

PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

HUNGARY

1st – 14th NOVEMBER 2019

TOUR REPORT

LEADERS: CHRIS DOUGHTY and ZOLTAN ECSEDI.

At the beginning of autumn, huge flocks of geese, ducks and Common Cranes, on their way to wintering grounds in the Mediterranean Basin and the Nile Valley, transform Hortobagy National Park, in eastern Hungary, into the foremost migration staging post in Europe. Witnessing this very special spectacle, was the main reason for our birding tour to Hungary; and we were not to be disappointed. We did indeed observe immense flocks of Greater White-fronted and Greylag Geese, and sprinkled among them, we found 33 stunning Red-breasted Geese, and 7 endangered, Lesser White-fronted Geese. We also very much enjoyed the huge flocks of Common Cranes, a large flock of Great Bustards, a flock of Eurasian Dotterels and large numbers of birds of prey. In the Zemplen and Bukk Hills, in the later half of the tour, the beech and oak woodlands, looked resplendent in their magical autumn colours. Here we saw no less than 7 species of owls, all during daylight hours, and 7 species of colourful woodpeckers. Unexpected vagrants add excitement to any birding tour, and the Yellow-billed Loon we saw, was a very welcome surprise.

Following a couple of long and tiring flights from Australia, we were met at Budapest Airport, by Zoltan, our local guide, and then we drove to our splendid hotel in the center of Budapest, where we were able to freshen up a little. In the afternoon we did a little birding and sight-seeing, at Heroes Square, in the very center of Budapest. While admiring the many impressive statues and wonderful baroque architecture, we also saw Great Cormorant, Grey Heron, Black-headed Gull, Feral Pigeon, Grey Wagtail, Common Magpie, Rook, Hooded Crow and House Sparrow.

The following morning, after breakfast, we drove alongside the Danube River, in Budapest, and here we added Mallard and Caspian Gull. We were on our way to an area of farmland at Bugyi, a little to the south of Budapest, where a flock of Great Bustards had been reported. It took us no time at all, to locate the flock of splendid Great Bustards, which were greatly admired. The farmland proved to be a good area for many other species of birds, and in a short period of time we saw a superb White-tailed Eagle, several Western Marsh-Harriers, a female Hen Harrier, large numbers of Common Buzzards, a superb Rough-legged Buzzard, a few Common Kestrels, a distant Saker Falcon, perched on an electricity pylon, several Common Pheasants, small flocks of Northern Lapwings, a few Eurasian Curlews, a surprisingly large flock of Stock Doves, lots of Eurasian Collared Doves, a few Meadow Pipits, a diminutive Goldcrest, a

Eurasian Wren in full song, a few Common Blackbirds, a pair of Great Tits, a Blue Tit, a very confiding Great Grey Shrike, one or two Western Jackdaws, a pair of Common Ravens, a small flock of Common Starlings, the Eurasian Tree Sparrow proved to be common, as were European Greenfinches and Goldfinches, and we also saw large numbers of Corn Buntings. We also saw a herd of Western Roe Deer and a Brown Hare.

In the afternoon, we drove to the east, to Tisza Lake, where a Yellow-billed Loon, an extremely rare vagrant to Hungary, had been reported. Following a little searching, we enjoyed good scope views of an adult Yellow-billed Loon, in non-breeding plumage. Other birds of interest here included both Red-throated and Black-throated Loons, Great Crested Grebe, Great Egret, Mute Swan, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Eurasian Coot, Common Kingfisher, Lesser Spotted and Great Spotted Woodpeckers and our only White Wagtail of the tour. We then continued on to our splendid lodge in Hortobagy National Park, where we would stay for the next four nights. We arrived late in the afternoon, just as it was getting dark, but we had enough time to marvel at the great flocks of Greater White-fronted and Greylag Geese, and Common Cranes.

Following breakfast at the lodge, we drove in four-wheel drive vehicles to a particularly wet area, in the southern section of Hortobágy National Park. We were in search of the scarce Eurasian Dotterel; at exactly this time of year, small flocks of this beautiful bird, turn up at exactly the same location, where they moult from their splendid breeding-plumage, in to their rather drab non-breeding plumage. Right on cue, there they were, a flock of 20 or so birds, every single one, in non-breeding plumage. Shortly, these birds which had bred in Scandinavia, would continue their migration, to their wintering grounds, in a semi-arid belt of the Middle East and North Africa, extending from Morocco, eastwards to Iran. Scattered among the Eurasian Dotterels, was an even larger flock of Eurasian Golden-Plovers, and they too were all in non-breeding plumage. Next, we returned to the massive flocks of geese, where we were able to pick out two of the world's most endangered birds, the Lesser White-fronted Goose and the stunningly attractive Red-breasted Goose, we very much enjoyed watching them in the scope. In the afternoon, new birds for our ever growing tour list included Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, the very uncommon Eastern Imperial Eagle, a splendid Short-eared Owl, Crested Lark and Eurasian Linnet.

