

# Hidden Hungary in Spring

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly Budapest and transfer to Bükk National Park
<b>Day 2</b>	Bükk National Park
<b>Day 3/4</b>	North Kiskunság National Park
<b>Day 5/7</b>	Central Kiskunság National Park
<b>Day 8</b>	Fly London

### Departs

April / May

### Focus

Birds

### Grading

A. Day walks only

### Dates and Prices

Visit [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) (tour code HUN03)

### Highlights

- Exclusive access to superb birding hides that afford incredibly close views of many species
- Look for Great Bustard in Kiskunság National Park
- Raptors including Eastern Imperial, Short-toed & Lesser Spotted Eagles, Saker & Red-footed Falcon
- Explore the forested Bükk Hills for White-backed Woodpecker, Ural Owl & Collared Flycatcher
- Colourful Bee-eaters, Hoopoes & Rollers
- Warblers including Savi's, Moustached, Marsh, Great Reed, River & Barred
- Opportunity to extend your tour in Budapest, Hungary's vibrant capital city
- Led by expert naturalist guides



From top: Red-footed Falcon, Great Bustard, European Bee-eater. Images by Paul Marshall & Shutterstock Images



Naturetrek    Mingleddown Barn    Wolf's Lane    Chawton    Alton    Hampshire    GU34 3HJ    UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

## Introduction

Hungary is a scenic land of wooded hills and endless flat plains, dotted with reed-fringed lakes and intersected by one of Europe's great rivers, the mighty Danube. With such a variety of landscapes and habitats on offer, it is not surprising to learn that Hungary is also one of Europe's very best wildlife destinations, in particular for its abundant and varied birdlife. Late April to early May is an exciting time in Hungary's avian calendar, as resident species are joined by migrating waders, warblers and raptors on their way north, filling the woods with choruses of birdsong. During this tour we will journey through some of the country's most picturesque 'Magyar' landscapes, from the forested Bükk National Park in the east to the lowland steppe, grassland and farmlands of Kiskunság National Park. Aside from its avifauna, Hungary also has much to offer in terms of butterflies and other wildlife. Not only is it a



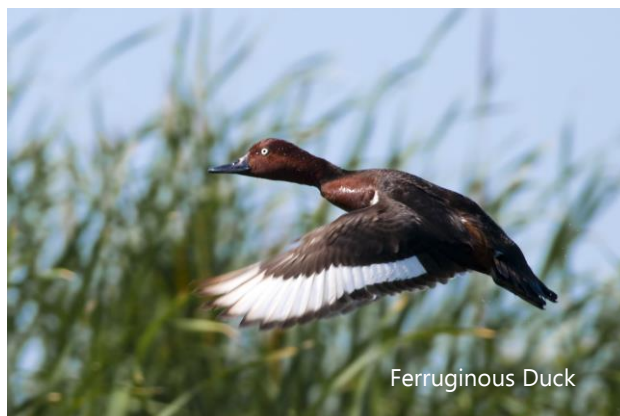
Eastern Imperial Eagle

spectacular country rich in nature, culturally Hungary boasts a wealth of folklore as well as being famed for its full-bodied wines and hearty food. With all this on offer throughout the tour, we will also sample authentic Hungarian cuisine!

Having flown to Budapest, the capital of Hungary split in two by the Danube, our first destination is Bükk National Park for the first two nights. The Bükk is characterised by dense broad-leaved forests, traditionally farmed fields,

flowering meadows and vineyards. This is the best area in the country for Ural and Eagle Owls, and no less than nine species of woodpecker are present for potential sightings, including the rare White-backed Woodpecker. It also facilitates the breeding of bountiful birds of prey including Goshawk, Eastern Imperial, Short-toed and Lesser Spotted Eagles. There will be many conspicuous birds to enjoy such as Woodlark, Red-backed Shrike, Black Redstart and Barred Warbler to name but a few.

We then head to the northern part of Kiskunság National Park for the next two nights. This tranquil lowland region of steppe, sandy dunes, farmland and wooded copses is one of Hungary's most important areas for the Great Bustard, which we will hope to see in full display! Collared Pratincoles also breed here, whilst ponds and gravel pits attract all three marsh terns, plus Red-crested Pochard and Ferruginous Duck. Fringing reedbeds are home to Moustached, Savi's and Great Reed Warblers, whilst overhead there are hunting Montagu's Harrier, Saker Falcon and Red-footed Falcon. European Roller and Lesser Grey Shrike dot the roadside wires and we can also expect to see Hoopoe, Golden Oriole and Bluethroat here as well.



