

WildWings

HUNGARY in AUTUMN

30th October – 5th November 2016

Tour Report by tour leader Gerard Gorman

Participants: Kevin & Madeleine May, Ko Yamamoto, Malcolm Chettleburgh & Anthony Perrin.

Day 1 (Oct 30th): After meeting up at Budapest Airport we were soon into our vehicle and on our way towards our first base in the Kiskunság, a large lowland area to the south-east of Budapest. Although this was a “transfer day”, we wasted no time and kept our eyes open as we went, and soon started to see some birds. Common Buzzards were indeed common, there were a few Corn Buntings on wires and we saw our first Tree Sparrows, Crested Larks, Lapwings, Yellow-legged Gulls and Great Egrets. There were also a few male and “ringtail” Hen Harriers, and a Rough-legged Buzzard showed very well. I stopped at a spot I had checked-out a week earlier, and we were then to experience one of the highlights of the trip, on this the very first day. A group of 30 Great Bustards in a roadside field allowed us prolonged views. As we watched them, our first Great Grey Shrike was spotted on a wire. In addition to the birds, there were also many Roe Deer on our route. Further on, another stop in a village park produced two Syrian Woodpeckers. We then checked into our guest-house and soon after had our first fine Magyar meal.

Day 2 (Oct 31st): It was a fine autumn morning, and most of us met at 7am for an optional pre-breakfast walk around our accommodation. We soon found White Wagtails, Black Redstarts, and a flock of Fieldfares flew over. After breakfast, we set off to a nearby salt-lake. We went “off-road” via a dirt track and thus got close to the water and the birds. It was to be a very good few hours here. Birds included many Greater White-fronted and Greylag Geese, Pintail, Shoveler, Wigeon, Teal, and four Cranes flew by. But the highlight was probably the raptors: Hen Harriers, Marsh Harriers, Kestrels, Sparrowhawk, two Eastern Imperial Eagles, two White-tailed Eagles and two Saker Falcons, all seen well. Continuing on, we then had a few “dodgy” puddles and muddy patches to get around before we finally got back onto the surfaced road. Next up was a “comfort stop” in a roadside café, where a Green Woodpecker called. We then visited a Long-eared Owl daytime roost I knew by a church in a village near the Danube. We saw four owls well here, one totally out in the open in a birch tree, and although others were no doubt in the thick conifers, we did not try to see them in case we disturbed them. We had our picnic lunch by an ancient burial mound where there were lots of Ruddy Darters, a surprising number of butterflies and a photogenic Tree Frog. Heading back to our base, we stopped to watch various roadside birds, including a few raptors and big flocks of corvids, Hooded Crows, Jackdaws and Rooks, and a herd of Hungarian Grey Cattle, a traditional breed with huge horns.

Day 3 (Nov 1st): It was cold and fresh again at 7am, but warmed up by mid-morning and at the end of the day we had even caught the sun on our faces! Today we explored the northern Kiskunság. We found another five Great Bustards near Apaj, many Great Egrets and another Hen Harrier. We then visited a large reed-fringed fish-pond system seeing our first Pygmy Cormorant, waders such as Golden Plover, Ruff and Dunlin and both Penduline and Bearded Tits. We also found a Grass Snake on the track which I helped across, after we had photographed it. Further on, there were many 1000s of Greater White-fronted and Greylag Geese and numerous ducks on a vast flooded field. We reckoned we saw at least 8 different White-tailed Eagles today, and several more Hen Harriers, another Rough-legged Buzzard and a Peregrine on the ground. Leaving these wetlands, a roadside stop to climb an observation tower and scan the flat grasslands produced a surprise in two obliging Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. We had really fantastic views of one, a female, first in tree, before she flew down low into a patch of reeds in front of us. Just before we reached our accommodation, a Little Owl was spotted on a cottage roof. The day ended with another hearty dinner.

