

Slovakia – Birds of the Mountains & Plains

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Krakow and drive Vitanova.
Day 2	Vitanova, Orava Region.
Day 3/4	Velka Fatra and Chocske Hills.
Day 5/7	Zemplinska Dam and eastern Slovakia.
Day 8	Fly London.



Departs

May.

Focus

Birds and other wildlife.

Grading

A/B. Easy to moderate day walks only.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code SVK04) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

Highlights

- Stunning Carpathian landscapes
- Look for Pygmy, Eagle, Tengmalm's & Ural Owls
- Saker, Lesser Spotted & Imperial Eagles
- Up to 9 species of woodpecker possible
- Visit the 12th century Spissky Castle
- Marsh, Barred & River Warblers plus Collared & Red-breasted Flycatchers
- Explore the wetlands at Sienne
- Led by expert naturalist guides



From top: Ural Owl, Tatra Mountains & Barred Warbler.



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

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

Over the past couple of decades, birdwatchers have slowly awoken to the natural history delights of Eastern Europe. Today, countries such as Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Hungary are well established destinations on the European birding circuit and familiar to many of us who travel the world in search of wildlife. For reasons unknown, however, the Republic of Slovakia has not enjoyed a similar surge in ornithological interest. This is odd, for this small landlocked country, which sits at the very heart of Europe, is every bit as exciting for birds as its larger neighbours. For example, Slovakia is home to all of Europe's 9 species of woodpecker (plus Wryneck) with over 1,000 pairs of each! Ural, Pygmy and Tengmalm's Owls are more readily seen here than anywhere else outside of Scandinavia, whilst Eastern Imperial Eagle, Saker Falcon, Wallcreeper, Citrine Wagtail and River Warbler make up just a small part of an impressive supporting cast. Slovakia can also boast some of the most varied scenery on the continent, from the towering peaks of the Tatra Mountains to the rolling tree-less plains of the east. It is only a matter of time, therefore, before Slovakia will be acknowledged as one of Europe's finest wildlife destinations and, with that in mind, we are pleased to offer the following itinerary which takes in the very best of the country's birdlife and scenery.

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 Fly Krakow & transfer Vitanova, Orava Region

We depart London's Gatwick Airport mid-morning on an Easyjet flight to Krakow in Poland. On arrival we will meet our local guide and begin the two hour drive south to the small village of Vitanova in the Orava region of Slovakia, tucked away in the foothills of the Tatra Mountains. This will be our base for the first two nights of the holiday whilst we explore the surrounding open grasslands, woodlands and peat bogs. After checking into our comfortable hotel there should be a little time to venture out for our first Slovakian birds which may include Lesser Spotted Eagle, Red-backed Shrike, Grasshopper Warbler, Fieldfare and Serin.

Day 2 Vitanova, Orava Region

We will spend today exploring the varied habitats within Orava. This is a beautiful region of Slovakia backed by the jagged peaks of the Tatra Mountains and dotted with small villages and castles. Your guide will suggest an early start this morning in order to reach an area of peat bog and hay meadows in the early hours. Here we hope to watch lekking Black Grouse along with Lesser Spotted Eagle, Whinchat and Great Grey Shrike. Later in the day we will explore the shoreline of the Orava Reservoir, the largest body of water in the country which is located close to Slovakia's border with Poland. Our main target here will be the attractive Citrine Wagtail which have only become established here over the past couple of years. Corncrake are often heard calling from the adjacent meadows, whilst Black Stork and both Grey-headed and Black Woodpeckers are possible. Common Rosefinch also breed around the lake although this species is a late migrant and so may not have arrived in numbers by the start of our tour. Other species we hope to find today include Three-toed Woodpecker,

Nutcracker, Ring Ouzel, Dipper, Wood Warbler and Crested Tit. The majestic Ural Owl is also on the increase in the Orava Region of Slovakia and willingly use nest boxes erected by local conservationists. Butterflies to look out for include Scarce Swallowtail, Wood White, Glanville Fritillary and Camberwell Beauty.