Ferruginous Duck

We then head to the centre of Kiskunság National Park, for the last three nights of the tour, and a fitting grand finale. We will split our time between hides and birding the nearby ponds and wetlands, but it is the former that will arguably be the highlight of the tour. We will have exclusive access to a series of them that afford incredibly close and unique

views of many species, including colonies of Red-footed Falcon and European Bee-eater. Whilst we will not be there in the early morning and evening for the best light, the opportunities for photography at close range will be available, or to simply spend the time quietly watching the birds going about their business. Species that either nest within the vicinity or regularly come into the feeders and baths include European Roller, Hoopoe, Middle Spotted and Black Woodpeckers, Turtle Dove, Yellow Wagtail, and Nightingale, as well as more common woodland and grassland species. In the wetlands we can expect to see raptors such as Eastern Imperial and White-tailed Eagles, herons, egrets, terns, warblers singing in the reedbeds and waterfowl.

This is not a photography-focused holiday, but rather a great opportunity to see many of the key Eastern European species that Hungary has to offer, with the likelihood of some great images for those that wish to bring a camera. For those not concerned with photography, the last part of the tour will be a unique opportunity and fantastic experience to observe so many species at such close quarters for a prolonged period.



Kiskunság National Park



***NB. 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

## Fly Budapest

We depart London on a morning flight to Budapest, the Hungarian capital. After arriving, we meet our local guide and driver and head north-east, making our way towards the forested hills of Bükk National Park. As we head to our first hotel, we will make roadside stops for birds, which should include our first White Storks on nests and perhaps European Roller and Lesser Grey Shrike on wires or tops of bushes. Upon arrival there will be time before dinner for a local birding walk. We will spend our first two nights in a wonderful hotel situated in the village of Noszvaj, with an excellent restaurant.

## Day 2

## Bükk National Park

The Bükk is an upland area comprised mainly of forested hills which, in effect, are 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 today. 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, and are therefore home to a wealth of animal and plantlife.



Grey-headed Woodpecker

pastures, rocky dolomite-limestone slopes and hand-managed vineyards that all create such a diverse patchwork of habitats, and are therefore home to a wealth of animal and plantlife.

We will be focusing on the birds today and in particular woodpeckers – with nine species recorded here, including Black, Grey-headed, Middle Spotted, Lesser Spotted and the rare White-backed, it really is a hotspot, although we will have to keep both our ears and eyes peeled

to see as many of them as possible. Other birds found here include River, Barred and Wood Warblers, Collared Flycatcher, Common and Black Redstarts, Serin, Woodlark, and possibly Eurasian Wryneck. This is the best area in the country for Ural, Scops and Eagle Owls, if we are lucky, and over the woodlands soar a wide range of raptors including Eastern Imperial Eagle, Lesser Spotted and Short-toed Eagles, Goshawk and Honey Buzzard.

## Day 3

## Bükk NP & Northern Kiskunság National Park

We will spend this morning in the hills of the Bükk, continuing our explorations here and hopefully seeing any species that we missed yesterday.

After lunch we will set off on a 2.5–3-hour drive south-west to the northern part of the excellent Kiskunság region, a flat plain between the Danube and Tisza Rivers. We will be based for the next two nights in the village of Bugyi. This region offers us a fantastic range of habitats to explore, including grasslands (puszta), sandy dune-like hills, farmlands, marshes, gravel pits, reedbeds, woodlands and fishponds.

## Day 4

## Northern Kiskunság National Park

We will spend today exploring the northern part of this national park, which is very rich in birdlife due to the variety of habitats. Although we are sure to see a wide range of the migrant birds that move through this region in late April and early May, we will be especially on the lookout for two of Hungary's rarer resident species, the magnificent Saker Falcon (which is featured on the 50 Forint coin) and the Great Bustard, Hungary's national bird. These huge birds are notoriously shy, but the Kiskunság with its traditional farming techniques, supports a good population and we stand an excellent chance of encountering this spectacular species (with the males possibly still displaying), the heaviest of all the world's flying birds!

The fishponds hold Purple Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill, Garganey, Red-crested Pochard and Ferruginous Duck. White-tailed Eagle is often seen and Western Marsh Harrier patrols the shores. Reedbeds support a good population of Bearded and Penduline Tits, Bluethroat, Savi's, Sedge, Great Reed and Common Reed Warblers. We may search for the rare and secretive Moustached Warbler as well.