On our second full day in Hortobagy National Park, we took a packed lunch with us, and spent the whole day birding in the north-eastern section of the park, in an extensive area of fish-ponds and lakes. New birds here, included a few small flocks of Little Grebes, and among them we found a single Slavonian Grebe, a very uncommon passage migrant to Hungary, there were also good numbers of the range-restricted Pygmy Cormorant, which we saw very well. Among the thousands of wildfowl present, we picked out Eurasian Wigeon, Gadwall, Eurasian Teal and Northern Pintail. A Peregrine Falcon added a little excitement to the days precedings, we greatly admired several beautiful Pied Avocets, a few Black-tailed Godwits, a couple of elegant Spotted Redshanks, a large

flock of Dunlins, we picked out a single Common Gull, among the many Caspian Gulls. We then drove to an old barn, and you guessed it, we saw a pair of delightful Western Barn Owls, and we also found a Little Owl, sitting on the roof of an old building. We were then driven to the day-time roost of a group of 24 or so, splendid Long-eared Owls, which was one of the many highlights of the tour. In the extensive reedbeds surrounding the lakes, we enjoyed very good looks at both the attractive Eurasian Penduline-Tit and Common Reed Bunting. In a patch of farmland and woodland, we added both Black and Green Woodpeckers, a couple of Water Pipits, a small flock of Fieldfares, a flock of migratory Long-tailed Tits, Common Chaffinch, a pair of wintering Brambling, a small flock of Eurasian Linnets, several attractive Hawfinches, and a bathing flock of beautiful Yellowhammers, who showed off their chestnut rumps, as they were bathing.

On our final day in Hortobagy National Park, we concentrated our efforts on a collection of fish-ponds and small lakes, in the western section of the park. Here we enjoyed great looks at several Common Shelducks, and three very uncommon Ferruginous Ducks. Along the muddy shorelines of a large lake, we had good looks at a few Grey Plovers, several Common Ringed Plovers and a small group of Common Snipe. We managed to find a solitary Little Gull among the many Caspian Gulls, and in one of the extensive reedbeds, we watched a large flock of Bearded Reedlings. We also saw our first Common Blackbird, of the tour.

The following morning, with some reluctance, we left Hortobagy National Park, and headed for the small village of Komloska, in the rolling countryside of the Zemplen Hills, in northeastern Hungary. However, we did have a couple of planned birding stops along the way. The first, was at the Elep Fish Pond, where the only new bird we found, was a splendid Eurasian Jay, who was busily burying acorns in the ground, which would help keep him alive, during the oncoming winter months. We then drove to Debrecen Great Wood, where we found a flurry of activity, and plenty of woodland birds, which were new birds for the tour. We admired a Tawny Owl who was sitting in a tall tree, at the entrance to his nest hollow, we found a few wintering Redwings, a not very obliging Mistle Thrush, we enjoyed good close looks at a couple of Marsh Tits, enjoyed several Eurasian Nuthatches and a couple of Short-toed Treecreepers. While refueling our bus at Tokaj, Jackie pointed out a Syrian Woodpecker, climbing up a nearby tree and this enabled us to have a very good look at it. On our arrival in the Zemplen Hills, we did a little birding and saw our first Eurasian Treecreeper of the tour, as well as a splendid Eurasian Red Squirrel.

The following morning we did some pre-breakfast birding in Komloska Village, and we saw our first Grey-headed Woodpecker, and a few Eurasian Siskins. Following breakfast, we drove to an abandoned quarry, deep in the Zemplen Hills, in search of a pair of Eurasian Eagle-Owls, we quickly located one of them, and while enjoying prolonged scope views of the bird, a surprise, wintering Wallcreeper, suddenly flew past us, and perched on a nearby rock-face. We hurriedly got the scope on it, and while we were watching it, a second Wallcreeper, flew in front of us; and to our alarm, a Eurasian

Sparrowhawk was in hot pursuit! Following a series of twists and turns, the sparrowhawk gave up, and, fortunately, flew away. While birding at a second abandoned quarry, we saw our first European Robin and had fleeting glimpses of a Rock Bunting.

We spent the whole of the following day birding in the Zemplen Hills, the weather was good, and so was the birding. We found a Northern Goshawk in flight, and this was quickly followed, by a Golden Eagle, which was also observed in flight. We very much enjoyed close, prolonged looks at a stunning Ural Owl, in broad daylight, as it perched, totally unconcerned, on the cable of a ski-lift chair. A Middle Spotted Woodpecker, was seen very well, as was a Woodlark, and a male Common Crossbill was a very welcome addition to the trip list. At dusk, as we were about to enter a small boutique winery, where we would enjoy a very fine dining experience, and the odd glass of wine, or two, a Common Pipistrelle, a diminutive species of bat, was observed flying around the building.

The following morning we drove to the Nyekladhaza Gravel Pits, and here we managed to find two new birds for the tour; a single Yellow-legged Gull, which we saw well in the scope, and a small flock of 5 Common Wood-Pigeons. We then drove to the beautiful town of Eger, complete with its very own castle, and checked in at a very fine hotel, in the shadow of the castle.

