

WildWings Hungary in Spring

10th – 16th May 2015

Tour Report by Gerard Gorman

Day 1: After meeting up at Budapest Airport at around 12.30pm we were soon loaded into our 4x4 vehicle and on our way towards our first base in the Kiskunság region, south of Budapest. It was a fine, clear day and in less than an hour from the airport, we were watching a mixed flock of Black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls in adult breeding plumage, so close we could hear the distinct calls of the Meds. Next up, at this same roadside a male Montagu's Harrier and then several Marsh Harriers glided by. Moving on a short way we stopped for Turtles Doves, blue-headed (flava) Yellow Wagtails, Golden Orioles and Corn Buntings, with one of the latter posing nicely for photos. A patch of Marsh Iris were also noted here by Nigel. I then spotted something crouched in the grass, our first Great Bustard, a plump female. We drove to the top of a ridge to get a better view and picked out another 4 bustards, all males. Next up was a flooded pasture with a fine mix of Garganeys, including handsome drakes, Ferruginous Ducks and Black-winged Stilts. As we headed on south other roadside birds were Great White Egret, White Stork, Cuckoo, Roller, Lesser Grey Shrike, Whinchat and Stonechat. A reedy pond had Great Reed Warbler and both Marsh and Edible Frogs, with Spotted Flycatcher and Red-backed Shrike in the adjacent trees. We checked in at our pleasant guesthouse, greeted by a Black Redstart, at about 5pm. Our first hearty Magyar 3-course dinner was just what was needed after a long travelling day. Finally, we ran through our checklists and agreed we had got off to a very good start.

Day 2: We met at 7am for a pre-breakfast walk around our base. We soon found more Rollers, Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, Golden Orioles in full song, Bee-eaters, Crested Larks and a Little Owl. We also saw two fine Roe Deer bucks interacting and as the morning warmed up Susliks began to emerge from their burrows. After breakfast we visited two of the salt-lakes that dot the Kiskunság. The weather was perfect, warm, clear, blue skies. A pair of superb Red-footed Falcons forced us to stop before the lake, then a Common Bittern exploded into flight (by the end of the day we had seen 9 different Common Bitterns and heard several more including two that crouched in low sedge a few feet away from us). All three marsh terns, Black, Whiskered and White-winged Black hawked around in front of us and then a surprise species, a late passage female Hen Harrier spotted by Bill. A Bluethroat sang and we had great views of both Savi's Warbler and Bearded Tits in trackside reeds. We hardly knew where to look. On another patch of water there were breeding plumage Black-necked Grebes, more Ferruginous Ducks, and many waders including 100s of Ruff in various colour and breeding plumage Spotted Redshanks, there were Little Gulls, Purple Herons and Spoonbills feeding and in flight. Fire-bellied Toads were calling everywhere and a Tree Frog was found by Margery. Later, at a deeper lake, we added Pygmy Cormorants and a soaring Black Stork. To cap it off a male Black Woodpecker called and then flew in and perched in full view. As it had been sunny we also came across butterflies such as Wall, Silver-studded Blue, Purple-shot Copper, Painted Lady and Queen of Spain Fritillary. Dragonflies included Scarce Chaser, Four-spotted Chaser, Downy Emerald and Hairy Dragonfly. Interesting plants included Bug and Green-winged Orchids, Purple Mullein, Meadow Clary and Pheasant's Eye. After dinner we heard a Scops Owl calling behind our hotel so we headed in its direction and got flight views as the light faded.

Day 3: Everyone was present for another pre-breakfast walk. We saw the same birds as the previous day, but had better views of the resident Little Owl. We then set off, once again in good weather, for the northern part of the Kiskunság with Saker as our main target. But before we reached that area we stopped for another Little Owl, perched on a roadside wire. Next was an adult White-tailed Eagle mobbed by a Hooded Crow, and there were more Red-footed Falcons, Rollers and Lesser Grey Shrikes. At a canal bank we found a range of wildlife including singing Great Reed Warblers, a Pond

