



Bearded Tit is a superb bird and easily seen in Central Europe (János Oláh)!

HUNGARY & TRANSYLVANIA

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LEADER: JÁNOS OLÁH

Birdquest has been operating tours to Hungary since 1991 being one of the few pioneers to enter the eastern block. In the last 25 years the country has changed significantly. Getting out of the grip of communism it took many years to restore the normal life but nowadays a new generation in power and the country shook of the last bits of the 'inheritance' too. The long and exciting history of the area also adds to the atmosphere of the tour. Apart from birds we sample the World Heritage Tokaj wines and visit the birthplace of Dracula as well as taste the local food in each of the visited area from the Hortobágy pancake to the local billberry brandy. The tour itinerary has been changed a few times over the years but nowadays the combination of Hungary and Transylvania seems to be a settled and well established one, and offers an amazing list of European birds. This is a perfect introduction to birders visiting Europe for the first time but also offers some difficult-to-see birds for those who birded the continent before. But apart from birds it is also a great tour to see a wide range of habitats from the Hungarian 'puszta' to the cool pine forests of Transylvania. Central and Eastern Europe has a great variety of bird species including lots of special ones, and not many places in Europe someone can see over 200 species in just a mere 8 days of birding! This year we recorded 219 species with only two heard-only. Amongst these we had 17 species of raptors, 6 species of owls, 10 species of woodpeckers and 18 species of warblers seen. We had several tour highlights

but certainly the mighty Saker Falcon, the fantastic Wallcreeper and the superb Bearded Tit were voted as the top three birds. But of course the handsome Red-footed Falcons, the massive Eurasian Eagle and Ural Owls, the royal Eastern Imperial Eagle, the shy Capercaillie, the ever so declining Grey Partridge, the elusive Little Crane, the rare White-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, the skulking River and Barred Warblers, the localised Sombre Tit, the fluty Red-breasted and Collared Flycatchers and the unique Collared Pratincole will be long remembered. We have also managed to see three rarities in the Hortobágy area such as White Pelican, Isabelline Wheatear and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler. Our mammal highlights included superb views of Carpathian Brown Bears of which we saw six on a single afternoon and a Pine Martin being mobbed by White-backed Woodpeckers!

Our action packed tour visited four different regions with unique habitats and culture. Our journey started in northeast Hungary at the Zemplén Hills which has excellent raptors, owls, woodpeckers and wine. From here we drove to Romania where we had visited limestone valleys of the 'Island Mountain' before moving further east to the Eastern Carpathian range to the Hargita and Görgény Mountains. At the end of the tour we drove back to the grasslands of the Hortobágy in Hungary. All in all it was a memorable action-packed Birdquest to Central Europe and no doubt we all had a great time with great birds, good wines and delicious food.



Saker Falcon was voted the 'Bird of the trip' despite our best views were on the very first day of the tour (Zoltán Kovács)!

Our group gathered at Budapest airport but it took some time, as there was a late arriving flight from UK with some participants. So for a brief hour we drove to a nearby agriculture area where we picked up Crested Lark, Red-backed Shrike and European Hare plus Roe Deer. Finally when we were all together we started driving towards Tokaj, a World Heritage site in the north-eastern corner of Hungary. A little more than three hours later we arrived in the Zemplén Hills, where we were greeted by White Storks on nests and singing nightingales virtually everywhere. The Zemplén area is a range of rounded chalk hills cloaked in ancient deciduous forest with the occasional peculiar volcanic outcrop on which there is invariably a castle, most of which were ruined in the battles against the Turks in the sixteenth century. There was not much time left but we decided to visit a nearby quarry in the hope of seeing Eurasian Eagle Owl. We quietly sneaked into the abandoned quarry and managed to locate a female bird sitting close to the chicks. This is the most powerful

and heaviest owl in the World – the female Eurasian Eagle Owl! We enjoyed great looks at the owl family and just as quietly we left them behind. A male Eurasian Sparrowhawk made a brief appearance for some and we also had a Woodlark and three fly-by Red-footed Falcons on the way out of the quarry. They are rather rare in this area but this year migration was so late and very unusual. We had one more stop before we go to our hotel where we had superb encounters with Hawfinches and two wrynecks.

Next morning we had a pre-breakfast session around the hotel, which was very productive with many Turtle Doves, migrating Whichats, Golden Oriole, Hoopoe and a Lesser Spotted Eagle. Following our tasty breakfast we drove to a grassy, marshy area nearby where we scored heavily with absolutely amazing looks at a perched Saker Falcon and a very cooperative Bearded Tit – both of which imprinted so much as they finished in the top three birds of the tour! But the supporting cast was also pretty good with Eurasian Bittern in flight for some, a fine adult Eastern Imperial Eagle soaring nearby showing its white back and the grey tail with a dark terminal band, a flying Black Woodpecker but best of all two pairs of the localised Little Crane allowing pretty good looks as they were skulking on the edge of the vegetation! We also had superb Yellow Wagtails, Great Reed Warbler and Common Reed Buntings. What a great start of the day!



Little Crane is another special bird of Central Europe and we had excellent looks at it (János Oláh)!