All of the following day was spent in the Bukk Hills National Park. Most of our time was taken up birding in a very large abandoned quarry, which was worked extensively, during the Russian Occupation of Hungary. Here we found the first of our two target birds for the day; a delightful male Black Redstart, and we were able to watch the bird for quite some time, as it searched for insects along the steep walls of the old quarry. At a second, smaller quarry, our target species was the attractive, but all too rare, Alpine Accentor. As we were walking to the quarry, we found a beautiful and very obliging Fire Salamander, on the track ahead of us, this was a real treat, and we saw it exceptionally well. On our arrival at the quarry, we found a pair of Black Redstarts, and our last species of the tour, a pair of exquisite Alpine Accentors, which performed very well for us.

The final day of the tour was also spent in the Bukk Hills National Park, but try as we may, we failed to find any new birds for the tour.

The following morning we drove back to the airport in Budapest, for our flight back to Australia. It had been a very successful and enjoyable tour, thanks in no small part, to the great skill and untiring enthusiasm, of our expert local guide, Zoltan Ecsedi.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

LOONS

Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata* A rare winter visitor to Hungary, we were fortunate to observe a single bird, at Tisza Lake

Black-throated Loon *Gavia arctica* A very uncommon winter visitor to Hungary, we enjoyed good scope views of a single birds at Tisza Lake, and a second bird, at the Nyckladhaza Gravel Pits.

Yellow-billed Loon *Gavia adamsii* A rare vagrant anywhere in Hungary, this species was by far the biggest surprise of the tour. A single bird was observed well through the scope, at Tisza Lake. This species breeds throughout northern Siberia in Russia, and winters predominantly along the northern coast of Norway. This species is classified as 'Near Threatened' by Birdlife International.

GREBES

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* A common summer breeding bird throughout Hungary, the majority of birds had already left for there wintering grounds in Africa. However, there were a few post breeding flocks present, in Hortobagy National Park.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* A common summer breeding bird throughout Hungary, the majority of birds had already left for there wintering grounds, on larger lakes and reservoirs, mainly in Switzerland. However, there were a few post breeding flocks present, scattered throughout the tour.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus* This species is a very uncommon passage migrant in Hungary. We observed a single bird in Hortobagy National Park, and this was followed by a second sighting, also of a single bird, at the Nyckladhaza Gravel Pits. This species is classified as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. The population is estimated to be between 240,000 – 583,000 individuals, and unfortunately, the population is declining. The main threats to this species are human disturbance at nesting sites, forestry operations around breeding lakes, fluctuating water levels, and the stocking of lakes with Rainbow Trout.

CORMORANTS

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Good numbers were observed frequently, throughout all wetland areas of the tour. However, there is only one known breeding colony in the country, which is apparently stable. The majority of these birds are resident, but a small number, winter along the Mediterranean coastline.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* This species has a fairly restricted range; occurring from Hungary in the west of its range, to Kazakhstan, in the east. In Hungary the Pygmy Cormorants is an expanding breeder, both in range and number. It nests in the largest numbers on the fishponds and marshlands of Hortobágy, but its population at Kis-Balaton has also become significant during the last few decades. In Hungary, the Pygmy Cormorant is mainly a breeding summer visitor, with the majority of birds wintering in Croatia, Montenegro, Albania and Greece. However during mild winters, large numbers stay to overwinter in Hungary.

HERONS, EGRETS AND BITTERNS

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Observed almost daily, in small numbers, throughout the tour. The Grey Heron is a fairly common summer breeding visitor to Hungary, wintering mainly along the Adriatic coast of Croatia.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Small numbers recorded almost daily. There has been a massive rise in the number of breeding pairs in Hungary, during the last few decades. From 33 pairs in 1951, to currently almost 4,000 pairs. The main breeding grounds are in Hortobágy, where over 1,000 pairs nest. The majority of Hungary's breeding birds winter along the Adriatic coast of Croatia. However, during mild winters, large numbers stay to overwinter in Hungary.

SWANS, GEESE AND DUCKS

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* A common breeding bird in Hungary, which we saw well at Tisza Lake and in Hortobagy National Park. The Hungarian breeding population is mainly sedentary, but some short-distance winter migration also occurs, mainly to the Balkans. The wintering Mute Swan population in Hungary is between 1,000-1,200 individuals, consisting mainly of local breeding birds, but also includes wintering birds, predominantly from southern Poland. During severe winters, breeding birds from as far away as Denmark and Russia, also occur.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* Huge flocks, totaling up to 50,000 individuals, use Hortobagy National Park as a staging post, in autumn, before wintering predominantly in areas around the Black Sea coast, and along the west coast of Turkey. We greatly enjoyed watching the huge flocks of this species, during our time in Hortobagy National Park.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* Among the many thousands of Greater White-fronted Geese, we managed to pick out a total of 7, of these very rare birds. This species breeds on the far north of the Arctic coastline, from Norway in the west, to Kamchatka, in Russia, in the east. The European population winters in southeastern Europe. It is classified as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. The population is estimated to be between 16,000 – 27,000 individuals, and unfortunately, the population is declining. In Europe the population is critically endangered, with a population of only 50 breeding pairs. The main threats to this species in Russia, are illegal hunting, disturbance at nesting sites, and the rounding up of moulting birds. In Europe, the main threat is the accidental shooting of birds on its staging and wintering grounds. Each year 20 to 30 percent of the population is shot and killed in Europe.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser* A common breeding resident, we enjoyed many sightings in Hortobagy National Park.

