

# Austria's Steppes & Wetlands

Naturetrek Tour Report

6 - 13 May 2010

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Reedbeds around the Neusiedler-See



Black-tailed Godwit



Stork



Grey-lag Geese with young

Report compiled by Andy McGeeney  
Images by kind courtesy of Stella McDowall



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## Day 1

Thursday 6th May

Some of us met at Heathrow and travelled to Vienna where we met the rest of the party. The one hour drive to Illmitz soon passed and we were settled in our very comfortable Hotel Garni. After settling in we drove the short distance to the National Park offices where we had time to look at the exhibitions and shop before meeting Harald Grabenhoffer one of the managers. He gave us a thorough introduction to the National Park talking in particular about the relationship between the cultural landscape and the ecology of the lake and surrounding lands. Harald described the habitats we are likely to visit, their biodiversity importance, and why they occur where they do.

## Day 2

Friday 7th May

The start of the day was cloudy but it soon cleared to sun and white clouds. We were met first thing in the morning by an open sided horse drawn carriage which took us across the wet meadows and grasslands to Sandek on the shores of the lake. Here we had the opportunity to do some birdwatching and sightseeing across the reedbeds, woodland and meadows. We saw the white donkeys once kept by landowners as a sign of prestige. Breakfast was served on the bench table by the tower. While we walked the 2km back to the village. We saw en route an amazing diversity of flowers and birds and even a few butterflies.

Lunch was in the hotel and then we drove to the Biological Research Station where we had access to a walkway into the reedbeds not open to the public. We saw and heard many birds and watched a couple of Muskrats collecting material for their nests. The richness of the habitat was illustrated by good numbers of Great White Egrets and Marsh Harriers; various warblers sang to us in the reedbeds.

In the evening we went to a wine grower's cellar where we were briefly shown the wine fermenting processes before spending the rest of the visit tasting a variety of very good local wines (both white and red). The region provides some of the best Austrian wines because the lake stores heat which warms the vines for an extended period in the autumn.

## Day 3

Saturday 8th May

We had similar weather to yesterday, warm and sunny after a grey start.

We drove a short distance to Lange Lacke where we took nearly 4 hours to walk to the first observation tower on account of the many flowers and birds along the way. At the beginning we had good views of a male Golden Oriole sitting in a tree and later watched Black tailed Godwit in full breeding plumage and many Crested Pochards out on the lake. We heard many field crickets singing in the colourful flower meadows, and even found one out of its burrows on the path. After a brisk walk back to the start of the walk we had a picnic at a wooden table with a fine view of the flower meadows spread out before us.

In the afternoon we searched for ziesels (ground squirrels) but realised that they had probably been disturbed by weekend walkers from the nearby path (we got to see them in Hungary later in the week though!). We did get good views of baby Lapwings feeding on the shoreline, and adult wood and Common Sandpipers. The local guide Andrea took us to see a Long-eared Owl sitting on a nest made from an Ikea wastebasket jammed in a tree, and the male perched in full view in the next tree!! The day was not over yet and we stopped at a new hide near Apetlon to get an overview of wet meadows, stream and reedbeds. The green tree frogs by the pathway provided amusement and good photo opportunities.

We had locally grown asparagus by special request in our meal tonight. Some of us went on a walk in the evening looking for bats and amphibians. Harald talked about how the changes in habitat brought about changes in agriculture and drainage which had negative impacts on amphibian populations but despite hearing three species of toads and frogs we didn't see any.

## Day 4

Sunday 9th May

Today was sunny and warm as we explored Zitzmannsdorfer meadows in the morning. The walk began by listening and seeing a River Warbler which we could compare with Reed and Sedge Warblers also singing. We found various newly emerged dragonflies including the rare Yellow-spotted Whiteface, Hairy Hawker and Four-spotted Chasers. We saw 3 species of damselflies: Common Emerald, Blue-tailed and Variable Blue. We had good views of Red-backed Shrikes and breeding waders such as Redshank and Godwit. Among the many flowers we discovered there were a few Siberian Blue Irises and in drier areas swathes of Dragons teeth and sky blue Austrian Flax. Just before we got into the vehicle we watched a Little Owl perched in a tree nearby.