Later we drove to a shady woodland patch seeing a superb close Short-toed Eagle and a skulking Barred Warbler on the way. Our lovely walk in the oak-hornbeam woodland produced singing Wood Warblers, brief views of a male White-backed Woodpecker and pretty good scope looks of Ural Owl sitting high up in the canopy. Unfortunately White-backed Woodpecker is declining and they are very shy birds anyway. We located a nest hole in this valley a few days ago but something happened and the birds abandoned the hole or had been predated. These shy creatures need fallen logs and standing dead trees as well, which is becoming a rare sight in forestry-run European woodlands. They breed exclusively in dead trees and usually hold a rather large territory. The last stronghold of the European population is definitely the Carpathian Mountain range and the Zemplén Hills with over 120 pairs is definitely one of the best places to see them. But this time we had to wait longer for another encounter with this species. After a hearty lunch we were back in the woodland to look for more woodpeckers and we got mega views of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers

as they were busily feeding chicks in a roadside dead tree. Another Black Woodpecker was also seen and finally with the help of our local guide a fine day-roosting Tawny Owl was also tracked down much to the delight of the non Europe based birders on the tour! We were not yet finished and in the late afternoon we drove to the Tisza River floodplain to try our luck with the very late arriving River Warbler. We had great views of singing Barred Warblers, many Red-backed Shrikes and finally pretty good looks of a freshly arrived and very cooperative Eurasian River Warbler in its usual tangly habitat! After this very productive birding day with many woodpeckers and other goodies we got back to the Hotel and prepared for a 'night out'. We had an excellent dinner in a family run wine cellar tasting several Tokaj wines including the famous '5 puttonyos' Aszú: the wine of Kings and the King of Wines'!



Ural Owl was seen very well through the scope as it was just sitting in the canopy (János Oláh).

On our last morning in this bird rich area we had another pre-breakfast birding. Weather was overcast and it looked it can rain in any moment. Our lovely walk through an open area with scattered very old oak trees produced singing Woodlarks, many many Yellowhammers and Hawfinches, several singing Wrynecks and also a fine male Grey-headed Woodpecker. It was time for us to leave the Zemplén Hills behind as we had a long drive to Transylvania and had some planes on the way too! Although it was a rather short visit to these fantastic hills we managed a superb selection of birds and a fine introduction to great European birding. It was now time for us to move on and drive to the Tisza River and then onto the famous Hortobágy! Still before we got there we twitched a long-staying male Isabelline Wheatear, which was a write-in for this tour and only the 5th record for Hungary. We arrived in the northern Hortobágy area and we were on a mission as Great Snipe was reported the previous evening so we drove to this location and with a bit of effort we got good looks at a Great Snipe! We also had a few Red-throated Pipit and Yellow Wagtails. This was followed by a short stop by a small soda lake which was packed with birds and we had Greater White-fronted Goose, Common Shelducks, Eurasian Wigeon, Garganey, Ferruginous Ducks, Black-necked Grebes, Eurasian Spoonbills, many Black-winged Stilts and Avocets, European Golden Plover, Temminck Stint, several breeding plumaged Ruffs and all three marsh terns in breeding plumage. The Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns were particularly fancy in their breeding dress. Despite all the nice waterbirds the obliging Common Nightingale which was singing on a dead treetop was probably the most memorable sighting. After

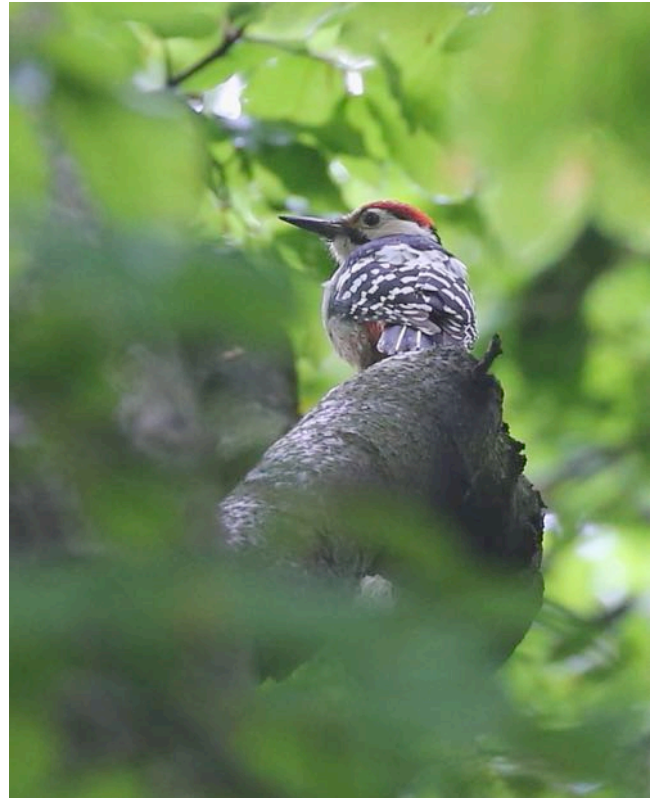
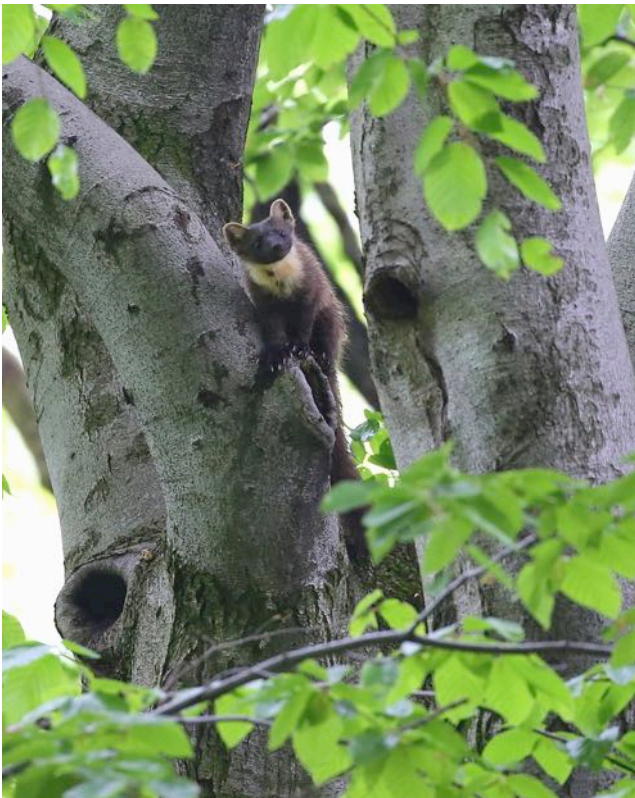
this short but extremely productive visit to the Hortobágy we were on our way to Transylvania. The border crossing was slightly longer than usual but we had our packed lunches and we were soon birding by some large reservoirs near Élesd. Yet again it was fruitful as we got excellent prolonged views of several singing male Ortolan Buntings and also had glimpsing views of the declining Grey Partridge (or Hungarian Partridge – in Romania). This species has declined tremendously in the last 20 years and nowadays it is a rare bird. It was late afternoon by the time we arrived in the Torockó Valley. In the last hour of daylight we got to see a fine Peregrine on its breeding habitat as well as Eurasian Crag Martins and a fine singing male Rock Bunting! It was time to check into our hotel but as we were gathering for dinner in the restaurant Eurasian Scops Owl was starting to call so we had nice looks of one. A fitting final to a really action-packed travelling day! The local welcome drink - billberry brandy – was a good start of a traditional gulyás dinner with donuts!



