

Autumn in Hungary

Naturetrek Tour Report

9 – 16 October, 2012



Common Cranes



Watching Dotterel



Hummingbird Hawk-moth



Long-eared Owl

Report and images compiled by Geoff Carr



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	Paul Franklin	
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	June Riches	
	Heather Richards	
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Day 1

Tuesday 9th October

There were six of us travelling with BA from Heathrow to Budapest, and after a good flight in near clear conditions we descended to Budapest airport, with the first bird of the trip being a Buzzard hunting the outer part of the airfield. We were soon through customs, collected our bags, and were greeted by Gerard our local leader, along with Andrew and June, Paul and Brenda who had made the journey to Budapest earlier. We boarded our bus and met our driver for the trip, Istvan Tabor. We were soon on our way towards our hotel on the edge of the Kiskunsag National Park with some birding en route.

The flat landscape of agricultural land, wet meadows and remnants of the original “steppe” in some places with occasional belts of mainly False Acacia woodlands that were planted around the 1930s. The villages were of a “Germanic” design with long strips of land attached to each house growing various crops, grapes and with some livestock. One particular large wet meadow area was being grazed with Water Buffalo as a form of management. On the journey we had a few Buzzard, Crested Lark, Stonechat, Great Grey Shrike and Corn Bunting. We reached our accommodation for the next two nights, the Kigyosi Csarda Panzio Hotel.

At 4-45pm checked into our rooms and did some birding around the hotel before dark. Lots of Grey-lag Goose over, White-fronted Goose, White Wagtail, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker calling and Tree Sparrows. As dusk fell we went back to the hotel, showered and then down for an excellent meal of mushroom and cheese soup, veal, chips and salad and ice-cream to finish with. After a tiring day most people went to bed at 9pm.

Day 2

Wednesday 10th October

The 7am walk had a near full attendance and all were rewarded by Penduline Tit, Green Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and about 50 White Wagtail leaving the nearby roost in the reeds. Back in for breakfast, continental style with meats, cheeses, bread, jam and coffee.

At 0830 we left the hotel to explore the Kiskunsag National Park with the promise of a warm sunny day. After a few miles we stopped to view an area of agricultural land and were rewarded with 16 Great Bustards in the distance and a number of Buzzards sat around waiting for the thermals. A little further on we had a Hen Harrier hunting and two late Swallows zooming past plus a flock of Long-tailed Tit with a mixture of both the “white-headed” race and the strip-headed which we are used to seeing in the UK.

As the day was warming more raptors were evident and we stopped after a few more miles to get brilliant views of a pair of Saker Falcons hunting Suslik, a type of “steppe” ground squirrel. The Saker Falcons performed right above us offering superb photographic opportunities. In the same area and also hunting the Suslik were Long-legged Buzzard, Common Buzzard and a Rough-legged Buzzard. Continuing further we had another group of 35 Great Bustards but this time only about 200m from the bus, with a couple of Black Redstarts on the nearby farm buildings.

We had lunch near the Apaj fish-pond complex and after our picnic we walked around the fish ponds and as the water was low we had a few wader species such as Curlew, Lapwing, Little Stint, Grey Plover and Dunlin. Marsh Harriers were quartering around the site looking for unwary prey. We had our first Eastern Imperial Eagle, another Hen Harrier and two White-tailed Eagles.

With the prospect of a light shower we went for a coffee in nearby Apaj village and then retraced our route back to the hotel with more birding en route getting more Stonechat, Corn Bunting, Tree Sparrow, Linnet and flocks of Goldfinch. We reached the hotel for 6pm and at 7pm met for another really good dinner with wine and beer.

Day 3

Thursday 11th October

Our morning walk followed a very similar path to yesterdays, with similar birds – two Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Kingfisher, and a flock of Long-tailed Tit with a Chiffchaff. Breakfast was also supplemented, by large communal plates of scrambled egg, bread, jam and coffee. We paid our drinks bills and departed at 0830 for the Hortobágy National Park.

The day was now quite warm and sunny with few clouds, ideal for raptors. We stopped occasionally to look at various birds and had at least 50 Buzzards en route, 6 Black Redstarts, 3 Great Grey Shrike but the highlight was 3 Eastern Imperial Eagles near Tenk. We spent some time here watching them soaring around for 15 minutes and interacting with a couple of Ravens. During the remaining journey we had another 3 Eastern Imperial Eagles at various locations.

