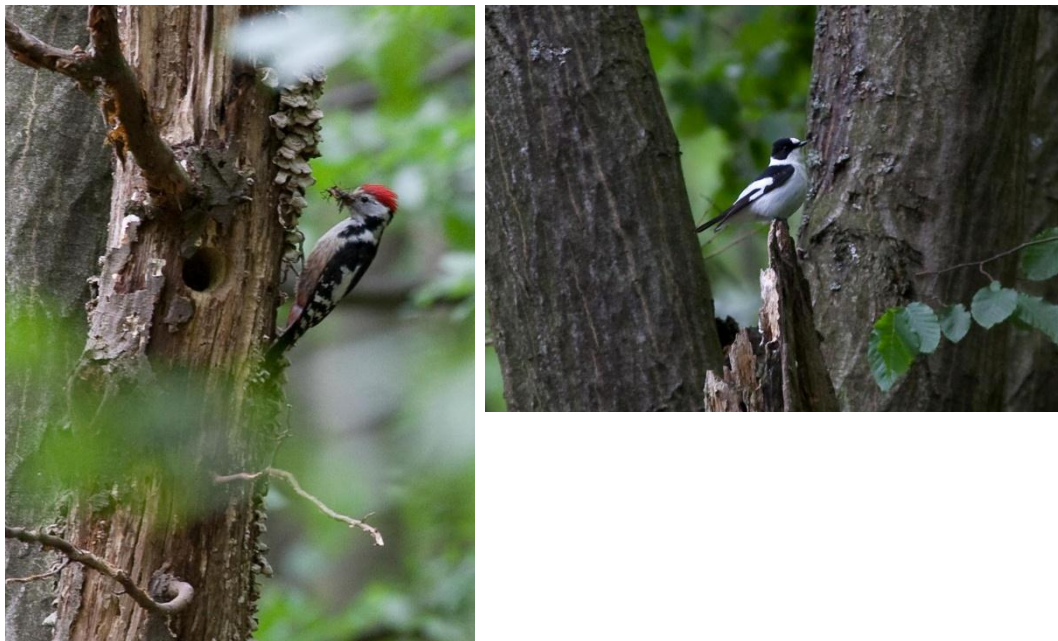
Also had our first encounters with a single Wryneck and at least three Barred Warblers. The afternoon spent in different locations looking mostly for raptors and we managed to find a Short-toed Eagle and a distant Lesser Spotted Eagle. Finally we finished the day with a superb pair of Grey-headed Woodpecker and a fantastic Corncrake! This elusive bird is not always easy to see but Zoli is an expert on this subject as well. Our accommodation was the family-run Solyomvár Hotel in the village of Komlóska- which is the final place on a dead end road and surrounded by forest!

Sunday, 13th of May

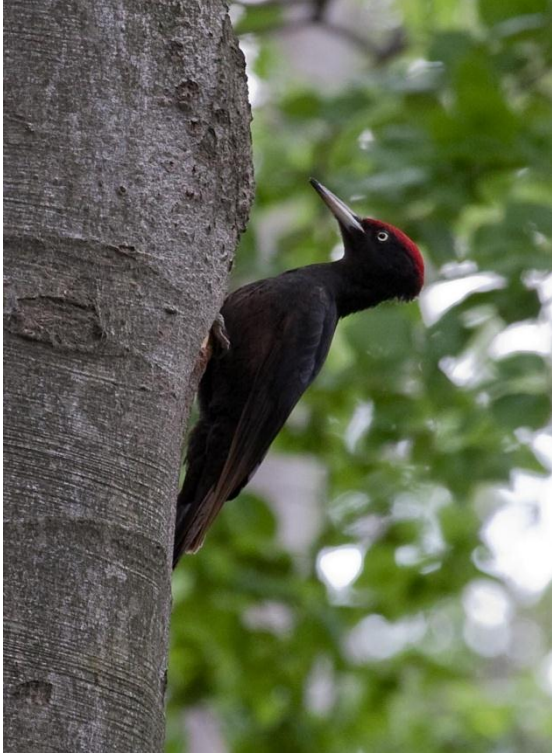
Next day we headed to an active Middle Spotted Woodpecker hole. On the way had a close encounter with an adult Lesser Spotted Eagle which allowed stunning views!



