

# Autumn in Hungary

Naturetrek Tour Report

16 – 23 October 2013

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Saker Falcon



Long-eared Owl



White-tailed Eagle

Report and images compiled by Geoff Carr



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   Gerard Gorman            Hungarian Guide & Ornithologist

Driver                            Attila Vegh

Participants:                  Sue Howard  
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   Billie Andrews  
   Frank Andrews  
   David Curtis  
   Cynthia Curtis  
   Steve Guy  
   David Briggs  
   Elizabeth Briggs  
   David Williams  
   Sue Wates  
   Roger Wates  
   Alison Uren  
   Mike Uren

## Day 1

**Wednesday 16th October**

Nine of us travelled with BA from Heathrow to Budapest, with the first bird of the trip being a Buzzard sat on the outer part of the airfield. We were soon through customs, collected our bags, and were greeted by Gerard our local leader, along with the rest of the group who had made the journey to Budapest earlier or flown with a separate airline. We boarded our bus and met our driver for the trip, Attila Vegh. We were soon on our way towards our hotel on the edge of the Kiskunsag National Park. A Saker flew low over the bus at one point as a starter. We reached our accommodation for the next two nights, the Kunsagi Major Hotel near the village of Kerekegyhaza at 6pm and after a welcome drink of Palinka, checked into our rooms. At around 7pm we went to for an excellent meal of mushroom and cheese soup, chicken, chips and salad and ice-cream to finish with. After a tiring day most people went to bed at 9pm.

## Day 2

**Thursday 17th October**

The 7am walk had a near full attendance and all were rewarded Little Owl, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Grey Shrike and a couple of Black Redstarts. Back in for breakfast, continental style with meats, cheeses plus scrambled egg, bread, jam and coffee. At 9am we left the hotel to explore the Kiskunsag National Park with the promise of a warmer sunny day. After a few miles we stopped to view an area of agricultural land and were rewarded with a number of Common Buzzards, Rough-legged Buzzard, Hen Harrier and Corn Bunting. A little further on we found another Hen Harrier and Rough-legged Buzzard hunting, and a small number of Curlew resting in the fields.

As the day was warming more raptors were evident and we stopped after a few more miles to good views in all directions. We walked to the top of a slight rise in the otherwise flat landscape of the Puszta and put the telescopes on a distant 45 Great Bustard feeding in the agricultural fields. Gerard spotted a Saker on the ground not far away waiting for any Suslik, a type of “steppe” ground squirrel, coming out of their burrows to collect forage for hibernation. The Saker Falcon flew on and we followed but it was lost to sight and had obviously moved on. In the same area and also hunting the Suslik were Common Buzzard and a Rough-legged Buzzard.

Continuing further we had lunch in a nearby village on the picnic tables and with a few Hummingbird Hawk Moths and Clouded Yellow butterflies feeding on the last flowers of the autumn. Foraging around the area Steve found a Grass Snake and Common Lizard. From the picnic spot we retraced our route and stopped to view over a mixture of Puszta and farmland and had a covey of 17 Grey Partridge, Hen Harrier, Rough-legged Buzzard and a number of Yellow-legged Gulls flying over towards a nearby roost. From here we continued on and arrived back at the Kunsagi Major Hotel as the sun was setting and giving photographic opportunities with Little Owl calling nearby. It was a good finish to an excellent day birding in the Kiskunsagi National Park and surrounding farmland in sunny weather.

## Day 3

## Friday 18th October

Our pre-breakfast morning walk followed a very similar path to yesterdays, with similar birds Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Little Owl, Raven, Crested Lark and at least 8 Black Redstarts around the hotel. Again, the continental breakfast was also supplemented, by large communal plates of scrambled egg, bread, jam and coffee. We paid our drinks bills and departed at 9am for the Hortobágy National Park. The day was now sunny with few clouds but quite windy which probably kept some of the raptors down. We stopped occasionally to look at various birds and had at least 50 Buzzards en route, a close juvenile Goshawk hunting and lots of Goldfinch.

