



Marbled Polecat (Zoltán Gergely Nagy)

ROMANIA MAMMAL TOUR with **SAKERTOOURS** 24th of August 1st of September 2024

Leader: Zoltán Gergely Nagy

Assisted by: Zsolt Babos, Zsolt Hegyeli, Csaba Jére and János Oláh

In 2024 we have concluded our 5th Romania Mammal Tour, a trip that is a great (and mammal packed) adventure for any mammal lover. After last year's absolute record of 60 species seen, we knew it would be hard to see even more. We didn't manage, but we came tantalisingly close at 58 species during the 9 days/8 nights of the tour! There was one heard-only bat species which we do not count.

With species like Wild Boar and Brandt's Myotis – species we have seen on all previous tours – we would have equalled the record already, but they eluded us this year! We had a great tour however and everybody was happy to 'trade in the record' for a stunning Marbled Polecat sighting that lasted for seven minutes allowing unforgettable views, or a European Mink sighting, although that was only a brief look for only one side of the boat. Some of the other goodies included the very localised Romanian Hamster – a species we have seen every year since 2021, Forest Dormouse, 48 individual Brown Bears, and by joining the research work of the small mammal biologist Zsolt Hegyeli and the bat specialist Csaba Jére, we had great views of Northern Birch Mouse, Miller's Water Shrew among 5 shrew species as well as Geoffroy's Myotis and even the scarce Bechstein's Myotis among the 9 species of bats that were caught on our night out in the Varghis Gorge.

Dobruja and the Danube Delta

The tour started in Bucharest Airport and our first destination was in the Dobrudja region, near Constanta. This year again we had pleasant warm weather with clear skies in this part of Romania, making the mammal watching more enjoyable at night. On the first we realized that there were much fewer Romanian Hamsters around compared to last year – probably a natural cycle for this little studied, scarce mammal. Still, one individual was seen by a few participants right at the end of the first night session. Other species included 3 Northern White-breasted Hedgehogs, 14 Red Foxes and 22 European Hares. However, the first night (and perhaps the entire tour) was stolen by a stunning Marbled Polecat, that we managed to approach, observe (for 7 minutes), and even photograph quite well! We have been dreaming about this moment since we started our mammal tours in 2020!



Marbled Polecat (top, tour participant Michael Dvorak) Red Fox(left) and Northern White-breasted Hedgehog (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

After our 'usual' late breakfast the following day we went out for some sea watching to the Black Sea coast, but unfortunately, we did not see the endemic to the Black Sea subspecies of the Harbour Porpoise. Still, we were in an especially biodiverse region, with plenty of migrating birds on the marshlands. We were in habitat for Steppe Polecats and Golden Jackal but no daytime sightings. In the meantime, Zsolt and János has located an active colony of Lesser Mole-rats and has carefully prepared a promising area for viewing. We all lined up motionless on a field (to the curiosity of local people passing by) and after about half an hour we were rewarded with an unmistakable face looking out from its burrow, the elusive and strange-looking Lesser Mole-Rat.



Lesser Mole-rat (top) Red-backed Shrike with prey (left) and wetland habitat with waders (right) (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

On the second night of the trip, we started out by identifying the bats that were hunting right outside our accommodation just after sunset. We had mostly Nathusius Pipistrelles and at least one Common

Pipistrelle too, identified with the help of the Echo Meter Touch 2 Pro – no surprise there as they are amongst the more common bats of the region. Later in the evening we have made a special effort to find Romanian Hamster for everybody, and at late night we were finally rewarded with a very tame individual that offered some fantastic views! So eventually one of the key mammals of the tour was seen by all and very well! Additions for the trip were two Mound-building Mice, a Badger and 9 Golden Jackals –we were exploring larger area and a variety of different habitats.