Great Snipe showing its white tail-side when landing (top), Rock Bunting (left) and Grey Partridge (János Oláh).

Early next morning, still before breakfast, we drove to the village of Torockó and climbed up to the base of the impressive limestone hill. Following the overnight rain and arrival of the cold weather front it was a very cold morning with occasional drizzle and rain. Once we climbed a few hundred meters we got excellent looks

of the picturesque tiny World Heritage village below us as well as a perched Golden Eagle on a ridgetop as it was scanning its territory in the miserable weather with no desire for flying at all. A displaying male Common Rock Thrush was somewhat distant but a fine and curious Sombre Tit gave excellent looks. On the way back we had a big herd of goats much to the delight of the group! After a fine breakfast we were still birding in the same valley and had great views Ortolan Bunting and Great Grey Shrike but in the windswept Kőköz Valley the weather was so cold that after seeing a White-throated Dipper we decided to move on. After some travelling we arrived to another lovely mixed oak-hornbeam woodland where we were targeting the scarce White-backed Woodpecker yet again. The woodland was quiet on our walk until we heard the exciting calls of a White-backed Woodpecker. We moved closer and closer to the noise and finally spotted a pair of these enigmatic woodpeckers as they were mobbing a Pine Martin as it was moving through the canopy. We had great looks of the birds and the Pine Martin too when it started to rain, a big shower just arrived! We waited in the shelter of some large trees and finally run back to the bus. The rain stopped after half an hour and we had our picnic lunch in the woods. This was followed by a visit to Segesvár (Sighisoara), the birth place of Dracula alias Vlad Tepes. We had a short walk in the old town inside the citadel and visited the house where the famous Bram Stoker's figure was really born (although the famous one was of course born in his head). We even had a pair of European Honey Buzzards gliding across the sky in great high unfortunately. From Segesvár it was only an hour drive through 'Székely' villages with their classic 'Székely carved gates' to get to our next destination near Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc). The willow bushes near the Küküllő River gave us excellent looks of Thrush Nightingale and several Garden Warblers while the surrounding agricultural area held Fieldfare and Black-headed Wagtail (*feldegyi*).



Pine Martin (left) was mobbed by a pair of White-backed Woodpeckers. The male bird in this image (János Oláh).

We left early next day to the higher parts of the Hargita Mountain. The weather did not improve and there was forecast of substantial rain for the day. Although most of the lekking of the Western Capercaillies had finished by now but we were still hoping to connect with this amazing bird as the males still visit the lekking area for a few days. This year we got really lucky as we already spotted a female bird on the roadside before we got to our final destination. We could watch her as long as we wanted before moving on to the top of the mountain for a quick breakfast stop. The morning air was fresh and it was rather murky and rainy but we got nice looks of male and female Ring Ouzel. This *alpestris* race with its scaly belly is a very smart looking bird indeed. Following breakfast with Ring Ouzels we took a trail into the forest. After a somewhat difficult walk in

rather snowy conditions we reached the area used by the 'Capers' and we soon flushed a huge male bird which gave us reasonable looks as it was gliding down the mountain. It started to rain again and birding in the cold and rainy pine forest wading through snow is not great fun. However, we kept on trying and finally located Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker. Seeing both of our main targets we decided the morning was successful enough and we walked back to the bus through the snow seeing Dunnock and Nutcracker on the way back. It was a great experience to be on the 'roof of the Carpathians' even with somewhat unfortunate weather.



Pine Martin (left) was mobbed by a pair of White-backed Woodpeckers. The male bird on the picture (János Oláh). ERRR!!!!

After our mountain experience we decided to have a nice lunch in a warm and cosy local restaurant! The open fireplace was a very welcome comfort and a great help to get most of our gear dry while having a nice meal. Indeed with food and the dry coats on made our mood much better and we continued birding. A brief roadside stop by a small reservoir turned out to be a longer one as we spotted two Little Terns and a fine Red-throated Diver both of which are rather scarce birds in the region. It was still raining! We wandered down a forest track in search of Pygmy Owl but we only managed to see 'Alpine' Willow Tits and a splendid male Fire Salamander.