Days 3 & 4

Liptov, Velka Fatra & Chocske Hills

After a final early morning walk close to our hotel in Vitanova we will drive for around an hour to the historic town of Liptov, our base for the next 2 nights of the tour. From Liptov we will explore the forests and meadows of the Velka Fatra Mountains and Chocske Hills, looking for woodpeckers and owls in particular. Nearly 90% of the Velka Fatra are covered in forest, home to all nine species of woodpecker (plus Wryneck), including Black, Three-toed, White-backed, Middle Spotted and Grey-headed Woodpecker. The diurnal Pygmy Owl is also fairly common and we may be fortunate enough to see one of these diminutive owls perched on the top of a tall spruce tree. Tengmalm's and Eagle Owls are also to be found here, but their more nocturnal habits make these two species a little trickier to track down. The mixed Beech and spruce forests that cloth the slopes of the mountains are also home to Collared and Red-breasted Flycatchers, Firecrest, Wood Warblers, Common Crossbill and Common Redstarts, whilst a whirr of wings may signal the escape of a secretive Hazel Grouse. Wallcreepers breed in the gorges in some years, whilst overhead a Golden Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Goshawk or Honey Buzzard may drift past.

Days 5 - 7

Zemplinska Dam & Eastern Slovakia

Moving on, we leave the mountains behind and head east into the Slovakian lowlands which are the northern extension of the Great Hungarian Plain. Our drive will take us through the dramatic scenery of the High Tatra Mountains and we will break the journey east with a stop at the spectacular 12th century Spissky Castle. As the mountains fade away and the landscape opens out, we will start to see our first open country birds such as White Stork, Lesser Grey Shrike, Bee-eater and Montagu's Harrier. For our final 3 nights of the tour we will be based in a comfortable hotel close to the Zemplinska Sirava Reservoir where pre-breakfast walks will be enlivened by a chorus of Nightingales, plus Icterine Warbler, Rock Bunting, Hoopoe and Wryneck.

We then have two full days to explore the open plains, mixed woodlands and wetlands of eastern Slovakia in search of such species as Eastern Imperial Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Saker Falcon, Rock Bunting, Tawny Pipit and Barred, Grasshopper and River Warblers. We will also have another opportunity to look for woodpeckers, and especially for Ural Owl which our guides will make a particular effort to find here.

The complex of marshes and old fish ponds close to the town of Sienne are one of Slovakia's finest wetlands and attracts numerous breeding and migrant birds. The extensive reedbeds and adjacent pools hold Bittern, Purple Heron, Spoonbill, Pygmy Cormorant, Ferruginous Duck, Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes, Black-winged Stilt, Avocet, Bearded Tit, Penduline Tit, Bluethroat and various 'reed warblers', including Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler, River Warbler and Marsh Warbler. All three marsh terns (Black, Whiskered and the beautiful White-winged Tern) hawk for insects overhead and the occasional White-tailed Eagle may also drift by.

Finally, we will spend time exploring the Latorica river valley and adjacent steppe and woodlands in the very south-eastern corner of the country. Colourful Bee-eaters are a common sight here, whilst other birds to look out for include Barred Warbler, Tawny Pipit, Golden Oriole, Hoopoe and Lesser Grey Shrike. The endearing

European Sousek is also found out on the grassy steppe. These small ground squirrels are on the menu for many of Slovakia's larger raptor species and so need to keep a careful eye open for a passing Short-toed Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle or Montagu's Harrier.

Day 8

Fly London

This morning we must make the 4 hour drive to Budapest Airport in Hungary. Our journey will take through a range of scenic countryside and offer a last opportunity to look for shrikes on the roadside wires and White Stork nests balanced precariously on village telegraph poles.

On arrival at Budapest Airport we will check in for our early afternoon Easyjet flight back to London's Gatwick Airport arriving around 1500 hours.

Tour grading

This tour is graded A/B, consisting of easy to moderate 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 and steep in places. The holiday is therefore suitable for anyone who enjoys walking in the countryside and is of an 'average' level of fitness.

Weather

Spring weather in Slovakia is very similar to that experienced in the UK. By May the weather is generally becoming settled and we can expect fairly warm and sunny days in the lowlands with cooler, often cloudier, conditions in the mountains. Evenings and early mornings can be cold, however, and there is always the chance of some rain.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. Hotels in Slovakia are comfortable, but not luxurious! Rooms are often simple in nature although all have private facilities. Our hotels have been chosen for their proximity to the birdwatching sites.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.