Romanian Hamster (top) bat watching (left) and Steppe or Mound-building Mouse (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

Next day was hot and summery, so visiting a cool and interesting cave was a good daytime programme. 30 years ago, this cave still had large numbers of overwintering Mehely's Horseshoe Bats but nowadays they are not present (or very rare) nevertheless we were keen to have a good look at the horseshoe bat we found there, which was a Greater Horseshoe Bat. Other species were Greater Mouse-eared Myotis, and at least 35 Schreiber's Bent-winged Bats. The nice and cool watermelon tasted great after the cave

visit! Next, we were focusing on finding European Ground Squirrels – a locally common species in the steppes and fields in this part of Dobrudja, but they are always quite tricky to see at this time of the year as they are getting ready for their long hibernation. After checking out multiple areas and a bit of perseverance, we finally managed to see 3 individuals in total.



Greater Horseshoe Bat (top) European Suslik (left) and a Schreiber's Bent-winged Bat (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

After the visit to the steppes, we made our way to the port in Tulcea and boarded our floating hotel that would be our home for the next two nights. As we made our way slowly into the Danube Delta towards our pre-planned anchoring location we relaxed on deck. Right after dusk we were out and exploring the delta and as usual there was plenty of wildlife to see during the first night. We managed to see 3 Golden Jackals, 3 Raccoon Dogs, 2 Stone Martens, 3 Otters, 2 Muskrats, and several Brown Rats and lots of Daubenton's Bats. Even though chances of seeing a European Mink is small (but real), the two nights in the delta always a memorable and special part of the tour!



Golden Jackal (top), Common Muskrat (left) and a Dice Snake with prey (right) (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

The next day we went for a shorter excursion with the boat, visiting some of the larger lakes as well as some channels where Golden Jackal and Wildcat are possible even during the day. No Mammals were seen, but the stunning birdlife and wild habitats of the Danube Delta offered spectacular views, and it was great to see the home of the very rare European Mink during the day.

After our evening meal we were out again and soon had a sighting of a European Mink, a very close but sadly very brief sighting, so not everybody could get on it. We kept trying but no more Minks were found. We had 2 Wildcats, 3 Stone Martens, a Golden Jackal, 3 Common Voles, a Long-tailed Field Mouse, 3 Striped Field Mice, and a Common Shrew that Zsolt Babos managed to catch by running after it so we could ID it in hand, along with the usual large amount of Brown Rats. We have also seen Nathusius Pipistrelles and at least one Soprano Pipistrelle, along with tens of Daubenton's Bats.



Raccoon Dog (top) White Pelicans and Pygmy Cormorants (left) and a Brown Rat in the Danube Delta (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

Transylvania

After a late breakfast on day 5 we arrived back to Tulcea and set off to a forested area where we have a set of nest boxes for Forest Dormouse. Our pre-tour survey has located a box that was in use and we were hopeful they are still around. They were and we managed to get excellent looks of this beautiful mammal. In fact, as we headed towards Transylvania later in the evening, we managed to see Hazel and Edible Dormouse too! Three species of dormice in one evening! Crossing the Carpathians is always a special part of the tour, the change in elevation and habitats always results in an action-packed night and spectacular encounters. As usual, we arrived quite late at night to Zetea, our base in Transylvania for the remainder of the tour. The absolute highlight was seeing 21 Brown Bears, some in the remote mountainous areas, and some near some villages at the foothills. We always felt that Lynx and Wolf could be possible but we had no luck with these elusive predators on our tours yet. A chance encounter is always possible, but winter and early spring looks like a better period for these top predators.



Eurasian Forest Dormouse (top) and Hazel Dormouse (János Oláh).

Besides the bears, we had seen 4 European Wildcats, the first one even before it got dark, 2 Eurasian Badgers, 17 Roe Deer, more than 20 Red Deer, 6 European Hares, a Yellow-necked Field Mouse, 3 Edible Dormice and 2 Hazel Dormice, more than 10 Red Foxes as well as a Northern White-breasted Hedgehog.



Brown bear near a village (top), Eurasian Wildcat (left) and a Eurasian Badger (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

On the next day after breakfast, we headed out to meet Zsolt Hegyeli, a biologist and leading mammal expert from Romania. Zsolt has been doing his annual trapping in one of his study areas and put out some traps in the previous evening in a variety of habitats and has managed to catch 10 different species of small mammals in just one night. We had good looks of Field Vole, Common Vole, European Water Vole, Bank Vole, Yellow-necked Field Mouse, Striped Field Mouse, Common Shrew, Eurasian Pygmy Shrew, Bicolored Shrew and a Eurasian Water Shrew, before they were set free. It was an amazingly productive session for Zsolt and for us! Seeing four species of shrews was special!