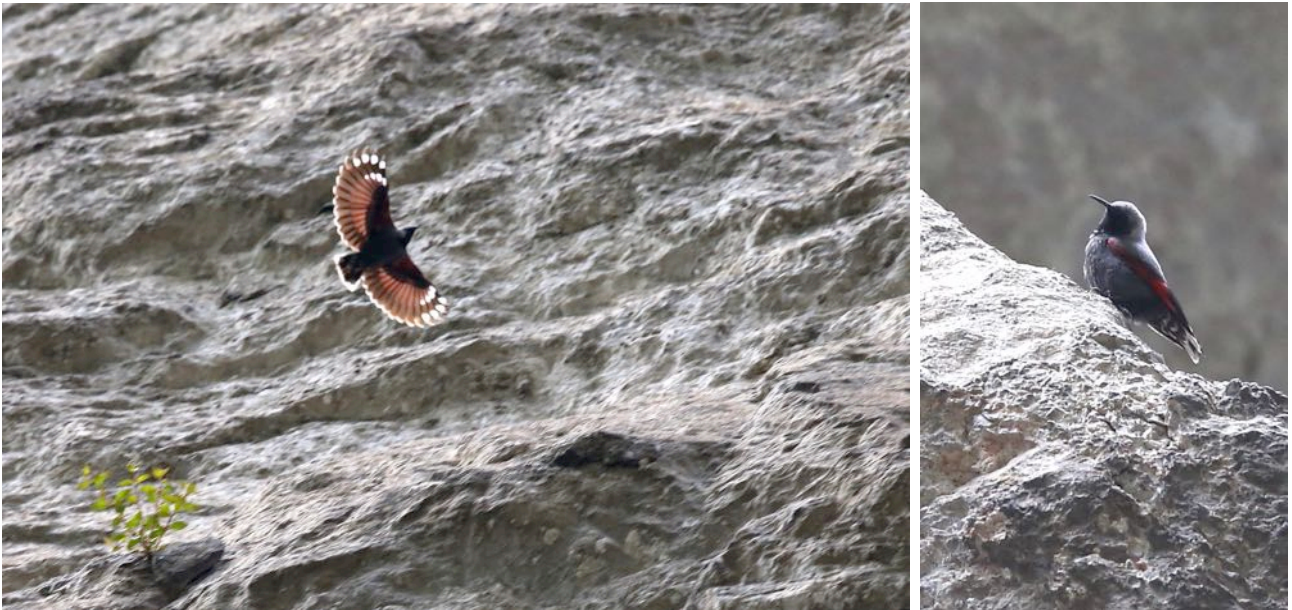
Little Tern in the rain (left) and Fire Salamander in the Hargita area (János Oláh).

Our last programme for the afternoon – still in the rain – was a visit some hides in the hope to see some Carpathian Brown Bears. We met the local forester and he escorted us to some nearby hides. It was amazing because as soon as the forester left the first bear appeared and gave us a superb show as it was trying to grab some food standing on his hindlegs. In the course of the next two hours we saw an amazing total of six different Carpathian Brown Bears. What an experience it was and the rainy day was quickly forgotten!



Carpathian Brown Bear (left) and close up of its dangerous claws (János Oláh).

Next morning we left for the scenic Békás Gorge. We climbed up to a mountain pass which was just over 1000 meters and got out of the bus. God, it was cold, very very cold! The rainy weather front moved through and it already got clear at night and as a result the temperature dropped significantly and despite the sun it felt like winter (and indeed it was barely over zero). There were many Ring Ouzels and Mistle Thrushes around and we also located Crested Tit and a very confinding Firecrest. After this productive walk in the coniferous woodland we continued to the Békás (Bicaz) Gorge to look for Wallcreeper. As soon as we arrived at the most scenic gorge of the Carpathians we started to scan the immense rock face for our main target, the magical Wallcreeper. It did not take long to pick up one in flight and in the course of the next 30 minutes we got several perched and flight views of this beauty. This is certainly a very unique bird species in several ways: the habitat, the feeding method, the appearance, the flight action and even the incubation period is unusual for a passerine. This year it was the second best bird of the 'Bird of the trip' competition! We also had one participant who has been waiting to see this bird for many years!



Wallcreeper in the Békás Gorge in Transylvania (János Oláh).

In the afternoon first we visited a European Bee-eater breeding colony but they had not arrived yet. Likewise we continued our search for Corncrakes but they did not arrive yet. It was a very cold spring and a lot of migrants were very late. The recent cold weather front did not help either. So later we drove to a nearby fishpond system, where we had nice looks at Purple Herons, Ferruginous Ducks and a nice selection of gulls like breeding plumaged Little Gulls, an immature Mediterranean Gull and in amongst the Caspian Gulls we even spotted a Lesser Black-backed (Baltic) Gull. A migrating male Montagu's Harrier was spotted and it was also interesting to watch how the Caspian Gulls were mobbing a Common Buzzard who flew over the fishpond.

We still had a morning left in Transylvania, so we decided to try for Red-breasted Flycatcher this morning. It was still very cold and as we arrived to the town of Szováta the grassy slope in the shade was white from overnight frost! We did not have much hope as it is another late arriving species but by mid May they normally should be busily singing in their territory. Of course Corncrakes should be doing the same and Bee-eaters should be around too! We drove to a mixed woodland and luckily we soon heard the fluty song of this remarkable little bird. We soon located it in the canopy and enjoyed great looks of the singing bird as long as we wanted. This was indeed a very nice finish to our birding in Transylvania. Out of the forest we tried two more locations for Corncrake but the same result as in the last few days: nothing was calling! Our next stop was to buy a chimney cake for our long drive back to Hungary. We had a brief stop by a petrol station where we also grabbed some sandwiches, otherwise we continued driving all the way back to the big reservoirs near Élesd. We checked one of the reservoirs and seen Common Shelducks, a few Tufted Ducks, four breeding plumaged Red-necked Grebes and many Black-necked Grebes. A few Little Ringed Plovers, two

Greenshanks and an out of the place Sanderling were bonuses as well as the flock of 60 Little Gulls. We were back in Hungary by late afternoon and tracked down a fine Long-legged Buzzard before getting to our hotel near Nádudvar.



Singing immature male Red-breasted Flycatcher (János Oláh).