We stopped for a while at Tisza Lake which was a large lake adjoining the River Tisza and contained a number of various wetland species. Here we had our first Pygmy Cormorants, Wigeon, Gadwall, Shoveler, Teal and lots of Migrant Hawker Dragonflies hunting over the reed-bed. We arrived at our hotel beside the River Tisza and checked into our rooms, had a short walk around the riverine woodland where we had Syrian Woodpecker and Nuthatch and re-grouped to go to the nearby Crane roost at sunset. Since we were not near any known Crane-roosting flyway we simply set off back towards Tiszacsege at 4.30pm and found a flat open area beside the road to watch. Here we had a Little Owl perched on an old farm building in the last rays of the sun.

Lines of Cranes were starting to arrive with some flying over and other groups dropping in to feed in nearby fields. As the sun was setting at 6pm the sky was full of lines of Cranes heading for the roost with their bugling calls filling the air. We estimated that around 20,000 Cranes were passing through to the roost on the fields of the Hortobágy National Park. What a wildlife spectacle!! We departed as it was nearly dark but Cranes were still flying over and we drove back to our hotel, a shower then dinner at 9pm. Soup, Pork, Chips and salad followed by pancakes. A fine end to a great birding day!

Day 4

Friday 12th October

Most were up birding at 7am in the woods near the hotel and we were rewarded with 3 Black Woodpecker, 2 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Chiffchaff and a few small groups of Cranes flying over.

After breakfast we drove away from Tiszacsege and to the flat Puszta of the Hortobágy National Park. Most of the day was spent at different points around Nagyivan, where we picked up the legendary ranger, Dr Gabor Kovacs who took us to look for a flock of Dotterel which were in the area. We parked the bus and walked out onto the Puszta where we had a few distant Marsh Harrier, a Merlin and a couple of Red-throated Pipits. For a while we could not locate the Dotterel but soon they flew into view and landed about 200m away and started to feed. We watched these 18 birds for half an hour running about catching grasshoppers and other insects on the flat grassland.

Satisfied at seeing these birds, we went for a coffee in the nearby village of Nagyivan where we had a couple of very close Syrian Woodpeckers giving really good photographic opportunities. From the village “coffee stop” we drove along a flood-bank to view over flooded pastures. This was a brilliant place for a variety of birds and where we had our picnic lunch. During our couple of hours birding here we had White Fronted Geese, 5 White-tailed Eagles, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Saker Falcon, 3 Hen Harrier, 25 Marsh Harrier, 2 Merlin, Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Bearded Tit, Swallow and a Water Vole swimming the dike. There were several species of Dragonfly, lots of Clouded Yellow and a couple of Swallowtail butterflies.

Mid-afternoon we departed from the flooded pastures and drove to the village of Hortobágy where Gerard showed us a large Oak tree beside a busy road with at least 20 Long-eared Owls roosting! The birds seemed unconcerned as we walked around to get the ideal photo of one of the birds.

As it was nearing sunset we drove on to the same area as last evening for the Crane roost but a little further along the road near a canal. While waiting we were entertained by a couple of Hummingbird Hawk Moths taking nectar from thistles, Black Redstarts on the farm roof, Stonechats and a good number of Roe Deer feeding out on the farmland. Cranes were now starting to arrive but not as many as the evening before. They appeared to be more distant and taking a different flight-line. Still, we watched a few thousand birds heading in to roost and before dark we drove back to the hotel and another excellent meal with beer and wine.

Day 5

Saturday 13th October

The pre-breakfast walk highlights were again 3 Black Woodpecker, 1 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Goldcrest, Redwing, Siskin and Short-toed Treecreeper. After our breakfast of scrambled eggs, bread, jam and coffee we departed at 9am and drove to nearby fish ponds to look for wetland species.

It was now a clear, sunny day and warm as we arrived at the fishponds and immediately found a large flock of Bearded Tit feeding close to where we had parked the bus. Brilliant coloured males and more drab, first-year birds feeding on the common reed seeds. The fish pond was low on water and we had Curlew, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Water Rail, Great White Egrets and a White-tailed Eagle feeding on a dead fish. A walk further found Ferruginous Duck, Great Crested Grebe, more Bearded Tit and really close views of Penduline Tits. Around the edge of the fish pond was a Fire-bellied Toad and lots of Edible Frogs.

We left here and drove to open farmland with distant Cranes feeding and had a picnic lunch beside a ruined farmhouse. During the lunch-break we were kept busy birding with appearances of Eastern Imperial Eagle, 4 Great Bustards, 2 White-tailed Eagles, a male Hen Harrier, Black Redstarts and a lone Chiffchaff.