Next, we entered a local dam that is a roosting place for Lesser Horseshoe Bats in winter. As it was still a little bit early in the season, before the first real cold snaps, we only managed to find 3 individuals. Luckily one was roosting on a metal structure not too high on the ceiling and offered some really good views.



Yellow-necked Field Mouse (top) European Water Vole (left) and a Common Shrew (János Oláh)

In the afternoon, we headed towards the Varghis (Vargyas) Gorge and its spectacular caves. We met Csaba Jére, a biologist and bat expert from Romania who has been monitoring the bats of the gorge for many years. As we started our bat netting activity the weather stayed calm and rain free until quite late in the evening when a sudden shower reduced the activity and compelled us to start heading back. Still, we had a really good time, netting the resident Schreiber's Bent-winged Bats, Greater and Lesser Mouse-Eared Myotis early on, and later we had 3 Geoffroy's, 1 Alcahoë Whiskered and 1

Bechstein's Myotis, 3 Western Barbastelles, 4 Common Noctules, and 2 Common Pipistrelles. In total 9 species of bats in just a few hours – a pretty good result and a really great experience!



Bechstein's Bat (top) and Common Noctule (left) in the Varghis Gorge and Lesser Horseshoe Bat (János Oláh).

As we were heading back to our base, we met with Zsolt Hegyeli again who has caught a Miller's Water Shrew and a Least Weasel as well. It was great to see them both just before they were set free. The long nights of the past few days were catching up with us and it was time to head for bed. Not for long though as Zsolt has been checking his traps every three hours and he got something exciting. After catching a Northern Birch Mouse last year, he did it again! This small mouse with an exceptionally long tail is localised, and hard to catch in Romania. The *Sicista* genus is difficult to observe without trapping and it is a family on its own – special one for mammal family collectors! He had two more additions to our tour: European Mole and a Harvest Mouse. The latter we sometimes find on the night sessions, but this year we only had this individual caught with the traps.



Northern Birch Mouse (János Oláh).



Northern Chamois (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

We left Zsolt behind and headed to the scenic Bicaz Gorge. After a brief scan we were lucky and spotted 3 Northern Chamois, of the *Carpatica* race, endemic to the Carpathian Mountains. Our views were a little distant, but it was nice to see them feeding and moving around on the cliffs and the steep meadows. After a little rest and an afternoon meal we went out in search of the large carnivores of the Harghita Mountains. We managed to see 16 Bears, as well as more than 30 Roe Deer, over 50 Red Deer, 15 Red Foxes, 14 European Hares, 2 Hazel Dormice, a Northern White-Breasted Hedgehog and a very distant Eurasian Beaver.



Brown Bear (top,), Bear cub chasing Red Fox (left) and the atmosphere in the hide (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

The next day, the last full day of the trip we have visited a hide for Red Squirrels, where after a brief period of waiting we managed to see 2 individuals. Sadly, no Brandt's Myotis were roosting under one of the side covers of the hide, so we missed out on this species this year. In the afternoon we have visited a hide for Brown Bears, where we saw 6 bears in total and two Red Foxes that were circling

around them when they visited. After our session with the bears, we made our way towards a local stream, hoping to catch better views of Eurasian Beavers. We were lucky, as we had brief, but very close views of an individual as it was making its way upstream.



Common Hamster was the last new mammal species for the tour (Zolán Gergely Nagy).

On the last day of the trip, on our way to Bucharest we usually try to see one more nice species, the Common Hamster. Just as in the past couple of years, our colleague, Szabolcs Kovacs made his way down to the hamster habitats a day earlier and with the help of traps managed to catch two individuals. When we met him, we had great views of the second hamster species of the tour. The second hamster casually walked back into its burrow, but the first individual that we released lived up to the aggressive reputation of Common Hamsters, growling, attacking Szabolcs and throwing karate-kicks as it was jumping around. After this display he quickly hurried back to its burrow too, but the whole experience propelled him onto our top 5 list of mammals of the trip – probably helped by the ‘last seen bias’, as it was the last mammal of the trip, closing the list at 58 species seen.