Next day before breakfast we had a fine male Little Bittern which was followed by about 15 Black Storks and 150 Eurasian Spoonbills on a freshly drained fishpond close to our hotel. It started to rain! We drove to Debrecen Great Wood where we quickly tracked down a Short-toed Treecreeper between two rainy spells and we were soon back on the Hortobágy Plains! The rest of the day was spent exploring the various habitats of the Hortobágy National Park though the weather was really changeable with various thunderstorms moving through the area. This superb park is the most western edge of the Central Asian 'Artemisia' steppes and beside the grassland it dotted with marshes, fishponds, temporary wetlands, soda lakes as well. Our first stop was on a classic steppe habitat where we have visited a Red-footed Falcon colony. We got out of the bus and walked to the little woodland where several pairs of Red-footed Falcons were calling, flying and displaying. The first half of May is mating season so they were very busy chasing each other and giving shrill falcon calls all the time. We also located an incubating Long-eared Owl though only the ears were visible from the nestbox.

A quick shower made us to return to the bus but a few minutes later we were out again and looking at the falcons. We also had a pair of Long-legged Buzzard and while we were looking for Souslik we got good views of a flying Eurasian Honey Buzzard and an adult White-tailed Eagle. The windy weather was not helping but we finally found a Souslik though our search for snipes in a nearby marshy area was fruitless. We had a nice lunch in the Bibic Nature Lodge overlooking a fine soda pan where we got to see a Greater White-fronted Goose and a nice selection of waders. After lunch we drove to the western part of the park. We tried another location for snipes but we could not find any, however, we got to see a Common Quail and ten minutes later a lovely pair of Montagu's Harrier gave us splendid looks. Our original idea was to check some fishponds but instead we quickly altered our plan when we saw the radar map on the phone and the huge storm was coming towards us...



Storm clouds with chamomile carpet (top) and male Great Bustard on the Hortobagy Plains (Janos Olah).

We decided to immediately try for the World's heaviest flying bird: the Great Bustard. As it involved driving on dirt tracks what we simply cannot do after heavy rain we moved to the bustard area as quickly as we could. Arriving the area we already saw the dark storm clouds gathering so we wasted no time and started scanning for the bustards. A European Roller was picked up allowing good views. This was the first for the season as they were also late this year. Luckily we found a flock of nine male Great Bustards and we moved as close as we could by bus and then on foot. This was the very end of the display season but we were lucky enough to see some of them doing a little bit of a displaying. The weather was really on our tail by now and we had to drive quickly to reach some covered road. We made it back to the road just as it started to rain. Wow this was a close shave...



Serious storm clouds gathering (top), Tawny Pipit (left) and male Bluethroat on the Hortobágy Plains (János Oláh).

By this time it started to rain more heavily so we decided to drive to the southern part of the park (as according to the radar map the storm was heading northeast). This was a good move as after 20 minutes the rain stopped and we arrived to a nice open area of the Hortobágy. There was a request of seeing the semi-wild Przewalski's Horses so we started to scan the horizon. The Hortobágy National Park is involved with the gene protection of the species and a 10 000 hectare area has been fenced off within the park to set aside for the horses and their breeding programme. We soon located the horses and the very clear afternoon visibility without any haze allowed good looks. In the very same area we had Tawny Pipit and a superb male singing Bluethroat too! It was time for us to return to our base.



Przewalski Horse on the Hortobágy Plains (János Oláh).

On our last full day of tour we were targeting certain species, which we had not come across yet. Our first destination was the Hortobágy Fishponds, a vast fishpond complex with a huge reedbed and an excellent observation tower system. The willows around the car park were great for migrants and we soon found Icterine Warbler and European Pied Flycatcher plus a smart Penduline Tit. After this short walk around the car park we got on the first train of the day to go all the way to the end of the fishponds (saving us a six kilometer walk). The narrow gauged train was used for fish transportation in the old days but nowadays it is a tourist attraction. We got off the train soon and walked to a *typha* vegetated corner of a huge fishpond where we quickly spotted Moustached Warbler and got excellent looks of this often difficult-to-see bird. There were also Bearded Tits around, Little Crakes were calling, Pygmy Cormorants were all over and the long staying White Pelican was drying its wings on a shallow muddy island. On the way back we walked the last kilometer to our bus so we could stop and scan one of the drained fishponds for waders. It was hard work to pick up and see well the goodies but breeding plumaged Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Turnstone was added to our list. A nearby nest box had three almost fully grown Long-eared Owl chicks and the adult female was guarding them nearby, perched in the full open on a small bush. It was a terrific sight! After a nice picnic lunch at the fishponds we drove to another area where we were hoping to find European Grasshopper Warbler. It was not the best time of the day but luck was on our side and we got pretty good looks of this skulker. Our next target was Lesser Grey Shrike and it did not take long to find one on a roadside wire. This was the time when we got a phonecall about an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler back at the fishponds we just left two hours ago. As we were only about 15 minutes drive away we quickly drove back and readily found this rather scarce bird. We spent a little more time around to look for Marsh Warbler but we had no luck. We added a few more birds to our list here like breeding plumages Squacco Heron and some of us had Glossy Ibises in flight. We were pretty satisfied with the results of the day as we managed to find most of the missing birds we could hope for except Marsh Warbler. But the tour was not over yet as we still had a last morning to find some extra birds!



Male Montagu's Harrier (top) and Moustached Warbler on the Hortobágy (János Oláh).