Leaving the picnic spot we drove slowly beside the fields with the feeding Cranes to get better views and photos as they flew over. From here we drove to Lake Tisza to look for any new species which may have arrived and were delighted to find an Otter swimming across the lake through the Coot, Wigeon and Shoveler. Around 12 Pygmy Cormorants were on the lake and on the edge of the reeds we found a Sedge Warbler and a Reed Warbler feeding on insects. A steady drive back to the hotel with a couple of birding stops produced 5 Great Grey Shrikes, 120+ Corn Bunting, Stonechat and lots of Tree Sparrow. Back at the hotel our evening meal was more lively being Saturday night and locals were eating out...

Day 6

Sunday 14th October

The usual pre-breakfast walk had a new trip species, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, the reliable Black Woodpecker, Short-toed Woodpecker and Coal Tit.

After breakfast we left our delightful riverside hotel with now 6 species of woodpecker recorded for the trip with the possibility of two more hopefully. We moved on to the Bukk Hills birding en route with the first stop for a coffee near the motorway where we had a Saker Falcon on the electricity pylons and an Eastern Imperial Eagle on the ground. Driving on, the landscape now changed from flat land to rolling wooded hills and our next stop was at a reservoir. Here we had Great White Egret, Shoveler, Teal, Wigeon, Grey Plover, Snipe, Dunlin, Water Pipit, Chiffchaff and Great Grey Shrike. We drove on and stopped in a village for our picnic lunch under Mulberry trees. Black Redstarts were around and a few Hawfinch flying over. Suitably refreshed we continued north through villages and wooded hill with many of the trees now changing colour, a mixture of greens, yellows and bronze, very colourful.

We stopped near a steep wooded valley and walked for about 2 hours passing grazing Grey Hungarian Cattle on the open pastures and then a mixture of thick woodland and open scrub. During this time we had Sparrowhawk, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, lots of Hawfinches, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Mistle Thrush, Marsh Tit and many Black Redstart. From here we continued on to the village of Noszvaj, where our accommodation at the Hotel Nomad was situated. We checked in then before dusk some of the group had a wander around near the hotel for the final birding of the day finding Hawfinch, Nuthatch and Marsh Tit. Our dinner in the evening was large and varied. Soup, then platters of various meats and vegetables washed down with wine. A fine end to the day!

Day 7

Monday 15th October

Our early morning 'village walk' produced Black Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Hawfinch, Siskin, Marsh Tit and Willow Tit.

After a superb buffet breakfast with everything you could wish for we set out in the bus to a nearby wooded valley. We walked for around 3 hours through old Oak and Hornbeam woodland getting a couple of Red Squirrel, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Ravens, Hawfinch and the real find – 3 White-backed Woodpeckers. White-backed Woodpeckers are hard to find and can be silent and quite secretive as we experienced, but patience paid off and we watched the birds for half a hour with some people getting good photographs.

Pleased with our find, and in particular that we now had all the European woodpeckers on the trip list except Three-toed which was not expected in Hungary. We walked back to the waiting bus then a short drive to the village where we stopped yesterday for the picnic lunch. Buzzards drifted over, Sparrowhawks were soaring, Black Redstarts were evident on the roofs and occasional Hawfinch flew over.

After lunch we visited some more woodland habitats and had really good views of Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Nuthatch. Another short drive to a quarry to look for Rock Bunting proved negative although we had many Black Redstarts there. We travelled back towards the hotel and a couple of short stops for Great Grey Shrike, Sparrowhawk and Hawfinch. Pre-dinner drinks had some of the group sampling various wines from the region and choosing a type for the dinner. The evening meal produced the same standard as yesterday and Andrew gave a speech of thanks to Gerard for organising such an excellent itinerary.

Day 8

Tuesday 16th October

Pre-breakfast, some of the group ventured out in the clear, sunny conditions to find Black Woodpecker, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Hawfinch, Marsh Tit and Willow Tit. After another excellent breakfast we paid our bar bills and set off at 9am for Budapest airport.

A service station coffee stop about an hour short of Budapest did produce a very distant Eastern Imperial Eagle and local Crested Larks. The weather deteriorated and it was soon raining heavily as we drove on to the airport, the first rainfall of the trip, luckily. We arrived at Budapest airport bang on schedule and said farewells to not only Gerard and Istvan, but also to those lucky people who were staying on for a few days in Budapest – Paul and Brenda, Andrew and June.

