

Autumn in Hungary

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Budapest and transfer to Kiskunság National Park
Day 2	Kiskunság National Park.
Day 3/5	Hortobágy National Park.
Day 6/7	Bükk National Park.
Day 8	Fly London.



Departs

October

Focus

Birds

Grading

Grade A. Day walks only

Dates and prices

See website (tour code HUN01) or brochure

Highlights

- Enjoy one of Europe's great wildlife spectacles
- 50,000 Common Cranes in the Hortobágy in October
- Great Bustard, Dotterel, Imperial Eagle & many others
- Migrating flocks of geese including Lesser White-fronted Goose
- Woodpeckers, raptors & other birds in the Bükk Hills
- Mammals – such as Sausliik – and other wildlife also enjoyed
- Hungarian wines to sample including the 'Bulls Blood'
- Extend your holiday with time in Budapest



*Common Cranes flying to roost & Long-eared Owl
Images by Paul Marshall & Malcolm Stott*



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Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Kiskunság National Park

We depart London's Heathrow Airport on an early morning flight to Budapest, the Hungarian capital. After arriving at Budapest Ferenc Liszt Airport we meet our local guide and driver, and head southwards into the Kiskunság region, much of it a National Park. After just 30 minutes we will be in the north of this rural area. As we head to our first hotel we will make roadside stops for birds, which should include our first raptors and probably Great Grey Shrike on wires or tops of bushes. Upon arrival there should be time before dinner for a local birding walk. We will spend our first 2 nights in a pleasant hotel with an excellent restaurant serving traditional Magyar dishes.

Day 2

Kiskunság National Park

We have a full day to explore the excellent Kiskunság region, a flat plain between the Danube and Tisza rivers. This region offers us a fantastic range of habitats to explore, including grasslands (puszta), sandy dune-like hills, farmlands, marshes, gravel-pits, reed beds, woodlands and fishponds. Although we are sure to see a wide range of the migrant birds that move through this region in October, we will be especially on the look out for two of Hungary's rarer resident species, the magnificent Saker (which is featured on the 50 Forint coin), and the Great Bustard, Hungary's national bird. Syrian Woodpecker can usually be found in the villages, whilst out on the grasslands and marshes will look for a variety of migrant waders along with flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese fresh in from Siberia. Late in the afternoon we will return to our hotel for a second night.

Day 3

Hortobágy National Park

Today we set off for the equally wide-open plains of the Hortobágy, a journey of around 3 and a half hours; broken with stops for both birds and refreshments. This will be the longest single drive of the tour, but takes us to our comfortable hotel close to the village of Tiszafured and puts us in position for excellent birding.

The Hortobágy National Park is the most important and well-known wildlife habitat of the Hungarian "Great Plain". The characteristic landscape of the Hortobágy is the puszta - semi-steppe grasslands unique in Europe - dotted with vast networks of fish ponds, marshes and acacia copses. Today we begin with a general exploration of the Hortobágy, taking several easy walks across the plain. Typical wintering birds, such as Great Grey Shrike, Rough-legged Buzzard, Marsh and Hen Harriers, Merlin and skeins of geese should be seen, whilst Great White Egret and parties of Common Crane will be even more exciting to those more used to late autumn days in Britain. As we will do every day, we will eat a picnic lunch in the most interesting area for birds.

Later in the afternoon, we will position ourselves close to the main roost of Common Cranes. Around an hour before dark the birds begin to fly in, the sounds and sights building up to impressive proportions. We can expect many thousands of these huge, noisy birds flying over our heads and are also likely to see flocks assembling on

the ground. In the last four years, the October peak in Common Cranes at the Hortobágy has regularly topped over 50,000 birds!

Day 4

Hortobágy National Park

This morning we make a short journey by road into the heart of the National Park before setting off across the flat, saline puszta. We will probably encounter a herd of the huge and ancient breed of Hungarian Grey Cattle, and shepherds with their small puli dogs. Hen Harriers are frequently seen quartering the plains and groups of Dotterel linger throughout the autumn. Little Owls roost on the roofs of long, thatched barns, whilst other birds we may find include Crested Lark, Black Redstart, Corn Bunting, Red-throated Pipit, Common Crane and if we are lucky, Imperial Eagle or Saker Falcon.