Early next morning we enjoyed our last pre-breakfast birding but this time we drove to a nearby location to look for Marsh Warbler. Bang on, the first bird we got our eyes on was Marsh Warbler! After breakfast we left the hotel but we were planning one more final stop. Near Karcag we took a side road and drove to some agricultural fields where Collared Pratincoles were forming a colony. We soon spotted one bird and then another and finally counted twelve different birds. Some of them were already nest building while others were still displaying. We watched them for some time and then we checked some freshly flooded paddy fields. After three days of rainy weather the sun was out in full force and raptors were starting to soar. We saw four Black Storks, three Eurasian Honey Buzzards, two Eastern Imperial Eagles, several Marsh Harriers and two White-tailed Eagles circling as well as many Night Herons and a few waders. It was time to go and all left for us is to drive to Budapest airport in time for our flights. It was a really enjoyable tour despite the rather unusually cold and rainy weather with a wide selection of great birds, lots of fun with an excellent group of Birdquesters!



Ortolan Bunting was seen very well in Transylvania (János Oláh).

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

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

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

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

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

CR = Critically Endangered, **E** = Endangered, **V** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near Threatened

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). 2017. IOC World Bird List (v 7.2). This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>. Please note, this was the current version when the report checklist was created. Some alternative names are given in parentheses.

All of our checklists are powered by our partner iGoTerra (www.igoterra.com) who provide web and mobile applications for bird and wildlife enthusiasts and businesses. Their suite of services cover observations, rankings, lists, photos and trip management tools.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser* Common.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* A single bird was seen on the Hortobágy.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* Good numbers were seen on the Hortobágy.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* Five sightings of flocks at Élesd Reservoir and on the Hortobágy.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* It was regularly seen on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Four sightings this year – it was a cold spring and they lingered around longer!

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Common.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Just a few were seen on the Hortobágy.

Garganey *Anas querquedula* Frequently encountered at various wetlands. Excellent looks of this beauty!

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Six individuals were seen on the Hortobágy.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* Well over 100 were seen on the Hortobágy. **VU**

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* Commonly seen on the Hortobágy and Transylvania. **NT**

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* About 15 were seen at Élesd Reservoir in Romania.

Western Capercaillie ♦ *Tetrao urogallus* Superb looks of a roadside female and males were seen in flight later.

Grey Partridge ♦ *Perdix perdix* We had excellent looks of this rapidly declining species in Transylvania.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* One was seen on the Hortobágy.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* Common.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* A late migrant was seen at Zetelaka Reservoir in Romania.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Just four were seen on the Hortobágy.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* Superb looks of four breeding plumaged birds at Élesd Reservoir.

Great-crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Up to 50 were seen at Élesd Reservoir in Romania.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* Up to 10 were seen at Élesd Reservoir and a few others elsewhere.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* Several great sightings, the largest flock of 15 were seen on the Hortobágy.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* Common in villages.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Three were seen on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Commonly seen on the Hortobágy. Our largest was a flock of 150.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* One seen in flight by some near Tokaj and others heard booming.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* Repeated excellent looks in our hotel garden in the Hortobágy.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Small numbers were recorded throughout.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* About 15 were seen on the Hortobágy.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Common.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Frequently encountered in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy.

Great Egret *Egretta alba* Common.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Common.

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* One was seen on the Hortobágy – a long staying rarity.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* Common in the Hortobágy region.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Common.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* A pair was seen in Transylvania and one seen well on the Hortobágy.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* Excellent looks in the Zemplén Hills.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* Several great sightings in the Zemplén Hills and Transylvania.

Eastern Imperial Eagle ♦ *Aquila heliaca* Great looks in the Zemplén Hills and near Karcag. **VU**

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* Two were seen near Torockó in Transylvania.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* We had eight sightings on the tour.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* One was seen briefly in Transylvania.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* Common.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* A late migrant was seen in Transylvania and a pair on the Hortobágy.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* A total of ten were seen on the Hortobágy Plains.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* Common.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* A single bird close to the border and two were seen well on the Hortobágy.

Great Bustard ♦ *Otis tarda* A flock of nine males were seen of this fantastic birds on the Hortobágy. **VU**

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* (NL) We heard regularly and somebody seen it in the hotel garden on the Hortobágy.

Corn Crane ♦ *Crex crex* (H) One was heard briefly but it was too cold, they were not calling in Transylvania.

Little Crane ♦ *Porzana parva* Superb looks of two pairs in Hungary.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* A few sightings throughout the tour.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* Common.

Common Crane *Grus grus* Just 20 were seen on the Hortobágy.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Common.



Short-toed Eagle in the Zemplén Hills (János Oláh).

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* Good numbers were seen on the Hortobágy.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* Common. **NT**

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* Single one was seen on a soda pan in the Hortobágy region.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* About 30 were seen on the Hortobágy.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Several sightings at several wetlands.

Great Snipe *Gallinago media* One was seen on the Hortobágy. **NT**

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* About 24 were seen in the Hortobágy area. **NT**

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* (NL) Just six were seen by some on the Hortobágy.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* Two breeding plumaged 'black' birds were seen on the Hortobágy.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* Common.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* About four were seen at various sites.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* (NL) One was seen by some on the Hortobágy.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa galreola* Several sightings on the Hortobágy.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Two were seen on the Hortobágy and 10 at Élesd Reservoir in Romania.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* A single one was seen on the Hortobágy.

Sanderling *Calidris alba* One was seen on the Élesd Reservoir.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* About 15 breeding plumaged birds were seen on the Hortobágy.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* Just three were seen on the tour.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* Two breeding plumaged 'brick red' birds were seen on the tour. **NT**

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Up to 2000 were seen on the Hortobágy.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* One was seen amongst the Dunlins on the Hortobágy.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* Hundreds were seen at various wetlands.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* Excellent looks at twelve birds on our last day. What a beauty!

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* Common.

Little Gull *Larus minutes* Small numbers were seen throughout. Biggest flock of 60 at Élesd Reservoir.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* Just a single one was seen in Transylvania.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* Up to 50 were seen in Transylvania and on the Hortobágy.