Terrapin, Norfolk Hawkers and sadly a road-killed Otter. As soon as we arrived at a farmland Saker territory two adults of this majestic falcon were spotted and gave a fine flight display: later we scoped a pylon-top nest-box and could see two quite well-grown chicks and then one of the adults flew in and perched by them. Another roadside wetland with grazing Water Buffaloes produced Black-crowned Night Heron and Black-tailed Godwit. A complex of carp-rearing ponds produced more wildfowl including some gaudy drake Red-crested Pochards and more Spoonbills, egrets, herons, gulls, another Bluethroat and we had close views of more Bearded Tits. As we left the ponds, another highlight from the many today was four Black Storks soaring above us. Another roadside stop, to photograph a patch of Early Spider Orchids and Pyramidal Bugle, meant we also added Clouded Yellow to the butterflies recorded. Before reaching our base we found around 50 Bee-eaters establishing a colony in sandy ground, rather than a bank - a remarkable sight. It was a warm, clear, still evening so after dinner we visited a secluded woodland glade not far from the hotel where I hoped to find Nightjar. As soon as dusk approached the birds began to churr and then we had wonderful flight views, included wing-clapping displays, of three birds - a fine end to another great day.

Day 4: It was a little overcast today as we left our lowland base, which had proved so productive, and headed north-east to the Zemplén Hills. We took our time, passing through villages with nesting White Storks and hearing Nightingales almost everywhere. We made various stops, the first to watch an adult Eastern Imperial Eagle sit on an electricity pylon in farmland, a little far but clear and easily identified in the telescope. Great White Egrets dotted the fields and there always seemed to be a Marsh Harrier in view and a Crested Lark by the roadside. We took a break in quiet village and had great views of a pair of Syrian Woodpeckers in a school-yard. Further on, by the River Hernád, we saw a Common Sandpiper, Great Spotted Woodpecker, our first Nuthatch, a singing River Warbler and then singing and displaying Barred Warblers. We then went up into the foothills stopping to take in the view over the plain by a lively colony of Bee-eaters, this time in a more typical sandy bank. We also saw our first Yellowhammers and a Common Whitethroat here, more Cuckoos and several Red-backed Shrikes. New butterflies for the trip today included a first-brood Map, Little Blue and a superb Southern Festoon (and its food-plant Birthwort) by the Hernád. As we arrived at our hotel we heard a Wryneck calling somewhere in the village.

Day 5: Today the weather had turned from sunny to rainy, but nevertheless we went out before breakfast along the nearby river and found a fine male Penduline Tit and got better views of a singing River Warbler. After breakfast we visited a stone quarry and were rewarded with views of two well-grown Eagle Owl chicks on a ledge. A party of Long-tailed Tits included several of the white-headed form. Moving on we saw Hawfinches by the roadside and then five Woodlarks. A walk through a rainy, damp and muddy beech forest proved a success as two non-bird targets were seen and photographed: stunning Fire Salamanders and outrageous Carpathian Blue Slugs! It was pleasant now so we stopped at a village edge for a picnic lunch and almost as we did so an Imperial Eagle flew over. Then a Wryneck called and showed well. Moving on we picked up more Golden Orioles, Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers, Black Redstarts, Red-backed Shrikes, Serins, Tree Sparrows, Turtle Doves, White Storks, two different Honey Buzzards and a female Syrian Woodpecker. Despite the wet weather, two new butterflies for the tour, Woodland Ringlet and Wood White, were also found. Notable plants included Nottingham Catchfly and *Iris sibirica*. Finally, back at base a Hobby was seen by the river. It had been a harder day due to the weather but we succeeded in observing a good range of birds and other wildlife, with Margery and Nigel particularly pleased with the Blue Slugs.