The delicious lunch was in a fish restaurant in Gols where we tasted a range of local dishes made from fish caught in the lake. We managed to fit in a visit to a Bee eater colony near Gols. We were able to get superb and close views of the colony as well as two pairs of mating Lesser Kestrels in the sand quarry! We also saw an uncommon species for Austria a pair of Jackdaws. We then drove off to the Hackelsberg for a walk up a steep hill to see views over the lake and see various new species of flowers and a few butterflies.

## Day 5

Monday 10th May

Today was hot and sunny for most of the time but it became increasingly humid, and the end of the day as we drove back it rained. We spent most of the time at Rust a very picturesque Austria village, complete with painted houses, storks and a stork sanctuary. After a picnic by the lakeside we completed our visit by having cakes and

coffee at a konditorei in the village square (actually it is Austria's smallest city). A search of the reedbeds to look for Bearded Reedling and Penduline Tit was aborted because of the impending rain.

## Day 6

Tuesday 11th May

It was warm and sunny all day as we spent most of the time in Hungary. We went to two main sites. The first at Mexica Pusta was an observation tower overlooking a large lake with a variety of ducks, waders and gulls. On the dry meadows we could see a traditional shepherd with his large flock of straight horned sheep keeping the grasslands cropped. We stopped by the road to see a colony of the increasingly rare Ziesel going about their business.

The second site, Boserkeny, was after a picnic lunch and included a walk along a canal rich in dragonflies and other insects. We found a full size Goat Moth larva crossing the path on the way to the observation tower. At the tower some of us saw a Little Bittern cross between two reed beds and 3 Ferruginous Ducks. A female Cuckoo perched for some time in full view and in the distance we could see a Cormorant colony. On the return walk we stopped to separate out Black, Common and Whiskered Terns perched on a dead willow when a juvenile White-tailed Eagle soared above the lake before moving off. We stopped at a roadside café for pancakes and coffee before crossing the border. On the drive back we passed a series of roadside wooden sculptures commemorating all the people who escaped from communist Hungary over the 50 years. We made a brief visit to the bridge crossing the border and decided there was not enough time to visit the wet forest if we wanted to see the Great Bustards. At about 7.30 we were well positioned in one of the observation towers to watch the Bustards strutting around. We were also treated to at least three Short-eared Owls patrolling the meadows below us!

## Day 7

Wednesday 12th May

It was cloudy and warm all day with a shower at the end of our field walks. We first of all went to Holle to do some birdwatching by long pools cut out of the reed beds along the shore. One surprise was to see a Turnstone on the shoreline! After hearing Bitterns all week we got see one commuting above the reed beds. We then walked to the wine farmers' vineyard through open grassland and small pools with some good views of breeding Black-tailed Godwits and Lapwings fighting over territory. We were also able to compare Kentish and Small-ringed Plover nesting on the sandy shores. The flowers were abundant as usual but were less impressive because of the grey skies. At the vineyard the farmer explained the basics of wine production and we got to meet his free range pigs. The breed is Hungarian mangalizer and their distinctive characteristic is that they are as woolly as a sheep! The gang of piglets were very amusing as they careered around the farm creating havoc wherever they explored. The delicious lunch was accompanied by wine and salad. We walked back to the Centre (seeing Early Spider, Military Orchid and white flowering narrow leaved Helleborine on the way) and drove to Zicklacke for some birdwatching and a visit to the new hide at Warmblut Kopelle for flying swans, Purple Heron and various warblers in the nearby woodland.

## Day 8

Thursday 13th May

It was a sunny day as we left for the return journey to Vienna airport and said our goodbyes to those staying in the city. The flight over London gave us good views along the Thames and the city centre. It was a great trip

where we managed to see 115 species of birds in a week, including three species of owls, and we were able to get a real feel for the culture and way of life in this part of Austria. The hotel made us most welcome and managed everyday to serve up local food to suit all tastes.