Migrating flock of Ruffs on the Hortobágy (János Oláh).

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* A few were seen at Élesd Reservoir.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* One was seen in Transylvania with a large gathering of Caspian Gulls.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* Two were seen at Zetelaka Reservoir on our rainy day!

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Common.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* Small numbers were seen usually but up to 500 at Hortobágy Fishponds.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* Superb breeding plumaged birds were seen at various wetlands.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* The least common of the 'marsh terns'.

Rock Dove *Columba livia* Common.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas* Many excellent looks in the Zemplén and Transylvania. Best looks at the bear hide.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* Common.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* Still delightfully common in Hungary and Romania. **VU**

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Common in villages and towns.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* A total of 24 were seen on the tour and many more heard.

European Scops Owl ♦ *Otus scops* One was seen well in Transylvania.

Eurasian Eagle Owl ♦ *Bubo bubo* A female and a fully grown chick were seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* We had nice looks of a day-roosting bird in the Zemplén Hills.

Ural Owl ♦ *Strix uralensis* Excellent looks at a female in the Zemplén Hills.

Little Owl *Athene noctua* A total of three were seen on the tour.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* We had excellent looks at a female on the Hortobágy. It was voted 4th best bird of the trip.

Common Swift *Apus apus* Just six were seen by some on our first day. (NL)

Alpine Swift *Apus melba* A flock of seven were seen in Transylvania.

European Roller *Coracias garrulous* We encountered this colourful bird several times on the Hortobágy. Superb!

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Several sightings on the Hortobágy.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* We had several excellent looks of this superb bird in the Zemplén Hills.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker ♦ *Picoides trydactylus* Excellent looks of a female in Transylvania.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker ♦ *Dendrocopos medius* Three sightings on the tour. Best looks at Szováta.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* A pair was seen feeding chicks in the Zemplén Hills.



Female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in the Zemplén Hills (János Oláh).

Syrian Woodpecker ♦ *Dendrocopos syriacus* A fine male gave excellent looks in the Hortobágy area.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* Common.

White-backed Woodpecker ♦ *Dendrocopos leucotos* A male briefly in the Zemplén Hills and a pair in Transylvania.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* We had three sightings on the tour.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* One was seen flying after we crossed the Tisza River by ferry.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* Nice male was seen in the Zemplén Hills.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Common.

Red-footed Falcon ♦ *Falco vespertinus* Superb looks at these most handsome raptors on the Hortobágy. **NT**

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* One was seen in the Zemplén Hills, one in Transylvania and one on the Hortobágy.

Saker ♦ *Falco cherrug* Superb looks of one in the Zemplén Hills. **EN**

Peregrine *Falco peregrines* One was seen near Torockó in Transylvania and another on the Hortobágy.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* Common.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* Just three were seen at the end of the tour. They were also late this year!

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* We six in Transylvania.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* Common by voice and a few sightings.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Common.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* Common.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* We had excellent looks in Transylvania. A total of five bird seen.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* Common.

Rook *Corvus frugilegusc* Common.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* Common.

Common Raven *Corvus corax* Common.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater* Common.

European Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus* We had 10 birds in Transylvania. Handsome little guy!

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* Four were seen on the tour..

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* We had many this year in Transylvania. A total of 13 seen.

Sombre Tit ♦ *Poecile lugubris* We had one in Transylvania on the most northerly edge of its distribution.



European Crested Tit (top) and Sombre Tit in Transylvania (János Oláh).

Great Tit *Parus major* Common.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* Common.

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* We had excellent looks on the Hortobágy.

Bearded Reedling ♦ *Panurus biarmicus* Amazing looks of this beauty! It was voted third best bird of the trip.



Bearded Tit on the Hortobágy (left) and Firecrest in Transylvania (János Oláh).

Wood Lark *Lullua arborea* A total of five were seen in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* Common.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* Common.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* Common.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Common.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris* A total of 14 birds were seen in Transylvania.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica* Common.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* 'White-headed' birds were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* A late migrant on the Hortobágy.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* Common.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* A few sightings in the Zemplén Hills and on the Hortobágy.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Common in the reebeds throughout.

Moustached Warbler ♦ *Acrocephalus melanopogon* Excellent looks of three birds on the Hortobágy.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* Common in the reebeds throughout.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* Common in the reebeds throughout.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* A last-minute bird seen on the last pre-breakfast birding.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* A total of four were seen on the Hortobágy.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida* One was seen on the Hortobágy. It is a rare bird in the region!

Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella neavia* One was seen on the Hortobágy.

River Warbler ♦ *Locustella fluviatilis* We had pretty good looks of this shy one in the Zemplén Hills.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* Common in the reebeds of Hortobágy.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* Common.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* Five were seen in Transylvania.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* Several were seen in the Zemplén Hills. A smart looking bird!

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* Common.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* Common.

Common Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla* Amazing looks of this stunner in Transylvania.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* Just two were seen in Transylvania.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* Finally one was seen in Transylvania.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europea* Common.

Wallcreeper ♦ *Tichodroma muraria* Excellent looks in Békás Gorge in Transylvania. The second best 'Bird of the trip'!

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* A total of six sightings in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* One was seen in Debrecen Great Wood.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* Common.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* A total of 13 were seen of the more scaly '*alpestris*' race in Transylvania.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* Common.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* Common in Transylvania.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* Common.

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

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* Commonly seen by the end of the tour especially on the Hortobágy.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* Great views in the Zemplén Hills and in Transylvania.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* Several were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* We saw one on its breeding grounds in Transylvania.



Thrush Nightingale in Transylvania (János Oláh).

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* Common. Excellent scope views of one on a dead treetop!

European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* An immature male was seen on the Hortobágy.

Collared Flycatcher ♦ *Ficedula albicollis* We saw them in the Zemplén Hills and near Segesvár.