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* We found a total of 33 individuals of this species among the thousands of Greater White-fronted Geese, in Hortobagy National Park. This stunningly attractive species, breeds only on the Arctic shore of central Siberia. The majority of the population winters along the Black sea coast and in Greece. With much smaller numbers wintering in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Iraq. This species is classified as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. The

- population is estimated to be between 44,000 – 56,000 individuals, and unfortunately, the population is declining. The main threats to this species are hunting while on migration, and on its wintering grounds, and industrial development at its breeding grounds, in Siberia.
- Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* In Hungary, this species is an uncommon passage migrant, we saw up to a dozen birds, while birding in Hortobagy National Park. These birds are from breeding grounds in Scandinavia, which winter along the Mediterranean coast.
- Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope* In Hungary this species is a fairly common passage migrant. It breeds throughout northern Europe and Asia. Wintering mainly, along the Mediterranean coast. We saw good numbers while in Hortobagy National Park.
- Gadwall** *Anas strepera* In Hungary, this species is an uncommon breeding resident. We observed a small number very well, in Hortobagy National Park.
- Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* In Hungary, this species is a fairly common winter visitor and passage migrant. We observed good numbers during our time in Hortobagy National Park.
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* This species is a common summer breeding bird throughout Hungary. In the warmer winters, many birds stay in Hungary, however, in cold winters the majority migrate to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. We observed massive flocks in Hortobagy National Park and smaller flocks in other wetland areas.
- Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta* Small numbers of this attractive species breed in Hungary. However, most birds are passage migrants, from breeding grounds in northeastern Europe and Russia, which winter mainly in the western Mediterranean.
- Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* Small numbers breed in Hungary. The majority are passage migrants, from breeding grounds in northeastern Europe and Russia, which winter mainly in the Mediterranean Basin.
- Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina* Small numbers of this attractive species breed in Hungary. However, most birds are passage migrants, from breeding grounds in northeastern Europe and northern Asia, which winter mainly in Britain, Ireland, Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Spain and northwest Africa. We saw a small flock at Tisza Lake. This species is classified as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. The population is estimated to be between 2,000,000-2,250,000 individuals, and unfortunately, the population is declining. The main threat to this species is hunting, both on its breeding and wintering grounds.
- Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Approximately 100 pairs nest in Hungary, and winter in the Mediterranean Basin. Unlike most other species of ducks, this species is always shy and secretive, it does not occur in close flocks, as in most other species of ducks. We were fortunate to find 3 birds, in the Hortobagy National Park.
- Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* In Hungary this species is only a passage migrant, large numbers of birds from northeastern Europe and Russia pass through Hungary,

where they occur on deeper, larger lakes; before wintering along the Adriatic coast of the Mediterranean Sea. We observed good numbers at Tisza Lake and at the Nyckladhaza Gravel Pits.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* In Hungary this species is a rare passage migrant, small numbers of birds from Scandinavia, migrate through Hungary, where they occur on deeper, larger lakes; before wintering along the Adriatic coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Our only sighting, was of a small flock, while birding at Tisza Lake.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* Small numbers of this species, which have bred in Scandinavia, winter on the larger lakes of central Hungary. Therefore, we were fortunate to observe a pair of birds, while birding at Tisza Lake.

KITES, HAWKS AND EAGLES

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Approximately 180 pairs of this very impressive species, now breed in northern Hungary. Due mainly to long term conservation measures, there has been a sharp increase in numbers during the last few decades. This number increases during the winter months, when wintering birds from northwestern Russia, swell this number to between 800-1,000 individuals. We enjoyed several good sightings of this species at scattered areas throughout the tour.

Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* A common summer breeding bird in Hungary, with an estimated 6,000-7,000 breeding pairs. Recent research has shown that the majority of adult females and immatures winter in the Mediterranean Basin; while adult males, winter in Africa, south of the Sahara. We enjoyed many good sightings of this species, at scattered locations throughout the tour.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* A fairly common winter visitor, to Hungary, from breeding grounds in northeastern Europe and northwestern Russia. We enjoyed several good sightings of both adult males and females, as well as immature birds.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* This species is a common resident, which we saw well on several occasions throughout the tour. Perhaps the most memorable sighting, was when a sparrowhawk tried to predate a Wallcreeper we were admiring.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* In Hungary, this species is an uncommon breeding resident, with only local movements recorded. During the winter months, numbers increase, with an influx of wintering birds from northeastern Europe and northwestern Russia. We saw a bird in flight, in the Zemplen Hills, and this was followed by a second sighting, also of a bird in flight, at the Nyckladhaza Gravel Pits.