Day 4 (Nov 2nd): Today we moved on to our second base at Tata in Transdanubia, west of the Danube. As we went, we stopped for various roadside birds. Just before we reached our destination, we explored a large stone quarry, seeing Long-tailed Tits (some with white heads), more Black Redstarts and briefly, a single Alpine Accentor. Our next stop was by a flooded forest where we ate our lunch. Our first Black Woodpecker of the week was seen here, then a Green Woodpecker called and flew in, and then two Great Spotted Woodpeckers. A Kingfisher, Mistle Thrush and Marsh Tits were also here, and we also heard a Water Rail. Before checking into our hotel, just a few miles away, we scanned the “Old Lake” at Tata, seeing lots of geese, mostly Greater White-fronts but also some Greylag and rafts of ducks, gulls and roosting cormorants. On an easy walk in the lakeside woods before dusk arrived, we found another Black Woodpecker and a Grey-headed Woodpecker. Once again, we were treated to copious amounts of fine food at dinner (no one was going to lose weight on this tour!) and some of us tried the local wines.

Day 5 (Nov 3rd): Today was our first full day in and around the pleasant town of Tata. Before breakfast we saw many geese and ducks on the lake, and woodpeckers seen near our hotel included Black, Green, Middle Spotted, Great Spotted and a Grey-headed called. We then visited the Ferencmajor fishponds where some dedicated and friendly young bird-ringers were manning a camp, but as it was windy and chilly, few birds were being caught. The ponds here however, some deep, some shallow, produced a good range of birds. Besides the many “grey geese” we found single Barnacle and Red-breasted Geese. Other birds included more Pygmy Cormorants, Common Pochards, Gadwalls, Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes, our first Ravens, and yet another White-tailed Eagle, an adult. The weather had been kind to us so far, but now, as it was getting a little cold, we drove up through the vineyards above Tata to have a hot lunch in a winery in the hills. We passed through some quiet, tidy villages and there were fine views from here over the Danube and beyond northwards into Slovakia. At the end of the day, we checked the lake near our hotel once more, seeing lots of wildfowl, and then had another walk into the adjacent woodlands.

Day 6 (Nov 4th): Before breakfast we scanned the roosting geese on the lake, seeing some Bean amongst the more numerous Greater White-fronts. We finally saw a Short-toed Treecreeper, after having heard several, and a nice party of male and female “continental” Bullfinches. After breakfast, we drove the short way up into the deciduous, mainly beech and hornbeam, forests of the Gerecse Hills. The autumn colours of the leaves here were stunning, and some of the older trees and logs were dotted with impressive fungi. We saw yet another Black Woodpecker, several Great Spotted Woodpeckers and a Grey-headed Woodpecker. All the while Ravens called in the sky above. Although we tried hard, and saw several foraging signs on a woodland walk, our main target here, White-backed Woodpecker, eluded us. After a “comfort stop” in a village inn, we headed back down to Tata and got great views of a Middle Spotted Woodpecker. We then scanned the drained lake from another few spots. The late afternoon light was perfect and we picked out another Barnacle Goose, a Red-breasted, and several “Taiga” Bean Geese amongst the noisy flocks of Greater White-fronts. After dinner, another hearty affair, we went through our sightings and made plans for the next day.

Day 7 (Nov 5th): Our final day. We had seen many good birds during the week (masses of geese, a range of raptors, many woodpeckers, owls at close range, etc), but I asked everyone to try to name their ultimate avian highlight. Madeleine, Ko, Malcolm and Anthony all agreed that the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker that we saw so well on day three was unbeatable (as author of several books on woodpeckers, I was not going to disagree!). For Kevin, however, it was the Great Bustard flock on our very first day. Non-birding highlights of our trip, were the flat expanses of the Kiskunság *puszta* (Kevin), autumn colours in the forests of the Gerecse Hills (Madeleine), the old, leafy, town of Tata (Ko & Malcolm), and the horses being led out each morning at our first guesthouse (Anthony). We set off for Budapest Airport and arrived there at 10am, in good time for Anthony to check-in for his flight. I then took the rest of the group, who were staying on in Budapest, to their respective hotels. I would like to thank everyone for contributing to this successful *WildWings* autumn tour.