Red-breasted Flycatcher ♦ *Ficedula parva* A singing immature male was seen in Transylvania. Lovely songster!

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Common.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* We had several good looks in Transylvania.

Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* Just one male seen in Transylvania and the views were distant.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* Common. A total of 12 were seen.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* Common.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* Several encounters throughout the tour.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* This rarity was tracked down in the Hortobágy.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* Two sightings in Transylvania.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Common.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Common.

Dunnoek *Prunella modularis* Three were seen in Transylvania.

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* Common. We saw *flava*, *dombrowski*, *feldegg* and *superciliaris* races.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Just three were seen in Transylvania.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* Common.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* One was seen well on the Hortobágy.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* A single observation in Transylvania.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* About five were seen in the Hortobágy area.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* Common.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* It was very common in the Zemplén Hills this year.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* Common.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* Common.

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* A pair was seen well in Transylvania.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* Common.

European Serin *Serinus serinus* Commonly encountered throughout the tour.

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* (H) Just heard in Transylvania.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra* This 'boring' bird was common throughout.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* Many sightings on the tour.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* Superb looks of this handsome bird in Transylvania.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* About eight singing males were seen in Transylvania.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* Common.

MAMMALS

European Hare (Brown H) *Lepus europaeus* Common.

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* One in the Zemplén Hills and one in Transylvania.

European Souslik *Spermophilus citellus* A single one was seen on the Hortobágy.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* Seven sightings on the tour.

(Carpathian) Brown Bear *Ursus arctos* An amazing six were seen in Transylvania. Excellent!

Pine Martin *Mustella ermine* *Martes martes* Excellent views one being mobbed by White-backed Woodpeckers!

Stoat *Mustella erminea* One was seen at Hortobágy Fishponds.

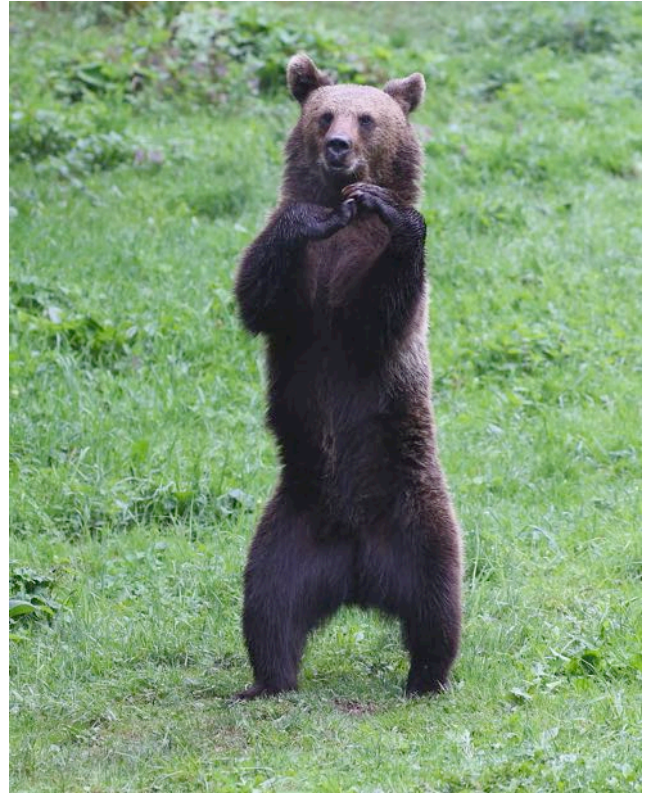
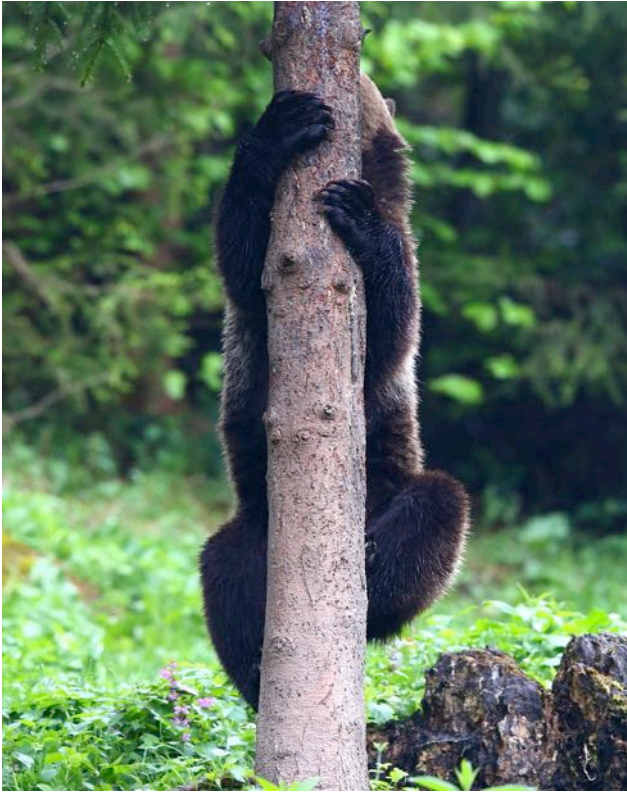
Wood Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus* One was seen from the bear hide in Transylvania.

Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus* (NL) One was seen close to the border crossing area.

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* Common.

APPENDIX: overall results of the 'Bird of the tour' contest

Species	Points	Nominations
1st Saker	26	3
2nd Wallcreeper	24	3
3rd Bearded Tit	18	3
4th Long-eared Owl	12	3
5th White-backed Woodpecker	12	2



Carpathian Brown Bears (top) in Transylvania and Western Roe Deer on the Hortobágy (János Oláh).



Carpathian Brown Bears (top) in Transylvania and European Squirrel on the Hortobágy (János Oláh).