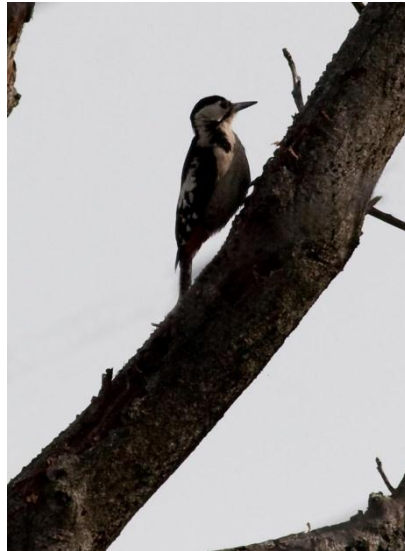
At the valley where the nesting hole is situated we had our first Collared Flycatchers and smart pair of Middle Spotted Woodpecker which was feeding chicks. Still in the same valley had an adult Tawny Owl nesting close by.



Spent the lunchtime at the forested grassland near Erdőbénye, where we had a distant Peregrine, a rare breeding bird in Hungary. After lunch we tried - unsuccessfully - for White-backed Woodpecker but instead had an excellent Ural Owl and a Black Woodpecker. This large owl is a Zemplén specialty with good years (like 2012) up to 80-100 paired breeding. We maintain a nest box system to help the species and the occupation and breeding success both very high.

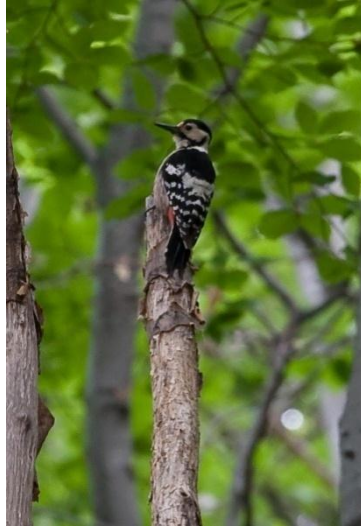


Afternoon we visited Bodrogkiszfalud, where had a pair of Syrian Woodpecker at Zoli's village. Late afternoon the nearby vineyard gave us three Woodlarks and lovely Tawny Pipits.



Monday, 14th of May

Another full day in the Zemplén hills but this time without the help of our local guide, Zoli. We were to track down the rare White-backed Woodpecker today! On our way to the northern Zemplén we had a pair of Golden Eagles circling. As we approached the old but very quiet beech forest almost immediately heard the contact call of a White-backed Woodpecker and within a few minutes the nesting hole was located (found by Zoli a few days before). We could watch this fantastic bird for as long as we wanted as they were feeding their chicks. We also had another Ural Owl but otherwise it was quiet – not as we were complaining!



On the way back had a singing “continental” Willow Tit which finally showed well. A nice lunch break at a lovely riverside restaurant was very welcome and later we headed to check some riverine habitats where immediately had a most obliging River Warbler perched out in the open! Even had a circling Black Kite to our growing raptor list.



In late afternoon we went down to an oxbow lake of the Bodrog River where with a bit of patience eventually all of us had an excellent look of a female Little Crake. This was a much wanted bird for our group this year and needless to say was a great pleasure to finish the day with. On the drive back to the hotel we also had our first encounters with some immature Red-footed Falcons.



The day was not over in the hotel, after a quick shower we were heading to a lovely, family-run winehouse where we sampled the tasty and famous Tokaj wine while having an excellent dinner. The ‘Sun King’ of France (Louis XIVth) said the famous motto when he first tasted the wine from Tokaj: ‘vinum regum rex vinorum’ (the wine of kings and the king of wines). The event was a fitting final to a fantastic birding in the Zemplén Hills!

Tuesday, 15th of May

After breakfast we packed into our minibus and headed to the World Heritage Hortobágy National Park. We had a brief stop in an agricultural area to see the highly localised Short-toed Lark. As we stepped out from the bus heard one singing but took some time until we had a scope view. It is still a question, that the Hungarian population belongs to the endemic race *hungarica* or not. It is a disappointment that this species disappeared from its original breeding grounds (Artemisia steppe) and only breeds on the maze fields nowadays.

For lunch we headed to Tiszacsege where our restaurant situated close to the river Tisza. Before lunch had a singing Icterine Warbler, a distant Black Stork, two White-tailed Eagles and our second Black Kite. From the parking area of the restaurant had a family of Short-toed Treecreepers after our delicious fish soup.