Birds of prey include Merlin, Common and Long-legged Buzzards, the latter often seen perched on top of the sweep-wells which are so much a part of the Hortobágy landscape. We should also have time to visit a peasant Cottage Museum on the edge of a huge puszta, where the traditional rural life and wildlife of the region are on display; Stone Curlews are often seen here. We will then round the day off with another visit to the evening Crane spectacle.

Day 5

Hortobágy National Park

Today we will explore the wetland area of the Hortobágy, comprised of complex fish pond systems encircled with large reedbeds. The birdlife of this area is rich all year round; indeed, this is the most important wetland bird habitat in Hungary. Likely birds include Bearded and Penduline Tit, Great White Egret, Pygmy Cormorant, Bittern and perhaps a lingering Purple Heron. Autumn migration is well underway, and passage wildfowl and waders will be gathering. Large flocks of White-fronted Geese consort with smaller numbers of Bean, Greylag and Lesser White-fronted Geese. Ferruginous Duck, Wigeon, Pintail, thousands of Teal and other ducks will also be present. These fish farms may indeed yield a few lingering migrants, such as Red-breasted Flycatcher or a hunting White-tailed Eagle. Other birds include Red-necked Grebe and flocks of Ruff, Curlew and other waders on drained pools. We may also see a fish pond being drained, and watch the workers hauling out huge carp - the main fish species bred here.

Day 6

Bükk National Park

This morning we head north on the two hour journey to the Bükk National Park, our base for the final 2-nights of the tour. The Bükk is an upland area comprised mainly of forested hills and open meadows which, in effect, form the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. The region was given national park status in 1976 in order to protect its geological, archaeological, historical, floral and faunal treasures. The hills rise gently from 300 metres above sea level to a maximum height of only 960 metres and as such no strenuous walks will be necessary to full explore this wonderful area.

Most of our time will be spent in the southern Bükk, where we will explore the mixed hornbeam-oak forests, old beech woods, oak-dotted pastures, rocky dolomite-limestone slopes and hand managed vineyards that all create such a diverse patchwork of habitats. This is a wonderful area for birds. Over the woodlands soar a wide range of raptors, whilst in the forests themselves we will be on the look out for a variety of woodpeckers such as Black,

Grey-headed, Syrian, White-backed, Middle Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. Our hotel is situated just outside the small village of Noszvaj and has the added attractions of Serin, Black Redstart, Hawfinch and Middle-spotted Woodpecker in the back garden.

Day 7

Bükk National Park

We will spend today exploring the forests and meadows of the Bükk National Park. In particular we will be on the lookout for woodpeckers. Whilst species such as the White-backed Woodpecker and the mighty Black Woodpecker prefer the old oaks, beeches and mixed stands with hornbeam, ash and alder, the Syrian Woodpecker and Grey-headed Woodpecker are often seen in and around the villages and vineyards. Other birds in these scenic hills include Eastern Imperial Eagle, Goshawk, Raven, Short-toed and Common Treecreepers and Rock Bunting. This area is one of Hungary's most renowned wine producing regions and the home of the famous red, fruity 'Bulls Blood'.

Day 8

London

This morning we will drive back to Budapest (two hours) in time to catch our early-afternoon flight back to London.

Optional extensions

For those of you wishing to see more of the beautiful city of Budapest we would be happy to arrange a couple of nights accommodation in the Hungarian capital at the end of the tour. We would recommend the Hotel Victoria which is a 4-star hotel situated on the River Danube and only a few minutes walk from the Castle District. A twin/double room at the Hotel Victoria is around £80 per person per night (bed and breakfast). Please call the Naturetrek office for more details and a confirmed price.

Tour grading

This tour is graded A, consisting of day walks only. We will travel to each site by minibus, then take leisurely walks to explore the area, generally over easy terrain, although some paths can be rough in places. The holiday is therefore suitable for anyone who enjoys walking in the countryside and is of an 'average' level of fitness.

Clothing

Please inspect your clothing list in the pre-departure information. It is likely to be damp underfoot on the plains of the Kiskunság and Hortobágy, so waterproof walking boots will be useful. Although it may be fairly warm during the day, it can turn cold at dusk, so some warm clothing will be necessary at the Crane roost on the Hortobágy.

Weather

The weather is changeable in October, although not usually as wet as in the UK. It can be windy on the flat plains of the Kiskunság and Hortobágy at this time of year.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. All rooms have private facilities and single occupancy is available at the single supplement price.

Your Safety & Security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/hungary> regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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