Moustached Warbler

## Day 5

## Northern & Central Kiskunság National Park

We will continue to explore the area around Bugyi this morning. The flooded meadows are a great place for waders and ducks. Northern Lapwing, Common Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit and Eurasian Curlew will be nesting here. In the nearby agricultural fields, we will look for Stone Curlew and also Collared Pratincole. The area is one of the last strongholds of Grey Partridge in Hungary and we should see several pairs or families. In the grasslands we may well spot some of the magnificent Great Bustards. More common birds in the area include Common Cuckoo, Turtle Dove, Eurasian Skylark, European Stonechat, Western Yellow Wagtail, Red-backed Shrike, Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting. Little Owl, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Montagu's Harrier, and Red-footed Falcon are also possible, as is Syrian Woodpecker in many of the villages and Hoopoes out in the sandy area.

After lunch we will head south-east to a more central part of the Kiskunság, close to the River Tisza, staying in the village of Lakitelek for the last three nights. We will settle into our new surroundings and go for a birding walk at some of the nearby wetlands.

## Days 6 - 7

## Central Kiskunság National Park

The next couple of days will be one of the highlights of the holiday, as we have the unique opportunity to make use of several hides in the area, in the part of the day they are not occupied by keen wildlife photographers (please read further below for more information about the hides).



European Roller

The habitat in this part of the national park is just as varied as the north, but being further away from Budapest and closer to the Tisza, the wildlife is even more abundant here. We will split our time between the different hides and birding on foot as we have been up until now.

These hides have been purpose-built for photography and will be occupied by others during the best light of the day, i.e. early morning and late afternoon and evening. From around the

hours of 0930 until 1600 these hides will be available and we will have exclusive access, spending several hours here per day, split between the different hides. Whilst the light will not be at its best, anybody wishing to bring a camera will still get some fantastic images, but arguably more appealing is simply to observe the action as it unfolds. It is a unique insight into how these species go about their daily business of feeding, bathing, mating, nest-building, and in-fighting, totally undisturbed by us, from literally a few metres away.

There are hides which are located in the midst of both a Red-footed Falcon and a European Bee-eater colony. In the case of the former, the falcons do not build their own nests but rather use abandoned ones of corvid species such as rooks, thereby becoming colonies in their own right. They hunt in open and semi-open habitat, preferably near water, so this area is perfect for them to thrive. The European Bee-eater is faithful to its nesting sites year on year, favouring sandy banks which they tunnel quite deep into. At this time of year they should have just returned and we will see the colony starting to take shape once again. We will have unrivalled views of this beautiful and charismatic bird, with its distinctive piping call and swooping flight.

Other hides are situated with either feeders or baths which attract a lot of birds. Species that either nest within the vicinity or regularly come in include European Roller, Hoopoe, Middle Spotted and Black Woodpeckers, Turtle Dove, Yellow Wagtail, Golden Oriole, Hawfinch and Nightingale, as well as more common woodland and grassland species, again all at close quarters.



Black Kite

We will want to stretch our legs on these days, and when not in the hides we will visit some of the many pools and ponds in the vicinity. Overhead we can expect to see raptors such as Eastern Imperial and White-tailed Eagles, and Black Kites, as they all breed nearby. There is a huge heronry with Purple, Night and Squacco Herons, Spoonbill, Great and Little Egrets, and sometimes Cattle Egret and Glossy Ibis. Whiskered Tern can be seen here, and in some years the less common Black and White-winged Terns as well, and there are large numbers of Pygmy Cormorants. In the reedbeds and bushes we will listen out for and hope to see Penduline and Bearded Tits, as well as Eastern Olivaceous, Marsh, Great Reed, Savi's and Barred Warblers.

## Day 8

## Fly London

This morning we should have time for a final couple of hours birding in this superb region, before the short hour-long drive back to Budapest airport in time to catch our afternoon flight back to London.

Please note: There is unlikely to be time to explore Budapest on this holiday. Should you wish to see a little more of Hungary's beautiful capital city, we would recommend you extend your stay at the beginning or end of the holiday.

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## 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.

## Bird Hides

Towards the end of the holiday, in central Kiskunság National Park, there will be the opportunity to spend time in a variety of small hides (max. 4 people per hide). Some of the hides are harder to access than others; i.e. the towers by the Red-footed Falcon colony involve climbing up and down a steep ladder with handrails. We will ensure that everybody has a turn in all the hides that they want to, and when not in the hides we will be exploring the nearby wetlands and ponds on foot.

## Food & Accommodation Included in the Price

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. The hotel in Noszvaj is very good quality, whilst the other hotels in the Kiskunság are more simple. All rooms have private facilities.

## How to Book Your Place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure and complete and return the enclosed booking form together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us now on 01962 733051. Alternatively, you are welcome to book on the internet by visiting [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or telephone us and make a booking with a credit or debit card.

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