We stopped for a while at Tisza Lake which was a large lake adjoining the River Tisza and here we had our picnic lunch. This area contained a number of various wetland species that kept us occupied while eating. Here we had our first Pygmy Cormorants, a distant group of flying Glossy Ibis, Great White Egret, Gadwall, Teal, Goldeneye, Great Grey Shrike, and lots of Migrant Hawker Dragonflies hunting over the reed-bed. The highlight here was an immature Eastern Imperial Eagle which was soaring not too far away and a distant White-tailed Eagle. We travelled on from the picnic stop and arrived at our hotel near Tiszacsege and beside the River Tisza at around 4pm and checked into our rooms, had a coffee and re-grouped to go to the nearby Crane roost at 5pm.

After a short drive we assembled in an open area to watch the Cranes coming into roost. After a short while lines of Cranes were starting to arrive with some flying over and other groups dropping in nearby to feed in the 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 10,000 Cranes were passing over 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 for dinner at 7.30pm - soup, fish and chips followed by pancakes. A fine end to a great birding day!

## Day 4

Saturday 19th October

Most were up birding at 7.30am in the woods near the hotel and we were rewarded with 2 Black Woodpecker, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Kingfisher, Chiffchaff and a few small groups of Cranes flying over from the evening roost.

After breakfast we drove away from Tiszacsege and to the flat Puszta of the Hortobágy National Park and surrounding farmland. Most of the day was spent at different points around Nagyivan and our first highlight of the day was a feeding flock of 150+ Corn Bunting, small groups of feeding Cranes and a Great Grey Shrike. At one point we were dropped off by the bus and we walked down a lane to an oxbow lake where we had 2 Kingfisher, lots of Grey-lag Geese over and Marsh Harrier.

From the oxbow lake we were picked up by the bus and then drove to an area of farmland with a couple of ruined farms and walked another track where we were lucky and found 20 Great Bustards which gave not too distant views and showed the size of these birds – the largest flying species in Europe. We also had a Saker being mobbed by a kestrel which showed a remarkable difference in size between these two Falcons. The Saker eventually came right over us and gave good photographic opportunities. Nearby a Hen Harrier was hunting and flushing Skylark and a couple of Crested Lark.

Satisfied with this we decided to go to a canal area near a village for a lunchtime picnic. It was very warm by now as we watched a group of 9 Night Herons flying around, Penduline Tit, Bearded Tit, Little Owl and a mixture of Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady, Queen of Spain Fritillary, various Dragonfly and Marsh Frogs.

After lunch we drove back towards Tiszacsege, and our accommodation but birding en route with quite a few Common Buzzard, Merlin, Marsh Harrier and Black Redstart. Back at our accommodation we had a coffee then out again for the evening Crane roost. It was a perfect, clear, still evening with first large numbers of Grey-lag Geese flying over and then lines of Cranes against the pink/orange sunset. With the sun now setting at around 6pm and the full moon rising in the opposite direction and thousands of Cranes flying over it emphasised the spectacle of bird migration and was a fitting end to the day. As it was becoming dark we drove back to our accommodation and an excellent evening meal.

## Day 5

Sunday 20th October

The pre-breakfast walk highlights were Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Kingfisher and a flock of Long-tailed Tits of the continental race with white heads.

After our breakfast of scrambled eggs, bread, jam and coffee we departed at 9am to the same area that we watched the Cranes coming to roost the previous evening. Here we were looking for various raptor species as well as observing parties of Cranes leaving the roost to feed on nearby farmland. As the morning was now warming up the raptors were up and hunting the Puszta and we soon had a couple of Long-legged Buzzard, 5 immature White-tailed Eagle, lots of Common Buzzard and a Great Grey Shrike. We watched the Cranes flying over for a while longer then drove off to the town of Balmazújbaros for a Long-eared Owl roost. In the centre of the town Gerard showed us a line of trees where the Long-eared Owls were roosting and counting around we found at least 20 birds here.