Common Buzzard *Buteo Buteo* This species is a very common breeding resident in Hungary, which we saw on a daily basis.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* Small numbers of this very uncommon species winter in Hungary, from breeding grounds in Scandinavia and northwestern

Russia. We enjoyed a few good sightings in Hortobagy National Park and in the Zemplen Hills.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* In Hungary this species is an uncommon breeding resident. The number of birds has been decreasing in every European country, with the exception of Hungary. Therefore, the growth of the population in Hungary, to an estimated 160 breeding pairs, through carefully considered conservation management, is vitally important to the fate of this species in Europe. We saw three adult birds and one immature bird, during the tour. This species is classified as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. The worldwide population is estimated to be between 2,500-10,000 individuals, and unfortunately, the population is declining. The main threats to this species are the destruction of its forest habitat, and illegal hunting.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* In Hungary, there are only five known breeding pairs of Golden Eagles, which are resident in Hungary all year round. Therefore, we were very fortunate to observe a bird in flight, in the Zemplen Hills.

FALCONS

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* This species is a common resident throughout Hungary, which we saw on almost every day of the tour.

Merlin *Falco columbarius* In Hungary this diminutive species of falcon is a very uncommon winter visitor, from breeding grounds in northeastern Europe and northwestern Russia. We glimpsed a bird in flight, on one occasion, while traveling in the bus, close to Hortobagy National Park.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* This large species of falcon is a scarce resident and winter visitor to Hungary. The wintering birds, are from southwestern Russia. We enjoyed watching two separate birds in the scope, both of which, were perched on telegraph pylons, which seems to be this birds favorite vantage point. This species is classified as 'Endangered' by Birdlife International. The population is estimated to be between 15,000-30,000 individuals, and unfortunately, the population is declining rapidly, particularly in central Asia, which is the birds main stronghold. The main threats to this species are electrocution by power lines, unsustainable capture for the falconry trade, habitat degradation and the impact of chemicals used in agriculture.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* There is a small breeding population of Peregrines in the Carpathian Basin and surrounding mountains, where adult Peregrines stay close to the eyrie, all year round. Birds arrive from Scandinavia and northwestern Russia, during the winter months, where they favour wetlands in the lowlands. We saw two birds during our time in Hortobagy National Park, which would suggest that these birds were winter visitors, from further to the north.

PARTRIDGES AND PHEASANTS

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* This attractive species was introduced into Hungary during the 18th century. Every year, gamekeepers release thousands of reared pheasants into woods in preparation for the shooting season. We enjoyed

daily sightings throughout our time in Hungary, of what is, without doubt, one of the world's most beautiful birds.

CRANES

Common Crane *Grus grus* In Hungary this species is a passage migrant, from breeding grounds in Scandinavia and northwestern Russia. In early autumn, thousands of Common Cranes transform Hortobagy National Park, into the foremost migration staging post in Europe. Before continuing to their wintering grounds, predominantly in Turkey and northern Israel. One of the great highlights of the tour, was to observe the enormous flocks of Common Cranes, feeding in the farmland.

RAILS, GALLINULES AND COOTS

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* This species is a common summer breeding migrant to Hungary, and winters mainly in the Mediterranean Basin. We observed a few small flocks, in the wetlands we visited.

BUSTARDS

Great Bustard *Otis tarda* Hungary has a small resident population of Great Bustards. We were fortunate to find a breeding flock of approximately 24 birds, feeding in farmland, close to Bugyi.

STILTS AND AVOCETS

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* Small numbers of this attractive species breed in Hungary, and spend the winter months in the Mediterranean Basin. We saw a couple of small flocks, during our time in Hortobagy National Park.

LAPWINGS AND PLOVERS

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* A fairly common summer breeding species in Hungary, which winter mainly in the Mediterranean Basin. We observed very large post breeding flocks, during our time in Hortobagy National Park, which were about to leave for their wintering grounds. This species is classified as 'Near Threatened' by Birdlife International.

Eurasian Golden-Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* A very uncommon passage migrant in Hungary, which pass through, on their way to wintering grounds in the Mediterranean Basin. We saw a group of 20 or so birds, together with Eurasian Dotterels, in Hortobagy National Park.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* The Grey Plover is an uncommon passage migrant in Hungary, from breeding grounds on the Arctic coast of northwestern Russia. We were very fortunate to enjoy good looks at a couple of these birds in Hortobagy National Park. Before they continued on to their wintering grounds, in the Mediterranean Basin.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius huiatisula* An uncommon passage migrant in Hungary, from breeding grounds in Scandinavia and northwestern Russia. We

were indeed fortunate to enjoy good looks at a couple of these birds in Hortobagy National Park. Before they continued on to their wintering grounds, in the Mediterranean Basin.

Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* A rare passage migrant in Hungary, which pass through, on their way to wintering grounds in the Mediterranean Basin. We were very fortunate to observe a group of 24 or so birds, together with Eurasian Golden-Plovers, in Hortobagy National Park. Unfortunately, they had all moulted into their rather drab non-breeding plumage.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* Small numbers of the cryptically camouflaged Common Snipe, are summer breeding visitors to Hungary. Larger numbers of passage migrants pass through the country in Autumn, on their way to wintering grounds, predominantly in Greece and Turkey. We observed a small group of birds, extremely well, on one occasion, in Hortobagy National Park.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* There are about 500 breeding pairs in Hungary, and during Autumn there are also large numbers of passage migrants, which pass through, on their way to their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa. We observed a small number of birds in Hortobagy National Park. This species is classified as 'Near Threatened' by Birdlife International.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* Very small numbers of this species breed in Hungary, and during Autumn there are large numbers of passage migrants, which pass through, on their way to their wintering grounds on the northwest coast of Africa. We observed small numbers at regular intervals, during our time in Hortobagy National Park. This species is classified as 'Near Threatened' by Birdlife International.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* This species is a very uncommon autumn passage migrant in Hungary; from breeding grounds in Scandinavia, passing through to their wintering grounds in Africa, south of the Sahara. We saw a few of these birds, during our time in Hortobagy National Park.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* This species is a common passage migrant in Hungary, from breeding grounds in Scandinavia, passing through to their wintering grounds in Egypt and coastal Arabia. We saw large flocks in Hortobagy National Park, all had already moulted in to non-breeding plumage.

GULLS

Common Gull *Larus canus* In Hungary this species is an uncommon passage migrant; from breeding grounds in Scandinavia and northwestern Russia, passing through to their wintering grounds, mainly along the coasts of the Black and Caspian Seas, and the Persian Gulf. We saw a few birds, during our time in Hortobagy National Park.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* The Caspian Gull breeds around the Black and Caspian Seas, extending eastwards across Central Asia to north-west China. In Europe, it has been spreading north and west and now breeds in small numbers in Hungary,

Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland and eastern Germany. The breeding birds in Hungary, winter mainly along the shore of the Adriatic Sea. We found large numbers in all of the wetland areas we visited.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* This species breeds throughout most of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. However, it does not normally breed in Hungary, where the bird is a rare visitor. Therefore, we were very fortunate to find a single bird at the Nyckladhaza Gravel Pits.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* In Hungary, this species is a common breeding bird and an abundant winter visitor, from breeding grounds in northeastern Europe and northwestern Russia. We saw large numbers at all of the wetlands we visited.

Little Gull *Larus minutus* In Hungary the Little Gull is an uncommon passage migrant; migrating from breeding grounds in central western Russia, to wintering grounds in the Mediterranean Basin. We picked out a single bird, among the hundreds of Black-headed Gulls, in Hortobagy National Park.

PIGEONS AND DOVES

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* Feral pigeons were very much in evidence in the larger towns and cities we visited.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas* In Hungary, this species is an uncommon resident and an uncommon passage migrant, from breeding grounds in northern Europe, to wintering grounds in southwest France and the Spanish Pyrenees. We observed a large flock of 40-50 birds, in farmland, close to Bugyi.

Common Wood-Pigeon *Columba palumbus* In Hungary, this species is an abundant summer breeding bird, which winters predominantly in Spain and Portugal. Just about the whole population had already left for their wintering grounds, with the exception of a flock of five birds, which we saw at the Nyckladhaza Gravel Pits.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* This species is an abundant resident in virtually all locations throughout Hungary, it is especially common around human habitation.

BARN OWLS

Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba* In Hungary, this species is an uncommon resident. We were shown a nesting pair in an old barn, in Hortobagy National Park.

OWLS

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* In Hungary, this species is a very uncommon resident. We saw a pair of birds in a disused quarry, in the Zemplen Hills.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* In Hungary, this species is a common resident. We saw a bird very well in Debrecen Great Wood, and this was followed by a second sighting, in the Zemplen Hills.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis* This species is a very uncommon resident in Hungary. It took some finding, but when we did find a pair, it was well worth the effort! This species was voted 'Bird of the Tour' by tour participants.

Little Owl *Athene noctua* In Hungary, this species of owl, which is active in daylight hours, is a widespread resident, often occurring around human habitation, where it frequently roosts and nests in old stone walls, cattle sheds etc. We enjoyed a good sighting of this small species of owl, as it sat on the roof of an old building, in Hortobagy National Park.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* This attractive species, is an uncommon resident in Hungary. During the breeding season, pairs are solitary. However, during the non-breeding season, they use communal day-time roosts, where food is locally abundant. We were taken to one of these communal roosts, in a small village, close to Hortobagy National Park, where over 20 birds were present. It was without doubt, one of the great highlights of the tour.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* In Hungary, this species is an uncommon winter visitor, from breeding grounds in western Russia. We saw single birds, quartering open farmland, on two separate occasions, in Hortobagy National Park.

