Hungary's Bats, Mammals & other Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1  Fly Budapest and transfer Aggtelek National Park.

Day 2/4  Aggtelek National Park.

Day 5/7  Bükk National Park.

Day 8  Fly London.

Departs
September.

Dates and prices
See Naturetrek website (tour code HUN05) or brochure.

Grading
A/B. Easy to moderate day walks.

Focus
Mammals (especially bats & rodents), plus birds, butterflies and other wildlife.

Highlights

- A general wildlife tour focusing in particular on bats & other small mammals.
- 15-20 species of bat possible.
- Watch researchers mist-net bats at ‘swarming caves’ & feeding sites.
- Small mammal trapping overseen by local mammal researchers. Up to 15 species of rodent possible.
- Birds including Imperial Eagle, European Roller, Syrian Woodpecker & Spotted Crake.
- Butterflies, dragonflies and other wildlife also enjoyed.
- Led by expert naturalist guides.

From the top: Geoffroy’s Bats Bükk National Park & European Souslik.
Introduction

Over the years Naturetrek has offered a variety of tours to Hungary, focusing on such wide-ranging wildlife delights as birds, butterflies and flowers. This unique holiday focuses on another side of the Magyar natural world and offers a fascinating insight into the life of bats and other mammals - mainly rodents - which are typically elusive and usually difficult to see. The tour visits large house-dwelling bat colonies, wonderful caves and includes the opportunity to join bat researchers as they mist-net bats at ‘swarming caves’ and feeding sites. We will also join small mammal experts from the national parks and be on hand when they check their study traps (naturally, all animals are released unharmed!). In all, we hope to see between 15 to 20 species of bat on this week-long tour, along with up to 15 species of mice, shrew and vole and perhaps 3 species of dormice. Larger mammals such as Wild Boar, Beaver, Brown Hare, Badger, Red and Roe Deer are also possible, along with an abundance of birds and other wildlife. Although rare and elusive, both Wolf and Wild Cat have also been seen by past groups!

Itinerary

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

Aggtelek National Park

We have an early start out of Heathrow this morning to catch our British Airways flight to Budapest, the beautiful capital city of Hungary. Upon arrival we will meet our local guide and transfer by road to Aggtelek National Park which lies close to the Hungarian-Slovakian border around 4 hours from the capital. We will break the journey with stops for both wildlife and refreshments and plan to arrive at our comfortable hotel near the town of Jósvafő by late afternoon, our base for the first four nights of the tour.

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 end, or beginning, of the holiday (please call the Naturetrek office on 01962 733051 for more information on extensions).

Days 2 - 4

We will spend the next three days exploring the varied landscapes and habitats of the Aggtelek National Park. Aggtelek was one of the first national parks to be designated in Hungary, protected primarily for its limestone scenery, karst landscapes and extensive caves. During our time here we will visit several bat colonies to see a variety of species including Greater Mouse-eared bat.
Geoffroy’s, Greater and Lesser Horseshoe Bats. Evenings will be spent mist-netting with the researchers, in search of Greater and Lesser Mouse-eared, Serotine and Grey Long-eared Bats, while small mammal traps will also sample the local rodent fauna. Species might include Common, Pygmy, Lesser White-toothed, Bicoloured White-toothed, Water and Miller’s Water Shrews, Striped Field, Wood, Yellow-necked, Herb Field, Harvest, Steppe and House Mice, Bank, European Pine and Common Voles. Along a stream we might catch Bechstein’s, Mediterranean Horseshoe, Brandt’s, Pond and Natterer’s Bats and with luck even Parti Coloured Bat. There is plenty of other wildlife to enjoy in addition to the mammals and during our time here we will not be ignoring butterflies such as Scarce Swallowtail, Map Butterfly, Lesser Purple Emperor and Short-tailed Blue, amphibians including Fire-bellied Salamander, Tree Frog and Common Spadefoot Toad and birds such as Imperial Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Red-backed Shrike, Black Woodpecker and perhaps even Ural Owl. One day we will also pay a short visit to an old vineyard and enjoy a typical Hungarian goulash prepared by its friendly owner and join a small mammal researcher to check dormouse nestboxes in the hope of finding an Edible, Forest or Hazel Dormouse.

On other days we plan to pack a picnic lunch to eat in a scenic spot before returning to our hotel near Jósvafő each evening for dinner and evening bat excursions.