It was time to say goodbye to most people as the tour has ended, but for some an exciting extension was just about to start. Romania has proven to be very rewarding for the dedicated mammal watchers again, with its diverse and often healthy habitats that shelter so much wildlife. The combination of Dobrudja with the Danube Delta and Transylvania provides uniquely varied opportunities for mammal watching in Europe, and the sheer number of ‘mega’ species possible means that chances are high that at least one or two of them will be seen every year on this tour. The biggest surprise this year has undoubtedly been the Marbled Polecat. We knew (or were hoping) that one day, one of the mammal tours will see one and 2024 was the year! Of course, the chance is there again next year but it is most likely not going to be a regular mammal as it is rare and secretive. Surely the 2025 tour will have some other exciting surprises for us!

As in every year, a special thank you to all the participants for joining this great adventure and doing such amazing work, and a big thank you to the biologists Zsolt Hegyeli and Csaba Jére, and the entire Sakertours team for the help and support, especially János Oláh, Zsolt Babos, Szabolcs Kovács, Milán Sebestyén and Balázs Sebestyén. We are looking forward to a great adventure in 2025 as well!

In 2025 we are not doing any new extensions but are ready to repeat the Grey Dwarf Hamster extension if there are at least two participants interested!

After the secret vote of the participants, the TOP5 mammals of the tour were:

- 1) Marbled Polecat
- 2) Romanian Hamster
- 3) Forest Dormouse
- 4) Brown Bear
- 5) Common Hamster



European Suslik habitat, Cheia Gorge, Dobrudja (János Oláh).

MAMMALS –list of species recorded on the 2024 tour (58 species seen, 1 heard only)

European Hare *Lepus europaeus karpathorum*

A commonly encountered species on the tour. We saw a total of 67, slightly more than last year. There were 41 in the Dobrudja area and a further 25 in Transylvania.

Eurasian Beaver *Castor fiber* (reintroduced)

In total 2 individuals were seen on the tour, all of them in Transylvania. One individual has been seen from a distance in a small lake, the second individual was swimming in a small stream.

Northern Birch Mouse *Sicista betulina*

One individual was caught in the traps in Transylvania. A very rare and localized species in Romania. It is a rather difficult mammal family to come across because they are very secretive.

Lesser Mole-rat *Nannospalax leucodon*

One was seen in the Dobrudja area. Any mammals living permanently under ground are notoriously difficult to see but with persistence and special techniques you do have a chance to see them. In 2025 we are running a Mole-rat Tour to Romania for some rare cousins!



Striped Field Mouse (left) and Romanian Hamster (right) (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

Romanian Hamster *Mesocricetus newtoni*

In total three individuals were seen on the tour, all of them in the Dobrudja region. This rarely seen hamster species only lives in the Dobrudja region of Romania and in a few spots in Bulgaria. It has a mostly nocturnal lifestyle, using steppe grasslands and agricultural fields, but it is very localized. This year there were much fewer individuals on the steppes and fields where we usually see them.

Common Hamster *Cricetus cricetus*

The last new mammal species (number 58) of the tour was trapped and released in southern Transylvania, as we were driving to the airport. Szabolcs Kovács has caught 2 individuals through the night, and we released them back to their holes. This hamster species is larger than the Romanian Hamster, and although it is more widely distributed it is an endangered mammal species nowadays.

Common Muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus* (introduced)

Two individuals were seen, both were swimming across the channels in the Danube Delta.

Field (Short-tailed) Vole *Microtus agrestis*

A single individual was seen, caught in the traps in Transylvania.

Common Vole *Microtus arvalis* / **Sibling Vole** *Microtus levis*

In total 4 individuals were seen, 3 in the Danube Delta and one was caught with the traps in Transylvania by the biologists. Without DNA analysis these two species are impossible to tell apart.

European Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius*

A single individual was caught in the traps in Transylvania by the biologists.

Bank Vole *Clethrionomys glareolus*

A single individual was caught in the traps in Transylvania. Common species in the coniferous forests.

Eurasian Harvest Mouse *Micromys minutus*

A single individual was seen, caught in the traps in Transylvania.