KINGFISHERS

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* In Hungary, this attractive species, is a fairly common resident. We enjoyed two separate sightings of single birds; the first was at Tisza Lake, and the second, was in Hortobagy National Park.

WOODPECKERS and ALLIES

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* An uncommon resident in Hungary, which we saw on three separate occasions; at Tisza Lake, at Komloska Village and in the Zemplen Hills.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius* In Hungary, this range restricted species, is an uncommon resident of broad-leaved woodland. We enjoyed good looks at three separate individuals, in the Zemplen Hills, and in the Bukk Hills National Park.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* A common resident of Hungary, which we saw very well on several occasions throughout the tour.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* A fairly common resident in Hungary; Jackie pointed out a bird in an old tree, at Tokaj, while we were filling our bus with fuel.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* This very large species of woodpecker, is a fairly common resident of Hungary. We saw it very well, on a number of occasions throughout the tour.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* A common resident of Hungary, which we saw well, at a few scattered locations.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* This uncommon resident, was seen very well in Komloska Village and in the Zemplen Hills.

LARKS

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* This species is a common and widespread resident throughout Hungary; which we saw well, on a few occasions.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea* This species of lark, is an uncommon summer breeding bird in Hungary, wintering mainly in Croatia and Greece. Most of this species had already left for their wintering grounds, however, we did see a single straggler, in farmland, in the Zemplen Hills.

PIPITS and WAGTAILS

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* A fairly common passage migrant in Hungary, from breeding grounds in northwestern Russia. It winters in the Mediterranean Basin. We saw a small flock in farmland at Bugyi, and then we saw a second small flock, in Hortobagy National Park. This species is classified as 'Near Threatened' by Birdlife International.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* This species of pipit is an uncommon passage migrant in Hungary, from breeding grounds in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania, which winter in Italy. We observed a pair of birds in Hortobagy National Park.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* This species is a very common summer breeding visitor to Hungary; wintering mainly in Africa, north of the equator. We observed a single straggler, at Tisza Lake.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* This very attractive species of wagtail, is a fairly common summer breeding visitor to Hungary, and winters mainly in Greece. Once again, we only observed a single bird, which flew over Heroes Square, in central Budapest, on the first day of the tour.

KINGLETS

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* Lively and fearless, the Goldcrest is Europe's smallest bird, during the breeding season, it is a bird of conifer woodlands. In the non-breeding season, it also ranges freely into deciduous woodland and even open heathland. In Hungary, it is predominantly a fairly common passage migrant, from breeding grounds in Russia, which winter mainly along the north coast of the Mediterranean Sea. We enjoyed many sightings, throughout the tour.

WRENS

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* In Hungary, this diminutive species is a fairly common resident, with numbers increasing in winter, because of an influx of migrants from northern Europe. We enjoyed a few scattered sightings throughout the tour.

ACCENTORS

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* This species of accentor, is a very uncommon passage migrant in Hungary, from breeding grounds in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania, which winter mainly in Croatia. We were very fortunate, to find a pair of birds in a disused quarry, in the Bukk Hills National Park.

THRUSHES and ALLIES

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* A common and widespread resident throughout Hungary, which we saw very well on several occasions.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* In Hungary, this fairly common species, is a widespread winter Visitor, from breeding grounds in Scandinavia and northwestern Russia. We enjoyed watching several large foraging flocks, throughout the tour.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus* The Redwing is a fairly common passage migrant, from breeding grounds in Scandinavia and northwestern Russia, which winter in the Mediterranean Basin. We saw it on a few occasions, in the Zemplen and Bukk Hills. This species is classified as 'Near Threatened' by Birdlife International.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* This species is a fairly common breeding summer visitor, in Hungary, which winters in Morocco. We saw it well, on a few occasions, in the Zemplen and Bukk Hills.

OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* This species is a common breeding summer visitor, in Hungary, which winters mainly in Greece. We saw it well, on a couple of occasions, in the Zemplen Hills.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* This species is an uncommon breeding summer visitor, in Hungary, which winters mainly in Northwest Africa. We saw a total of three birds, very well, while birding in the Bukk Hills National Park.

REEDLINGS

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus* This superb species, is an uncommon resident in Hungary. It breeds in extensive areas of reedbeds, exactly the habitat, where we watched a couple of flocks, during our time in Hortobagy National Park.

LONG-TAILED TITS

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* This species is a fairly common resident in Hungary, and the numbers swell during the winter months, from an influx of wintering birds from Scandinavia. We enjoyed watching several small flocks, at scattered locations throughout the tour, including white-headed birds of the race *caudatus*, from Scandinavia.

TITS AND CHICKADEES

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* A fairly common resident throughout Hungary, which we saw well, on several occasions.

Great Tit *Parus major* A common and widespread resident throughout Hungary; which we saw on almost every day of the tour.

European Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* This closely related species, is also a common and widespread resident throughout Hungary; and once again, we saw it on almost every day of the tour.

NUTHATCHES

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* A common resident, of forested areas throughout Hungary; we saw this species very well, on several occasions throughout the tour.