Day 5 - 7

Bükk National Park

For our final three nights we will move south to our second base in the Bükk National Park. En-route we may stop to visit an old Cistercian Abbey in the small town of Bélapátfalva, home to an important colony of Lesser Horseshoe Bats. The Abbey itself is the best preserved Romanesque church in Hungary and dates back to 1232.

The Bükk National Park protects a landscape of gentle forested hills and meadows, cut by gorges and numerous caves. 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 fully explore this wonderful area.
The Bükk Hills are home to an exceptionally diverse bat fauna, indeed for the fortunate up to 14 different species can be observed on a single night! During our time here we will visit a large house colony of Geoffroy’s, Greater Horseshoe, Mediterranean Horseshoe and Lesser Mouse-eared Bats and spend time one evening studying bats at one of Hungary’s most important ‘swarming caves’. Species to look out for may include Alcathoe’s, Greater Horseshoe, Lesser Horseshoe, Mediterranean Horseshoe, Daubenton’s, Pond, Bechstein’s, Brandt’s, Whiskered, Greater Mouse-eared, Lesser Mouse-eared, Geoffroy’s, Natterer’s, Barbastelle and Common Long-eared Bats. We will also visit the charming baroque town of Eger to observe a large Noctule Bat colony roosting under a busy road bridge.

The region is also rich in birds and butterflies. Over the meadows and through the woodlands fly dramatic species such as Swallowtail and Scarce Swallowtail, plus Map Butterfly, Eastern Bath White, Woodland Grayling, False Grayling, Scarce Copper, Sooty Copper, Amanda’s Blue, Queen of Spain Fritillary, whilst the various clouded yellows will test identification skills to the limit. This is also a wonderful area for birds. Over the woodlands soar a wide range of raptors including Eastern Imperial Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Goshawk and Honey Buzzard whilst in the forests themselves we will be on the look out for a variety of woodpeckers such as Black, Grey-headed, Syrian, Middle Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers.

On one day we descend from the hills to take an evening boat trip on Lake Tisza. The numerous canals, oxbows and ponds here are home to a wide variety of other wildlife including numerous dragonflies and birds such as Purple, Night and Squacco Herons, Great and Little Bitterns, Pygmy Cormorants and Penduline Tit. En route we will stop at an expanse of grassland steppe known as the ‘Little Hortobágy’. Here we should be able to add European Souslik - a small endearing ground squirrel and favoured prey of the local raptors - to our mammal tally along with Brown Hare and perhaps Muskrat or even European Hamster. We will also have a visit either before or after the boat trip to see the Lesser Mole Rat, with a specialist researcher. Please note that this is subject to weather – in very warm and dry weather the animals are not active at all, so you may only see them in their natural habitat.

Once again we will take a picnic lunch out in the field each day to eat at a scenic spot and return to our comfortable hotel for an evening meal.

**Day 8**

**London**

This morning we will drive back to Budapest (around 3 hours) in time to catch our mid-afternoon flight back to London.
Grading

Grade A/B - Easy to moderately strenuous. Terrain is generally undulating in nature and a little rough in places. There are also several night excursions and visits to dark caves etc where care should be taken when walking around. Whilst this is not a difficult tour an average level of fitness (and a like of late evenings!) is required to get the most out of the holiday.

NB – Access to several of the bat colonies involves gaining access to roof spaces by ladder or steep stairway. We would ask you to be very careful in such situations, be watchful for loose floorboards, take the advice and instruction of your guides, and only access the space if you feel confident of doing so. Should your guide feel that it would be unsafe for certain group member/s to enter one or more locations he will ask that person/s to remain behind. We would ask all group members to respect your guide’s advice and requests.

Bat disturbance

Please note that our visits to the bat caves and mist netting evenings are done as part of ongoing monitoring and research projects. We will be accompanied by the researchers who will ensure that there is no additional disturbance to the animals. Whilst we will be allowed to watch the netting and examination of the bats in the hand, group members are not permitted to either handle or extract the animals from the nets. To minimise disturbance further, we may split our group into sub-parties of 4 or 5 on occasion and visit the colonies in shifts. Flash photography is forbidden in all caves and roost sites, but allowed (in moderation) whilst netting.

Food & accommodation

For this tour we use comfortable but simple hotels; all rooms having private facilities. All meals are included in the cost with the exception of lunch on Day 8.

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 room at the Hotel Victoria is around £85 per person per night (bed and breakfast). Please call us for more details and a confirmed price.

Equipment

Please ensure that you bring along a good torch as many of the mammal excursions take place after dark! Head torches are recommended.

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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