HUNGARY IN AUTUMN
30th OCTOBER - 5th NOVEMBER 2016

WILDWINGS CHECKLIST

	30-Oct-16	31-Oct-16	1-Nov-16	2-Nov-16	3-Nov-16	4-Nov-16	5-Nov-16
x = seen. H = heard.							
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>			x	x	x	x	x
Greater White-fronted Goose <i>Anser albifrons</i>		1000s	1000s	1000s	1000s	1000s	x
Taiga Bean Goose <i>Anser fabalis</i>						10	
Tundra Bean Goose <i>Anser rossicus</i>					1		
Greylag Goose <i>Anser anser</i>		1000s	1000s	100s	100s	100s	x
Barnacle Goose <i>Branta leucopsis</i>					1	1	
Red-breasted Goose <i>Branta ruficollis</i>					1	1	
Common Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	x						
Mallard Anas <i>platyrhynchos</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Gadwall <i>Anas strepera</i>				x	x		
Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>		x					
Northern Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i>		x		x		x	
Eurasian Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>		x	x			x	
Common Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>		x	x	x	x	x	
Common Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>					x		
Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i>					x	x	
Common Pheasant <i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x
Black-necked Grebe <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>						3	
Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			x		x		
Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			x	x	x	x	x
Pygmy Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>			x		x		
Great Egret <i>Egretta alba</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
White-tailed Eagle <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		2	8	1	2		
Eastern Imperial Eagle <i>Aquila heliaca</i>		2					
Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		2	3		2		
Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>		5	6	3			
Common Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Rough-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo lagopus</i>		1		1			
Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i>		2	4	1	1		1
Common Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	x	x	x	x			x
Peregrine Falco <i>peregrinus</i>			1				
Saker Falco <i>cherrug</i>		2					
Water Rail <i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				H	H		
Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>						1	
Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>			x		x		x
Common Crane <i>Grus grus</i>			4				
Great Bustard <i>Otis tarda</i>		30		5			
Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>				6			
Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				4			
Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	100s	100s	100s				
Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>				50			
Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>				6			
Eurasian Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>		x	x				
Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibunda</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Feral Rock Dove <i>Columba livia</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Woodpigeon <i>Columba palumbus</i>	x				x		
Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Long-eared Owl <i>Asio otus</i>			4				
Little Owl <i>Athene noctua</i>				1			
Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>				1	1	2	
Black Woodpecker <i>Dryocopus martius</i>					2	1	2
Eurasian Green Woodpecker <i>Picus viridis</i>		H			1	1	1
Grey-headed Woodpecker <i>Picus canus</i>					1	H	1
Great Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos major</i>			x	x	x	x	
Syrian Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos sylvaticus</i>		2					
Middle Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos medius</i>					x	x	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos minor</i>				2			
Crested Lark <i>Galerida cristata</i>	x	x	x				
Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i>					1		
White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i>		x					
Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			H		1	H	1
Alpine Accentor <i>Prunella collaris</i>					1		
Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		H			H	1	
Black Redstart <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	x	x	x	x	x		
Stonechat <i>Saxicola torquatus</i>			x				
Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x
Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i>	x	x	x	x	x		
Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				x	x	x	
Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>				H	H	x	
Bearded Tit <i>Panurus biarmicus</i>				10			
Long-tailed Tit <i>Aegithalos caedatus</i>		x		x		x	
Marsh Tit <i>Parus palustris</i>				x	x	x	
Blue Tit <i>Parus caeruleus</i>	x	x		x	x		
Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x
Eurasian Nuthatch <i>Sitta europaea</i>					x	x	
Short-toed Treecreeper <i>Certhia brachyactyla</i>					H	x	
Penduline Tit <i>Remiz pendulinus</i>				1	H		2
Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>		2	2				
Eurasian Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Maggie <i>Pica pica</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x
Jackdaw <i>Corvus monedula</i>		x	x	x	x		
Rook <i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Hooded Crow <i>Corvus cornix</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>					x	x	
Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	x	x	x	x			
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>		x	x	x			
Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i>	x	x	x	x	x		
Common Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		x		x	x	x	
Serin <i>Serinus serinus</i>			1				
Greenfinch <i>Carduelis chloris</i>	x	x	x	x		x	
Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	x	x	x	x	x		
Linnet <i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	x		x				
Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>							x
Hawfinch <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>							x
Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		x					
Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		x					
Corn Bunting <i>Emberiza calandra</i>	x	x		x			
Roe Deer	x	x	x	x		x	x
Brown Hare					1		
Grass Snake				1			
Tree Frog			1				
Ruddy Darter		x	x				
Red Admiral		x					
Clouded Yellow		x					
Green-veined White		x					