We recorded a list of birds (120 in total), many of which we saw really well. We had good, warm weather, which was a real bonus and brought out the raptors. Thanks to Gerard, Istvan and everyone who spotted wildlife we missed and made such a good trip.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			2		10	6		
2	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>								
3	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>					6	1		
4	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	6	6	2	✓	✓		
5	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>			9		12	2		
6	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>		1		2	15	4		2
7	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		30	10	6		10		
8	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	1	1	2		20	20		
9	White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	3			50	6			
10	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	100	200	1000s	1000s	1000s	1000s		
11	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>			5	200	20	6		
12	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		50	✓	30	✓	✓	✓	
13	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			30		20			
14	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>				2				
15	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		50	20	10	20	10		
16	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		200	50	50	✓	✓		
17	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>					6			
18	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>					2			
19	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		3		3	1			
20	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		10	1	25	6	✓		
21	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	3	2	3	6	2	3	6	
22	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	6	100+	50+	30	20	10	10	18
23	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>		2						
24	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		2		5	6			
25	Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>		1	6	1	1	1		1
26	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	3	15	10	6	6	2	2	4
27	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>				4				
28	Saker	<i>Falco cherrug</i>		3		1		1		
29	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	2	10	10	10	10	4		
30	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		1h			2			
31	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		3			3			
32	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			50		✓	✓		
33	Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>			20000	✓	✓	✓		
34	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>		50			4			
35	Dotterel	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>				18				
36	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		4				1		
37	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		650	50	200	100			20
38	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>					1			
39	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		20			1			
40	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		1						
41	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>		4		20	1			
42	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		37	1	2	30			
43	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>						1		
44	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>				20	20			
45	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		1	1	6	5	10		
46	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	50	30	✓	✓	✓	✓		
47	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>		4	10+	10+	10+	10+		

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
48	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
49	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	2	100	60	20	30	50	30	10
50	Feral / Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	200	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>				20		20		
53	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			1h					
54	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			3	1	2	2		
55	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			1h	1h	1	1		
56	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>				3	3	2	1	1
57	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>							4	1
58	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		1		1h	2	2	1	2
59	Middle-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>						3	7	
60	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>			1	5		1		1
61	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>							3	
62	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	3	6	4	1	4	4	6	1
63	Lesser-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	1h	1	2	2	1	1h	2h	
64	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	2	10	✓	✓	20	10		
65	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	6	2	2	✓	2	1		3
66	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		2		1				
67	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		1	1					
68	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	1	6	20	50	20			
69	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>						1		
70	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>		2		2				
71	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	2	60	20	10	10	2		
72	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			1					
73	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>							1	
74	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			1					
75	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	2	2	1	1	2	2	3	
76	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			1					
77	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	1	4	6	10	10	20	10	3
78	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				2				
79	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	1	10	3	10	6	4		
80	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		1	1	2	3	6	2	
81	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>							1h	
82	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>					1			
83	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	4		2		6	2	1	
84	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>						10	4	
85	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>					1			
86	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>					1			
87	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>						1	1	
88	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		2	1h	1		6	1	
89	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		3	3		2	12	6	
90	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>		6			20			
91	Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>		2h		1h	10			
92	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		10	20		10	20	20	
93	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>						5	6	2
94	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montana</i>							1	1
95	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>						2	1	
96	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	10	✓	10	✓	10	✓	✓	
97	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	1	10	5	✓	10	✓	✓	
98	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			3	3	3	6	10	4

	Common name	Scientific name	October								
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
99	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>							1		
100	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>					2	2	1		
101	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	2	6	3	5	5	3			
102	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	50	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	2	10	5	2	20	30		
104	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	20	30	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			3			8	20		
107	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone (cornix)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
108	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	50	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
109	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	11	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	40	50	30	✓	10	✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	50	50	20	30	20	30	20	10	
112	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>								h	
113	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>						12	20		
114	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		1		2	10	70	100		
115	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	4		10	5	4	2	5		
116	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	100	100	100	30	30	50	20		
117	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>	50	20	30	15		6			
118	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	20	6	5	100	120	50			
119	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>						6	3		
120	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		4		10	10				

Mammals

Roe Deer

Suslik

Fox

Noctule Bat

Hare

Hedgehog

Water Vole

Red Squirrel

Otter

Stoat

Butterflies

Peacock

Pale or Berger's Clouded Yellow

Painted Lady

Small Heath

Marbled White

Red Admiral

Large White

Wall Brown

Speckled Wood

Clouded Yellow

Small White

Small Tortoiseshell

Meadow Brown

Others

Hummingbird Hawk Moth

Hornet

Grass Snake

Tree Frog

Marsh Frog

Edible Frog

Common Toad

Sand Lizard

Fire-bellied Toad

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