From the village and the Long-eared Owl roost we drove a short distance into the countryside to have our picnic lunch and stopped overlooking a large pasture area with the village on our left and woodland to the right. It was quite warm and lots of Harlequin Ladybirds were landing on the white bus and an array of all sorts of colours. We sat in the warm sunshine eating our lunch while watching distant Cranes and soaring Common Buzzards.

Leaving the picnic spot we drove on to the town of Hortobagy where there was another Long-eared Owl roost of some 18 birds providing close views and photos. Some people visited the Hortobagy visitor centre to have a look around and buy ice-creams. We left Hortobagy and drove to a fish-pond complex where we had 3 adult White-tailed Eagles soaring and two tumbling down while locking talons, a remarkable experience for us. Here we had a small group of White-fronted Goose flying over, Marsh Harrier, Penduline Tit and Bearded Tit.

We then drove back to our accommodation beside the River Tisza, had a coffee then a short walk around the nearby woodlands and seeing Great White Egret, a small Group of Night Heron and distant Cranes heading towards the roost. Later, we enjoyed another excellent dinner with Tawny Owl calling in the trees beside the hotel.

## Day 6

## Monday 21st October

The usual pre-breakfast walk had Kingfisher, Long-tailed Tit, Chiffchaff and Nuthatch on a warm, sunny morning. After breakfast we left our riverside hotel, crossed the River Tisza on the small ferry on towards the Bukk Hills birding en route with the first stop at the nature reserve of the Borsod Grasslands, a vast open plain with some wetlands. Here we found 2 Saker, 3 White-tailed Eagle, Hen Harrier, Great Grey Shrike, a couple of Bean Goose with a flock of Grey-lag Goose and 17 Great White Egret. A few butterflies were about in the warm sunshine and we had Small Copper, Clouded Yellow and Pale Clouded Yellow. From this brilliant habitat we drove to the town of Szentistvan to look at another Long-eared Owl roost and found at least 18 birds in the Spruce trees.

Driving on the landscape now changed from flat land to rolling wooded hills and our next stop was at the Bogacs reservoir near the foothills of the Bukk Hills where we had our picnic lunch in the warm sunshine while watching a Hen Harrier hunting the water fringe and a lone Whiskered Tern feeding around the lake. Suitably refreshed we continued around the lake to the western side and in the orchards there found Syrian Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Sparrowhawk and a number of Common Buzzards passing over. We continued north through villages and wooded hillsides with many of the trees now changing colour, a mixture of greens, yellows and bronze, very colourful.

We carried 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 Black Woodpecker, Hawfinch, Nuthatch, Grey Wagtail, Marsh Tit and Red Squirrel. 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

Tuesday 22nd October

Our early morning 'village walk' produced Black Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Hawfinch, Marsh Tit and Willow Tit. After a superb buffet breakfast with everything you could wish for we set out in the bus to the Hor Valley. We walked for around 3 hours through old Oak and Hornbeam woodland getting Grey-headed Woodpecker, Ravens, and the real find – White-backed Woodpecker. 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 bird for about 15 minutes 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 and had our picnic near the new National Park Centre. While eating we had a lone Serin in a nearby tree and lots of Clouded Yellow butterflies around. After lunch we visited a small reservoir where we found, Stonechat, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting and Linnet. Back then to the Nomad Hotel for a coffee then a short walk to the nearby ponds and park where we had Grey-headed Woodpecker calling, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker and lots of Nuthatch. 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 Mike gave a speech of thanks to Gerard for organising such an excellent itinerary.

## Day 8

Wednesday 23rd October

Pre-breakfast, some of the group ventured out in the clear, sunny conditions to find Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Hawfinch, Marsh Tit and lots of Jays collecting Walnuts. 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 produced local Crested Larks and a number of Common Buzzard. The weather was again quite warm and we arrived at Budapest airport bang on schedule and said farewells to not only Gerard and Attila, but also to those lucky people who were staying on for a few days in Budapest – Alison and Mike, Sue and Roger.

We recorded a list of birds (109 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, Attila and everyone who spotted wildlife and made this such a good trip.