Eurasian Harvest Mouse (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*

It was common in the Danube Delta on the night sessions, we counted minimum over 16 individuals.

Long-tailed Field Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus*

In total only 1 individual was seen, during the night sessions in the Danube Delta. Usually, we see more individuals of this relatively common species.

Yellow-necked Field Mouse *Apodemus flavicollis*

In total 4 individuals of this species have been seen on the tour, all of them in Transylvania. One individual was caught with the traps by the biologists.



Eurasian Pygmy Shrew (top), Bank Vole (left) and House Mouse in Transylvania (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

Striped Field Mouse *Apodemus agrarius*

A total of 4 individuals were seen on the tour. Three individuals were swimming across the channels in the Danube Delta, and one individual was caught in the traps by the biologists in Transylvania.

The striped field mouse has an extensive but disjunct distribution, split into two ranges. The first reaches from central and eastern Europe to Lake Baikal (Russia) in the north, and China in the south. The second includes parts of the Russian Far East and from there reaches from Mongolia to Japan. Its

expansion across Eastern Europe appears to be relatively recent. The species is thought to have reached Austria in the 1990s.

House Mouse *Mus musculus*

In total two individuals have been seen, both of them were caught quite close to the Harghita Bear Lodge in Transylvania.

Mound-building Mouse (Steppe) *Mus spicilegus*

A very common species in the steppe area of Dobrudja, with only (and unusually) 2 individuals seen this year. One of them has also been caught on the field and later released.

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*

Still common in the forests of Transylvania, in total 2 individuals have been seen, near a feeder in Transylvania at a forest photography hide.



Eurasian Red Squirrel (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

European Suslik *Spermophilus citellus*

The most widespread ground squirrel species in Europe is very common in the steppes of Dobrudja. We had seen 3 individuals on the tour at two locations.

Fat (Edible) Dormouse *Glis glis*

In total 3 individuals have been seen in Transylvania on the night sessions, all of them during the first night in Transylvania, when we crossed the Carpathian Mountains at night.

Hazel Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*

A total of 4 individuals were seen on the night sessions in Transylvania. There were most probably more that have gotten away before we could have identified them. It is the only living species of the genus and the distribution is across Europe from the UK to Russia. They make their own little nest and hibernate starting in October.



Hazel Dormouse (János Oláh).

Eurasian Forest Dormouse *Dryomys nitedula*

Two individuals were seen in Dobrudja while checking some nest boxes. A fantastic little creature and an Eastern European specialty.

Northern White-breasted Hedgehog *Erinaceus roumanicus*

A commonly encountered species, and this year we saw 7 on the tour. Taxonomically, it was considered to be a subspecies of *E. europaeus* for some time, and later a subspecies of *E. concolor*. Since the 1990s, it has been considered a separate species.

Common Shrew *Sorex araneus*

One individual was caught in the Danube Delta by hand and one with the traps in Transylvania.

Eurasian Pygmy Shrew *Sorex minutus*

One individual was caught with the traps in Transylvania.

Bicolored Shrew *Crocidura leucodon*

One individual was caught with the traps in Transylvania. ID from *C. suaveolens* can be tricky.

Eurasian Water Shrew *Neomys fodiens*

A large and superb looking shrew! One individual was caught with the traps in Transylvania.

Miller's Water Shrew *Neomys milleri*

Another good looking shrew! One individual was caught with the traps in Transylvania. ID from *N. fodiens* can be tricky, luckily, we had Zoltan Hegyeli at hand explaining the differences.



Miller's Water Shrew (Zoltan Gergely Nagy).

European Mole *Talpa europea*

One individual was caught with the traps in Transylvania.

Greater Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*

One individual was seen in a cave in Dobrudja.

Lesser Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*

In total we have seen 3 individuals inside a small dam where the bats gather to overwinter.

Schreiber's Bent-winged Bat *Miniopterus schreibersii*

It was the most numerous bat species on the tour. We have observed 35+ in the cave in Dobrudja and another 15+ were seen in the Varghis Gorge area. We have also trapped several. This species is a fast

flyer (60-80km/hour) and has got very long wings. The only species in Europe where the end of the wing folds in hence the name 'bent-winged bat'. It is classified as Near Threatened.