WALLCREEPER

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* This stunning looking bird, is a very uncommon winter visitor to the lower foothills of the Carpathian mountains, in northeastern Hungary. We were very fortunate, to find a pair of birds at a disused quarry, in the Zemplen Hills. It is thought that these birds are from breeding territories in the Swiss Alps, further to the west.

CREEPERS

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* In Hungary, this species is a common resident, which we saw well, on a few occasions.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* In Hungary, this species is an uncommon resident. We very much enjoyed watching a couple of birds, while birding in Debrecen Great Wood.

PENDULINE TITS

Eurasian Penduline-Tit *Remiz pendulinus* This attractive species, is an uncommon summer breeding visitor to Hungary, most of these birds are believed to winter in Italy. We enjoyed watching a family party in a large reedbed, while birding in Hortobagy National Park.

SHRIKES

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* A fairly common winter visitor to Hungary, from breeding grounds in northeastern Europe and northwestern Russia. We observed small numbers at scattered locations throughout the tour.

JAYS, MAGPIES and CROWS

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Another attractive species, it is a common resident throughout Hungary, we found it to be particularly common in the deciduous oak and beech forests, of northeastern Hungary.

Common Magpie *Pica hudsonia* A particularly common resident of Hungary, which we saw very well, on many occasions.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* This species is both a common resident, and a common winter visitor in Hungary. The winter visitors are from northeastern Europe and northwestern Russia. We found small flocks of this species inhabiting farmland, in and around Hortobagy National Park. They could often be found mixed in among larger flocks of Rooks.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* The Rook is a very common summer breeding visitor to Hungary, most of these birds are believed to winter in Greece. On most days we found large flocks feeding in farmland, often with smaller numbers of Western Jackdaws mixed in among them.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* A common resident of Hungary, which we observed on most days of the tour.

Common Raven *Corvus corax* In Hungary this species is a localised resident, which occurs in small numbers, throughout the northern fringe of Hungary, in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. We observed small numbers, while birding in the Zemplen and Bukk Hills.

STARLINGS

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* This species is a very common summer breeding visitor to Hungary, most of these birds are believed to winter in Southern Italy and Sicily. On most days we found small flocks feeding in farmland, throughout the tour.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* A common and widespread resident throughout all of Hungary, wherever there is human settlement. We saw it well, on many occasions.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* A common resident and winter visitor in Hungary, wintering birds originate in Russia. We found large flocks foraging in farmland, throughout the tour.

SISKINS, CROSSBILLS and ALLIES

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* A common and widespread resident species in Hungary, which we saw well on many occasions.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* This attractive species is a fairly common winter visitor to Hungary; from breeding grounds in northwestern Russia. We observed a pair of birds very well, in Hortobagy National Park.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* An uncommon, sporadic visitor to Hungary, We were very fortunate to find an adult male, while birding in the Zemplen Hills.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* A common and widespread resident throughout Hungary, which we observed on most days of the tour.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus* A fairly common winter visitor to Hungary, from breeding grounds in northwestern Russia, We saw it well on a couple of occasions, during our time in the Zemplen Hills.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* A common and widespread resident of Hungary, we observed small flocks, throughout the tour.

Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* This species is both a common resident, and a common winter visitor in Hungary. The winter visitors are from northwestern Russia. We found small flocks of this species inhabiting farmland at Bugyi and in the Zemplen Hills.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* This species is both a fairly common resident, and a fairly common winter visitor. The winter visitors are from northwestern Russia. We found a small flock of this species in Hortobagy National Park, and then found slightly larger flocks in the Zemplen Hills.

BUNTINGS, SEEDEATERS and NEW WORLD SPARROWS

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* This species is both a common resident, and a common winter visitor in Hungary. The winter visitors are from northwestern Russia. We found a few birds in Hortobagy National Park and then found large flocks in the Zemplen Hills.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* Small numbers of this species breed in Hungary, and winter mainly in Greece. We glimpsed a bird in flight, in a disused quarry, in the Zemplen Hills.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* This species is a common summer breeding visitor to Hungary, most of these birds are believed to winter in Southern France and Spain. We found small numbers of this attractive species in Hortobagy National Park, and at the Elep Fish Pond, close to Hortobagy National Park.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* This species is a common summer breeding visitor to Hungary, most of these birds are believed to winter in the Balkans. We found large numbers in farmland at Bugyi, and smaller numbers in the Zemplen Hills.

MAMMALS

Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* The small species of bat we saw at dusk one evening, flying around the winery where we had dinner in the Zemplen Hills, was of this species.

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* We enjoyed many sightings of this species, at scattered locations, throughout the tour.

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* We had two brief sightings of this species, during our time in the Zemplen Hills.

European Hare *Lepus capensis* We enjoyed many good sightings of this common mammal, at scattered locations throughout the tour.

AMPHIBIANS

Fire Salamander *Salamandra salamandra* The fire salamander is the best-known salamander species in Europe. We saw one extremely well, in the Bukk Hills National Park.