After lunch we headed to the southern part of the Hortobágy National Park to the tranquil and beautiful Angyalfáza puszta (=AngelHouse). Raptors here included a Montagu’s Harrier and an immature Longe-legged Buzzard. It took some time for us but finally we managed to locate a single Eurasian Stone Curlew and a flock of eight breeding plumaged Dotterels! This is a regular passage bird on the autumn migration in this part of the Hortobágy (traditional site) but still very scarce on the spring passage and usually occurs in dry years like 2012.



Late afternoon we arrived to our hotel for a four night stay. Trófea is situated on the south-eastern corner of the Hortobágy near Nádudvar. It has a lovely garden with a pool with lots of birds! Golden Oriole is particularly common and even Little Bittern can be seen with persistence.

Wednesday, 16th of May

After breakfast we headed to the eastern edge of the National Park where an active nest of Saker Falcon was known. 2012 was not a very good breeding year for the species but still several pairs have bred. After a bit of walking we had excellent views of these superb raptors and even saw a male unsuccessfully chasing a Feral Pigeon.



After the Saker experience we visited the southern part of the Hortobágy but stopped en route at a fishpond for Pygmy Cormorant and as a bonus we got to see all three species of “marsh terns”. We tried a dirt track to one of the southern marshes when the rain started so it was better to give up and go to the Hortobágy Fishponds. In the heavy rain the only option was to have a lunch in a covered picnic area and wait...

The rain continued so we decided to watch birds from a shelter. Our new birding lodge at the edge of Balmazújváros is not yet finished but the balcony is already a great place to see waders and various waterbirds. We added Greenshank, Little Stint and Little Gull to our fast growing list.

Thursday, 17th of May

It was still raining in the morning, so we decided to visit an old oak forest in Debrecen. Birding was slow and difficult and we had nothing new though three species of woodpeckers and a Honey Buzzard were some compensation. The lunchtime spent at the Hortobágy Nagycsárda with some local gypsy musicians played the “Skylark” for us.

Finally the rain stopped, so that was the time to do the fishponds again. Despite the strong wind we saw a singing Savi's Warbler, a late migrant Pied Flycatcher, an adult Long-eared Owl with chick, a Little Bittern and some waders such as a very late Whimbrel and Green Sandpiper plus a party of four Broad-billed Sandpipers.



Friday, 18th of May

It was a perfect clear sky early morning so we left the Hortobágy area and visited the wetlands of Bihar ner Földes. First we checked a pool managed with Water Buffalos, but two Black-necked Grebes were the only additions. The other Sakertour group joined us and with the help of Gábor Simay (the other guide) tried to flush a Great Snipe observed here a week ago, but not success this time. Good addition was our only Great Bittern of the tour however. The lunchtime was spent at Kaba where the old sewage ponds of the now abandoned sugar factory still exist. Here we had some Mediterranean Gulls, a single Red-necked Grebe and several Marsh Warblers were singing, but to have good views was unusually hard work. We returned to the Hortobágy after lunch.



After the substantial rain it seemed that the dirt road to the Zám marshes still impossible, but a news break thought that it might be possible. Our driver did his best and within an hour we were at the place where another Great Snipe was seen just a few days back. After a bit of work some of us had excellent flight views of a single bird flushed. An especially nice bonus for Dave.



It was time for us to drive to the western edge of the Hortobágy where our local guide, Gábor Kovács waited for us. We needed to take only a short walk before we watched at least ten displaying Great Bustards. They were not somewhat distant but perfectly enjoyable as they were doing their ‘foam bath’ dancing to impress the bustard ladies. After another successful day we headed back to Nádudvar adding Little Owl on our drive back.

Saturday, 19th of May

There was not much left for us on the last day in terms of available birds but a second visit to the soda pan near Balmazújváros yielded five Temminck’s Stints. We also enjoyed a colony of Red-footed Falcons and Bee-eaters to finish our birding.

On the way back to Budapest we had lunch at the ricefields near Karcag where we added Collared Pratincole, Mute Swan and Common Gull to our final list. From here we headed directly to the airport to catch the afternoon flight.