Common Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*

These large bats are often seen flying at dusk, and were observed only in a cave in the Varghis Gorge this year, where we have caught 4 individuals.



Common Noctule (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

Lesser Noctule *Nyctalus leisleri* – HEARD ONLY

One individual was detected in the Danube Delta with the help of the Echo Meter Touch 2 Pro, but we were unable to see the bat unfortunately, so it is only counted as 'Heard'.

Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Three individuals were seen on the tour, one individual in the Dobrudja, and one individual has been caught in the Varghis Gorge.

Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

At least one individual was seen hunting above the lakes and channels of the Danube Delta.

Nathusius's Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii*

This small bat was widespread in Dobrudja, and it was the second most common bat species seen in the Danube Delta, with over 13 individuals seen. It was seen in Transylvania too.

Western Barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*

In total 3 individuals have been seen on the tour; they have been caught in the Varghis Gorge. It is always a pleasure to this fantastic bat.



Western Barbastelle (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

Geoffroy's Myotis *Myotis emarginatus*

In total 3 individuals were trapped and seen in Varghis Gorge in Transylvania. It has a special ear-shape hence the Hungarian name 'Truncated' Bat.

Alcathoe Whiskered Myotis *Myotis alcathoe*

A single individual was trapped and seen in Varghis Gorge in Transylvania. A scarce bat in Europe and we have been lucky to see it on most of our tours.

Bechstein's Myotis *Myotis bechsteinii*

We have trapped and seen 1 individual in the Varghis Gorge. An amazing mammal species with huge ears (only the *Plecotus* bats have larger ears) and it is severely declining and now considered as Vulnerable. We have seen this scarce species on every tour since we started the mammal tours and a top tour target.

Daubenton's Myotis *Myotis daubentonii*

The most common bat species seen in the Danube Delta, we could see them hunt all around our boat. We saw tens of individuals on the tour. It is always associated with water and their main prey items

are flies, midges and caddisflies. They roost in tree holes and there is plenty of suitable habitat for them in the delta.

Lesser (Mouse-eared) Myotis *Myotis blythii*

A large sized bat resembles the following species which is more common. It is possible to ID in the hand. They usually whiter below, have a pale spot on the top of the head, the ears are slimmer and the top of the tragus usually not dark. We have trapped and seen 10 individuals in the Varghis Gorge. It is classified as Near Threatened.

Greater (Mouse-eared) Myotis *Myotis myotis*

A large and common bat species. We have seen a total of at least 19 individuals. At least 4 were seen in the cave in Dobrudja and 15 individuals were trapped in the Varghis Gorge.



Common Pipistrelle (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus moreoticus*

A locally common species in Dobrudja, were a total of 13 were seen on the tour. This species was once sporadic in Romania but since the late 1990's their numbers increased in the Dobrudja area and especially in the Danube Delta and around the lagoon system to the south where suitable reed beds (hiding places) can be found. In the lagoon system the extension of reed beds rapidly increased when the lagoons were blocked from the sea and the brackish water became increasingly less salty (almost freshwater for most lagoons nowadays). Both Wild Boar and Golden Jackal found refuge in the reed beds and their numbers started to increase.

Raccoon Dog *Nyctereutes procyonoides* (introduced)

An introduced mammal in Romania and the main stronghold is in the Danube Delta. On our night session we spotlighted 3 individuals this year. This species is native to Asia (Eastern Siberia, China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan) and was introduced to Europe and Russia between 1927 and 1957 by the fur-farming industry.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

A commonly encountered species on the tour. We saw a total of 55 individuals on the tour. There were 21 in the Dobrudja area and a further 34 in Transylvania. magical sighting in perfect afternoon light from our bear hide where could see interaction between the two species. Young bear cubs were chasing the Red Foxes.



Western Roe Deer (left) and Western Red Deer (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

European Wildcat *Felis silvestris*

In total 6 individuals were seen on the tour, 2 in the Danube Delta, and 3 in Transylvania during the night sessions. Sadly, even the healthy population of Wildcat in the Danube Delta has increasing hybridization.