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## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			10		1	3		
3	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			2	2				
4	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		6	50	20	200	40		
5	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>			4	2	6	6		
6	Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>				9	8			
7	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>		4	6	1	4	22		
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		2	1	3	12	18	2	
9	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			10					
10	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			50	2		3		
11	Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>						3		
12	White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>					8	8		
13	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		20	✓	✓	✓	✓		
14	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	
15	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			30	30	30			
16	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>				1				
17	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				5	1			
18	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			50	1	10	15		
19	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>						3		
20	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				100	100			
21	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>				50	30			
22	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>				6	6			
23	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>			2					
24	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		7		1	6	4		
25	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		3	1	2	4	3		
26	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		3	5	2	4	4	2	3
27	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			1			1	2	
28	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	60	50	50	50	50	4	50
29	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>					2			
30	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>		4						
31	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>			1		8	3		
32	Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>			1					
33	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		20	10	5	6	5	1	2
34	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>				1	1			
35	Saker	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	1	1		1		2		
36	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		17						
37	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	1	10	8	10	10	2	2	
38	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				1	1			
39	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			1000s	20	100s			
40	Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>			10000	10000	100s	100s		
41	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>		45		17				
42	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		16		1	35	10		
43	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		30				1		
44	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>						1		
45	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>		100	20	20	100+	100+		
46	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		200	50	100+	100+	10		40
47	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidias hybridus</i>						1		
48	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	6	4	20	10				

	Common name	Scientific name	October								
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
49	Feral / Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
50	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	20
51	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>					38	18			
52	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		1h		2h	2h				
53	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	2	2	2	2					
54	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				3	1	1	2		
55	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>				2		1	1		
56	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>							1 +2h	2h	
57	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		1h	2	1	2	1	1	1	1
58	Middle-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>				1		1	2	1	
59	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>		1				1			
60	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>							1 +1h		
61	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		2	1	2	2	10	10	5	
62	Lesser-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>					1		2		
63	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		50		10	10	20			
64	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		6	2	1	1	6		2	
65	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		2							
66	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		10	10			h			
67	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>									
68	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		2				1			
69	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>						1			
70	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		1					1	1	
71	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		2	2		1	1	4		
72	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		2	8	2	2	2	2	1	
73	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>		6		5	2		3	6	
74	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		1	1		4	5	20	5	
75	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>						3			
76	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>				1			1		
77	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			1					1	
78	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		1	1	1h	1h	1	1		
79	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				1					
80	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>				h	2	h			
81	Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>				2	1	1			
82	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>						20	30	10	
83	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>						2	6	4	
84	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montana</i>							1		
85	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>								1	
86	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		4	4	2	5	5	20+	10	
87	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		2	2	2	5	5	10+	2	
88	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				2	3	6	20+	6	
89	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>							1		
90	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		2	1	1	4	5			
91	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		3	5			4	20	6	
93	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	10	
94	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			30		✓		50	✓	
95	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		3				h	20+		
96	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone (cornix)</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		3	
97	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>									
98	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	2	20	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
99	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



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			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
100	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		2	20	10	2	3	✓	10
101	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>							6	1
102	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>							1	
103	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		20	10					
104	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>		5	3			2	10	10
105	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		50	100	50	20	4	10	4
106	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>							20	
107	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>		2		150		1	10	
108	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			1			3	5	
109	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				3	1	2		

## Mammals

Roe Deer

Fox

Noctule Bat

Hare

Brown Rat

Red Squirrel

Field Vole

## Butterflies

Peacock

Pale or Berger's Clouded Yellow

Painted Lady

Small Heath

Small Blue spp

Red Admiral

Large White

Wall Brown

Comma

Clouded Yellow

Small White

Small Copper

Queen of Spain Fritillary

## Others

Hummingbird Hawk Moth

Hornet

Grass Snake

Migrant Hawker

Common Newt

Common Wall Lizard

Tree Frog

Marsh Frog

Spade-foot Toad

Violet Carpenter Bee

Ruddy Darter

Common Darter

Common Toad

Common Lizard

Green Toad

Agile Frog

Fire-bellied Toad