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING THE TOUR

Abundance scale

(max for any one day)

1 = 1 - 4

2 = 5 - 9

3 = 10 - 99

4 = 100 - 999

5 = 1000+

NO	SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	No. of days recorded	Abundance
1.	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	1	3
2.	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	6	4
3.	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	1	2
4.	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	3	3
5.	Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	2	1
6.	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	6	3
7.	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	4	2
8.	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	3	3
9.	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	3	3
10.	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	2	3

11.	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	1	1
12.	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	1	H
13.	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	8	2
14.	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1	H
15.	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	3	3
16.	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	1	1
17.	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	1	2
18.	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	8	3
19.	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>	5	3
20.	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	1	1
21.	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	3	1
22.	Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	6	3
23.	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	2	1
24.	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	5	2
25.	Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	8	3
26.	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	8	3
27.	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	5	2
28.	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	5	1
29.	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	7	3
30.	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	4	3
31.	European Honey-Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	2	1
32.	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	2	1
33.	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	5	2
34.	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	2	1
35.	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	8	3
36.	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	1	1
37.	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	2	1
38.	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	3	1
39.	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	8	3
40.	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	1	1
41.	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	2	1
42.	Eastern Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	1	1
43.	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	1	1
44.	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	7	3
45.	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	6	3
46.	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	2	1
47.	Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	1	1
48.	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1	1

49.	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	3	1
50.	Little Crake	<i>Porzana parva</i>	2	1
51.	Corncrake	<i>Crex crex</i>	1	1
52.	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	3	1
53.	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	4	3
54.	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	4	3
55.	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	1	3
56.	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	3	3
57.	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	3	3
58.	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>	1	1
59.	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	1	2
60.	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	4	2
61.	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	2	2
62.	Eurasian Dotterel	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>	1	2
63.	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	8	3
64.	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	3	3
65.	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	1	2
66.	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	1	2
67.	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	4	4
68.	Broad-billed Sandpiper	<i>Limicola falcinellus</i>	1	1
69.	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	4	4
70.	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	2	1
71.	Great Snipe	<i>Gallinago media</i>	1	1
72.	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	4	3
73.	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	1	1
74.	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	1	3
75.	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	3	1
76.	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	5	2
77.	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	3	1
78.	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	1	1
79.	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	4	3
80.	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1	1
81.	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	1	1
82.	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	2	1
83.	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	6	4
84.	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	1	1
85.	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	5	3
86.	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	3	3

87.	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	6	3
88.	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	3	3
89.	White-winged Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	3	1
90.	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	8	3
91.	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	3	3
92.	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	8	3
93.	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	8	3
94.	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	8	3
95.	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	8	2
96.	Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	1	H
97.	Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	1	1
98.	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	2	1
99.	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	2	1
100.	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>	2	1
101.	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	1	1
102.	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	3	1
103.	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	5	3
104.	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	3	1
105.	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	6	2
106.	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	5	1
107.	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	2	1
108.	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picas viridis</i>	6	1
109.	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	4	1
110.	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	7	1
111.	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	1	1
112.	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	2	1
113.	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	1	1
114.	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	1	1
115.	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	6	2
116.	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	1	1
117.	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	7	3
118.	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	3	4
119.	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	8	3
120.	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	8	3
121.	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	2	1
122.	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	2	1
123.	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	8	3
124.	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	2	2

125.	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	8	2
126.	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	1
127.	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	2	1
128.	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	8	2
129.	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	5	1
130.	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	8	3
131.	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	2	1
132.	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	8	2
133.	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	8	2
134.	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	8	2
135.	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	7	2
136.	Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	1	H
137.	River Warbler	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>	1	1
138.	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	3	1
139.	Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>	1	1
140.	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	4	2
141.	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	6	2
142.	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	1	2
143.	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	4	2
144.	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>	4	1
145.	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	7	2
146.	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	1	1
147.	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	3	1
148.	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	2	1
149.	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	1	1
150.	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	5	2
151.	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	3	1
152.	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	2	1
153.	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	5	1
154.	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	3	2
155.	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	1	1
156.	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	1	1
157.	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	4	2
158.	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>	4	2
159.	Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>	1	1
160.	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	2	1
161.	European Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	2	2
162.	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	7	2

163.	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	3	2
164.	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1	1
165.	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	1	2
166.	Eurasian Penduline-Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	2	1
167.	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	8	3
168.	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	7	3
169.	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	4	1
170.	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	4	2
171.	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	8	3
172.	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	5	3
173.	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	5	4
174.	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	8	3
175.	Northren Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	3	2
176.	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	8	3
177.	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	8	3
178.	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	8	3
179.	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	8	3
180.	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	5	2
181.	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	8	3
182.	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	8	3
183.	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	7	2
184.	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	4	3
185.	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	5	2
186.	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	3	2
187.	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	8	2

This list represents those birds seen by any of the party members of this tour.
H means in the last column, that species was only heard.