Stone (Beech) Marten *Martes foina*

In total 5 individuals were observed on the tour, all of them on the channels in the Danube Delta at night. It is a fairly common species around villages, but they are infrequently seen due to their secretive and nocturnal habits.

Marbled Polecat *Vormela peregusna*

One individual was seen in the steppes of Dobrudja. It was probably out hunting late into the night, and not shy at all, providing an unforgettable sighting. A much sought-after mammal in Europe and not easy to see. Sakertours is working now on a possibility to look for this species for those who register their interest with us. If a den is found, we organize a tour in short notice! Get in touch with our office if you wish to be on the list of mammal watchers to be notified in case of such an opportunity would come!



Another image of the Marbled Polecat (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).

Least Weasel *Mustela nivalis nivalis*

One individual was caught accidentally in the traps in Transylvania. It was safely released shortly after.

European Mink *Mustela lutreola*

One individual was seen in the Danube Delta, running along one of the channels. This exceptionally rare and elusive animal has a real stronghold in the Danube Delta, but even here it is quite hard to see. Unfortunately, this year it was an unlucky very short encounter.

Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra*

In total 3 individuals were seen, all of them in the Danube Delta. They are widespread in Romania in all sorts of habitat but difficult to observe in riverine habitat and somehow in the Danube Delta they tend to be very shy.

Eurasian Badger *Meles meles*

A total of 3 individual were seen, 1 in the Danube Delta and 2 in Transylvania at night. They are rather secretive in Eastern Europe due to hunting pressure.

Brown Bear *Ursus arctos arctos*

The nominate race occurs in the Carpathians. We saw 46 individuals in total, 8 at our special bear hide on the last afternoon and there were 38 more sightings at night, all in Transylvania. Romania has the largest population in Europe.

Northern Chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra carpatica*

We made a visit to the scenic Bicaz Gorge where we managed to see 3 individuals on the cliffs. This is the *carpatica* race in Romania.

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

In total we have observed 56 individuals. One of the most common mammal, and we often see them on our birdwatching tours as well. They are active at daytime as well but most of our sightings were at night and especially at dawn. They are the main prey item for Eurasian Lynx in the Carpathians.

Western Red Deer *Cervus elaphus hippelaphus*

The Red Deer were preparing for their autumn rut, and despite not hearing them at all on the tour, we could see that their antlers have fully grown, and they are ready for the mating season to start. In total we saw 85 individuals, all of them in Transylvania.



Brown Bear at night (Zoltán Gergely Nagy).



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sakertour.office@gmail.com



Grey Dwarf Hamster Extension in 2024

In some years we are offering a possible extension to our main tour. In 2024 we were trying to see the Grey Dwarf Hamster which is a rare mammal in Europe and the only chance to look for it would be in Romania or Moldova. Our friend and mammal expert Zsolt Hegyeli as a preparation of this extension already spent a week in spring to locate the hamster where it has been confirmed from pellets. He was very lucky as he managed to catch one! This was the first ever live specimen to my knowledge of recent times (last 50 years). So, following this recce and his steps we were keen to go and had high hopes in September. The extension was right after the main tour between the 1st and 5th of September. We were not disappointed as we got VERY lucky with a Grey Dwarf Hamster caught right on the very first morning of the extension. Wow! Seeing this European rarity was fantastic and after a few minutes we released it at the same spot where it was caught. We even changed scenery to try other things, and we were rewarded with Ural Field Mouse *Apodemus uralensis* for our efforts! All in all, our 2024 extension gave two localised mammals to the participants!



Grey Dwarf Hamster (János Oláh).



Ural Field Mouse (János Oláh).

We will be running a Romanian Mole-rat Special Tour in April 2025 where we going to target four species of Mole-rats:

- Méhely's Blind Mole-rat – *Spalax antiquus*
- Bukovina Blind Mole-rat – *Spalax graecus*
- Lesser Blind Mole-rat – *Nannospalax leucodon*
- Transylvanian Blind Mole-rat – *Nannospalax transsylvanicus*

This tour is not planned to be repeated in near future so if you are interested to see some special mammals in Europe come and join us!

For more infos check out our website:

<https://www.sakertour.com/mammal-watching-tours/#special-mole-rat-romania-tour-2025>