Day 6: The weather was much better today. Before breakfast we went out by the river seeing Penduline Tits again, an Icterine Warbler, a female Black Woodpecker and a pair of Little Owls. A great find, again by Bill, was a female Pallid Harrier. Later, just before the hills proper, we stopped for an Eastern Imperial Eagle. A wooded valley was our next stop where Grey-headed Woodpecker called and then flew in and perched, and a Black Stork and several Collared Flycatchers were seen well. As we drove along numerous Hawfinches flew up from the gravel verges. We then spent some

time by a scenic large grassy meadow, splashed with Red Catchfly, and after a wait a hunting Short-toed appeared and then a perched Lesser Spotted Eagle which later did a close circle above us. Moving on, another grassy spot had three calling Corncrakes, but the vegetation was high and they would not reveal themselves. In the afternoon we walked along a scenic limestone valley seeing Great Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers together, Marsh Tit, a pair of resting Eastern Green Lizards and many butterflies including Large Tortoiseshell and Camberwell Beauty. A patch of bright yellow Hungarian Iris was yet another botanical highlight.

Day 7: Our pre-breakfast walk produced a new bird for the trip: a Long-eared Owl, plus a male Green Woodpecker, a male Syrian Woodpecker and once again singing River Warbler and Penduline Tit. We left the Zemplén after a full breakfast and headed back westwards in order to be at Budapest Airport in good time to check-in. On the way we stopped and added Common Cormorant to our list (incredibly we had not seen this species until today). We had recorded a good range of birds on this week-long WildWings tour in Hungary. There had been many highlights, such as the numerous Common Bitterns, the marsh terns, the various eagles, the Red-footed Falcons, the Eagle Owls and the ground-nesting Bee-eaters. Other wildlife highlights were the Susliks, the Fire Salamanders and, of course, the never to be forgotten Carpathian Blue Slugs! I'd like to thank everyone involved for contributing to this successful tour.

LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

1. Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* - Seen on 1 day, heard on others.
2. Great-crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* – Seen on 3 days.
3. Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* - Seen on 1 day.
4. Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmaeus* – 12 seen on 1 day.
5. Common Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* - Seen on 1 day.
6. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* - Seen on 1 day.
7. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* - Seen every day.
8. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* - Seen on 2 days.
9. Great White Egret *Egretta alba* - Seen on 6 days.
10. Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* - Seen on 1 day.
11. Common Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*- 9 birds seen on 1 day.
12. Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* - Seen on 2 days.
13. Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* - Seen on 3 days.
14. White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* - Seen on 6 days.
15. Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* - Seen on 3 days.
16. Greylag Goose *Anser anser* - Seen on 2 days.
17. Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* - Seen on 1 day.
18. Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* - Seen on 6 days.
19. Garganey *Anas querquedula* - Seen on 2 days.
20. Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*- Seen on 2 days.
21. Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* - Seen on 1 day.

22. Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* - Seen on 2 days.
23. Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* - Seen on 3 days.
24. Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* - Seen on 2 days.
25. White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* – Seen on 1 day.
26. Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* - Seen on 1 day.
27. Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* - Seen on 7 days.
28. Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* – 4 seen on 1 day.
29. Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* – Seen on 1 day.
30. Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* – Seen on 1 day.
31. Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* - Seen on 1 day.
32. Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* - Seen on 7 days.
33. Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* – 2 seen on 1 day.
34. Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* - Seen on 3 days.
35. Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* - Seen on 7 days.
36. Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* - Seen on 2 days.
37. Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* - Seen on 6 days.
38. Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* - Seen on 1 day.
39. Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix* – Seen on 1 day.
40. Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* – Heard on 4 days.
41. Ring-necked Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* – Seen on 7 days.
42. Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* - Heard on 1 day.
43. Corncrake *Crex crex* - Heard on 1 day.
44. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* – Seen on 1 days.
45. Common Coot *Fulica atra* - Seen on 3 days.
46. Great Bustard *Otis tarda* - Seen on 1 day.
47. Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* - Seen on 1 day.
48. Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* - Seen on 5 days.
49. Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* – Seen on 1 day.
50. Common Curlew *Numenius arquata* - Seen on 2 days.
51. Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* - Seen on 1 day.
52. Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* - Seen on 2 days.
53. Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* - Seen on 1 day.
54. Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* – Seen on 1 day.
55. Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* – Seen on 2 days.
56. Dunlin *Calidris alpina* – Seen on 1 day.
57. Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* –500+ seen on 1 day.

58. Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* - Seen on 3 days.
59. Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* - Seen on 2 days.
60. Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* – Seen on 1 day.
61. Little Gull *Larus minutus* – Seen on 1 day.
62. Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* - Seen on 3 days.
63. Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* - Seen on 3 days.
64. Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* - Seen on 3 days.
65. White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* - Seen in 1 day.
66. Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* - Seen on 2 days.
67. Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* - Seen on 3 days.
68. Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* - Seen every day.
69. Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* - Seen every day.
70. Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* – Seen every day.
71. Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* - Seen every day.
72. Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* – Seen every day.
73. Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* – Seen on 1 day.
74. Little Owl *Athene noctua* - Seen on 5 days.
75. Scops Owl *Otus scops* – Seen on 1 evening, heard on others.
76. Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* – Seen on 1 day.
77. European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* – 3 seen on 1 evening.
78. Common Swift *Apus apus* – Seen on 1 day.
79. Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* – Seen on 1 day.
80. European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* – Seen on 5 days.
81. Eurasian Roller *Coracias garrulus* – Seen on 4 days.
82. Hoopoe *Upupa epops* – Seen on 3 days.
83. Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* – Seen on 2 days, others heard.
84. Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* – Seen on 3 days, heard on others.
85. Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* – Seen on 5 days.
86. Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* – Seen on 2 days.
87. Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* – Seen on 1 day.
88. Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* – Seen on 1 day.
89. Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* – Seen every day.
90. Woodlark *Lullula arborea* – 5 seen on 1 day.
91. Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* – Seen every day.
92. Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* – Seen on 4 days.
93. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*- Seen every day.

94. House Martin *Delichon urbica* - *Seen every day.*
95. White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* – *Seen every day.*
96. Yellow Wagtail (Blue-headed race) *Motacilla flava* – *Seen on 5 days.*
97. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* – *Seen on 1 day.*
98. Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* – *Heard on 1 day.*
99. Eurasian Robin *Erithacus rubecula* – *Seen on 1 day.*
100. Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* - *Heard every day.*
101. Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* – *Seen on 2 days.*
102. Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* – *Seen every day.*
103. Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* – *Seen on 3 days.*
104. Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* – *Seen every day.*
105. Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*. *Seen every day.*
106. Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* – *Seen on 2 days.*
107. River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis* – *Seen on 3 days.*
108. Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* – *Seen on 2 days.*
109. Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* – *Seen on 2 days.*
110. Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* – *Seen on 1 day.*
111. Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* – *Seen on 3 days.*
112. Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* – *Seen on 1 day.*
113. Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* – *Heard on 2 days.*
114. Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* – *Seen 1 day, others heard.*
115. Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* – *Seen on 1 day, others heard.*
116. Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* – *Seen on 2 days, in song flight display.*
117. Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* – *Seen on 4 days, others heard.*
118. Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* – *Seen on 1 day.*
119. Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* – *Seen on 1 day, others heard.*
120. Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* – *Seen on 1 day.*
121. Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* – *Seen on 1 day.*
122. Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* – *Seen on 2 days.*
123. Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus* – *Seen on 2 days.*
124. Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* – *Seen on 3 days.*
125. Marsh Tit *Parus palustris* – *Seen on 1 day.*
126. Great Tit *Parus major*- *Seen on 6 days.*
127. Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* – *Seen on 2 days.*
128. Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* – *Seen on 1 day, white-headed form.*
129. Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* – *Seen on 2 days.*

130. Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* – Heard on 1 day.
131. Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* – Seen every day.
132. Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* – Seen on 4 days.
133. Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* – Seen every day.
134. Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica* – Seen every day.
135. Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* – Seen on 3 days.
136. Rook *Corvus frugilegus* – Seen on 4 days.
137. Hooded Crow *Corvus corone* – Seen every day.
138. Common Raven *Corvus corax* – Seen on 3 days.
139. Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* – Seen every day.
140. Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* - Seen every day.
141. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* - Seen every day.
142. Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* - Seen every day.
143. Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* - Seen every day.
144. Eurasian Serin *Serinus serinus* - Seen on 3 days, others heard.
145. Eurasian Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* - Seen on 6 days.
146. Common Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* - Seen every day.
147. Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* - Seen on 5 days.
148. Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* – Seen on 2 days.
149. Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* – Seen on 3 days.
150. Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*- Seen on 3 days.
151. Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* – Seen every day.

www.wildwings.co.uk