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## Species List

Birds (H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	May						
			7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>					H	✓	
3	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓				✓		
4	Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	H	H	H		H	✓	
5	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>				✓			
6	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>					✓		
7	Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
9	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓			✓	✓		
12	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
13	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	✓				✓	
15	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
16	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			✓			✓	
17	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓				✓	
18	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
19	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓			✓		
20	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>					✓	✓	
22	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>					✓		
23	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				✓			
24	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
25	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
26	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>				✓			
27	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
28	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		✓					
29	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	
30	Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>			H			H	
31	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	H		✓			
32	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
33	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				✓			
34	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
35	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
36	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		✓				✓	
37	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>						✓	
38	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
39	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	✓				✓	✓	
40	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	H		✓		✓	
41	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	
42	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
43	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
44	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>				✓		✓	
45	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	May						
			7	8	9	10	11	12	13
46	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓					
47	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓						
48	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>						✓	
49	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
50	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>		✓					
51	Yellow-legged (Caspian) Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	
52	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	
53	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	✓				✓		
54	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	✓						
55	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>					✓		
56	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
57	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
58	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
59	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	H	H	H	H	H	H	
60	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	H	H	H	H	✓	H	
61	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>		✓					
62	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>				✓			
63	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓					
64	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>				✓		✓	
65	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		✓		✓			
66	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓						
67	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓					✓	
68	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>				✓			
69	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓						
70	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
71	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
73	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
74	Blue-headed (Yellow) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>							H
76	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	H	H	H	H	H	✓	
77	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
78	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓					
79	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓	✓	✓				
80	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
81	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	H	H		✓	✓		
82	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	H		✓	H		✓	
83	River Warbler	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>			✓				
84	Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	H			H			
85	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	
86	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
87	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
88	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>		✓	✓			✓	
89	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>				✓		✓	
90	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>					✓		
91	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
92	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		H			✓		
93	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	✓						

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			7	8	9	10	11	12	13
94	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>				H			
95	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	H	✓					
96	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓				
97	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	✓		✓		✓		
98	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
99	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		✓		H			
100	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓						
101	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓			✓			
102	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula soemmeringii</i>			✓				
103	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
104	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓						
105	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
106	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
107	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	H			H		✓	
108	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
109	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>				✓	✓	✓	
110	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				H	H	✓	
111	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>	✓	✓					
112	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>							
113	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓		✓				
114	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	

### Butterflies

1	Pale Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias hyale</i>	✓	✓	✓				
2	Wall	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	✓	✓		✓			
3	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	✓	✓	✓				
4	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
5	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓		✓				
6	Green-veined White	<i>Pieris nap</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
7	Orange tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>			✓		✓		
8	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>			✓				
9	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>			✓				
10	Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>			✓				
11	Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>			✓				
12	Grizzled Skipper sp	<i>Pyrgus spp</i>			✓				
13	Map	<i>Araschnia levana</i>					✓		

### Dragonflies

1	Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Fen Hawker	<i>Aeshna isosceles</i>	✓		✓				
3	Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>				✓			
4	Hairy Hawker	<i>Brachytron pratense</i>		✓	✓			✓	
5	Yellow-spotted Whiteface	<i>Leucorrhinia pectoralis</i>	✓		✓				
6	Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
7	Common Emerald	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>	✓						
8	Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Variable Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion pulchellum</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	
10	Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>					✓		



	Common name	Scientific name	May						
			7	8	9	10	11	12	13
11	White Featherleg	<i>Platycnemis latipes</i>					✓		

## Mammals

1	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
2	Muskrat	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>	✓						
3	Ziesel						✓		
4	Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	European Hamster	<i>Cricetus cricetus</i>	✓						

## Amphibians &amp; reptiles

1	Grass Snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>					✓		
2	Striped Tree Frog	<i>Hyla arborea</i>	✓			H	H	H	
3	Fire-bellied Toad	<i>Bombina bombina</i>	✓				H	H	
4	Green Toad	<i>Bufo viridis</i>	H		H		H		
5	Eastern Pond Terrapin	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>					✓		
6	Common Lizard	<i>Lacerta vivipara</i>					✓		
7	Marsh Frog	<i>Pelophylax ridibundus</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	

## Misc Insects

1	Rose Chafer	<i>Cetonia aurata</i>		✓	✓				
2	Spotted Chafer	<i>Oxythrea funestra</i>		✓					
3	longhorn beetle	<i>Stenochorus sp</i>		✓					
4	Gold beetle	<i>Chrysolina sp</i>		✓					
5	Soldier Beetle	<i>Rhagonycha fulva</i>		✓					
6	Speckled Yellow Moth	<i>Pseudopanthera macularia</i>		✓					
7	Roman Snail	<i>Helix pomatia</i>							
8	Field Cricket	<i>Gryllus campestris</i>		✓	H		H	H	
9	Deer Tick	<i>Ixodes scapularis</i>					✓		