

Hungary in Autumn

Sunday 17 – Sunday 24 October 2010

Trip Report

Leaders:

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Introduction

The tour will be remembered for many reasons, including raptor sightings that were enjoyed on most days with sometimes close views as well as high numbers of birds. Not forgetting the incredible sight of close Great Bustard that looked unconcerned by our presence (for several minutes) and the magic of thousands of Common Cranes flying in to roost, passing just over our heads before landing on to one of the nearby Fishponds.

DAILY DIARY

Sunday 17th October

The last time this tour ran (2008) we reported that the Budapest – Ferihegy airport (Code name – Sky Court) was due to be finished in 2009. It now looks like it might be ready next spring. Watch this space! Meanwhile both sections of the group arrive at the airport and board the transport and then drive to the edge of the car park to take a look at the European Soudlik colony. We then drive off onto the M3 motorway and head east and it's not long before we see the first of many Common Buzzards perched on fence posts next to the road. We knock off the kilometres and stop off at a lay-by with comfort services and enjoy a hot drink and a snack, the only birds of interest are heard but not seen – Long-tailed Tit, so we drive on. We do manage to see good numbers of Caspian Gull over the fields and further along see very high numbers of Common (European) Starling that turn the bare fields black! After a while we stop once more at another service centre and as we emerge from the vehicle we see a large raptor land on a pylon, Eastern Imperial Eagle, distant but still impressive on its perch. Nearby we find Lapwing, Goldfinch, Kestrel, Black Redstart and also close Crested Lark calling before we drive on. We turn off the motorway after some distance and explore a minor road and manage to find a pair of Saker Falcon perched on a pylon and we can clearly see the markings on the these impressive raptors. Over the fields we soon find the first Hen Harriers and then enjoy the close presence of these buoyant predators around us as the numbers build up and we continue to watch them until the light begins to fail. We head off once again, still moving towards the east and finally stop at our base at Erdőbénye and unload ourselves and our luggage into their respected rooms before enjoying a great meal after which we deal with the checklist for the day and then retire for a well earned rest!

Monday 18th October

Some of the group start looking for birds before breakfast and our first Woodpeckers are seen in the form of Syrian and Great Spotted Woodpecker. After breakfast we move to the Boldogk_-vára area and check on some nearby raptors, as we stop a huge bird flies away from the tree we are parked under and only then do we begin to realise that we are looking at- Imperial Eagle 3 of them, What a start to the day! We also find numerous fields that contain remnants of sunflower crops which in turn

attract birds and then Sparrowhawk. We also find perched Great Grey Shrike, Tree Sparrow & strangely a Syrian Woodpecker perched on top of a concrete pylon in a nearby village. Moving on towards Regec we stop to admire another Imperial Eagle, this time an immature, and also locate our first Goshawk and then stop to have lunch. During lunch we could hear a Great Spotted Woodpecker nearby before a Treecreeper flies towards and through the group using us for cover in the exposed habitat before landing on a tree. In broad daylight a Noctule is found flying over the nearby hills and this was just the first of several sightings of bats (In daylight) we found during the trip! After lunch we move to explore the woodland around Harom Huta and begin to look for Woodpeckers. We find a good mix of mature hardwood trees and mixed deciduous/plantation and work hard to get views of Siskin and Crossbill but eventually see a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker but Black and Green Woodpecker are heard but not seen before we start walking back towards the minibus. One person was lucky to see Ural Owl and a very dark Red Squirrel in its winter coat was mistaken for a Pine Marten! Rootings made by Wild Boar were seen in a nearby meadow; perhaps they were feasting on the Autumn Crocus bulbs? The light begins to fade all too quickly and we reluctantly board the vehicle and begin our drive back to Erdöbénye just as the first Common Pipistrelle emerges from the roost to take on the night shift.

Tuesday 19th October

We decide to explore the area around Erdöbénye for the first part of the day and drive into a car park and Attila goes to ask for permission to allow us to walk in the nearby forest. That accomplished we set off along the forest path, many leaves are falling and the ground is covered, so no chance of stealth tactics today, but we continue to walk until we manage to catch up with a Great-spotted Woodpecker whilst one lucky person enjoys viewing a White-backed Woodpecker. A mammal is spotted walking slowly towards us, Mouflon, but does not stay long after getting our scent. Nuthatches are busy in the canopy and Common Crossbill fly overhead, then Black Woodpecker is heard nearby and some of us manage to get brief flight views of these attractive birds. We leave the forest behind us and move into a small clearing and find a pair of Common Crossbill perched on top of a Pine and we enjoy good views of these before they fly away. In the nearby scrub Willow Tit are seen and we also manage to see Long-tailed Tits which contain both *europaeus* and *caudatus* (white headed) forms. We then move along towards Baskó and find a good number of Ravens taking advantage of the tractors ploughing in the fields before we stop to have food and hot drinks. Within seconds of arrival we find Golden Eagle soaring over the woodland, in fact we end up with 4 in total which keep us busy for quite a while and yet another day flying Noctule is seen to join the Eagles. We also find a good mix of winter thrushes perched on power lines and Great Grey Shrike waiting patiently nearby for its next meal to appear. We reluctantly say goodbye to the eagles after our lunch stop and head off towards Sároszombat. We soon find ourselves driving past some vineyards and stop to view a good mix of birds including: Fieldfare, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Chaffinch & Linnet to name but a few. Then a 'Green' Woodpecker lands on a post but its head is hidden behind the post until it finally reveals itself as a Grey-headed Woodpecker. We then move on to stop at a quarry near Sároszombat and look for Eagle Owl which sometimes roosts here but not today, so we move along to stop once more for Eagle Owl, this time at the Tokaj quarry and return the same result. We then head back to base have our meal and do the checklist before going out into the local Wine Cellar for a wine tasting experience. This event was a great success which had the added bonus of giving everyone a good night's sleep.

Wednesday 20th October

The rain and misty conditions greeted us as we drove to the nearby pasture land not far from our accommodation and get out in the hope that things would clear up. As we start to walk we have the briefest view of a Black Woodpecker and shortly after this a Brown Hare skulks away in to cover. The rain continues and in the end we walk back to the warmth of the minibus and head off to take a look at the Bodrog River Plains. Weather conditions seem to be improving as we arrive and start scanning the

Marsh. Through the mist we could just make out 2 White-tailed Eagles perched in the same tree. Behind us an immature Serin is found perched on the wires. We now travel to Balmazújváros and park in a built up area, a short walk takes us to some housing and here we look into the nearby trees and find at least 60 Long-eared Owl looking down at us. The cameras come out and the owls try to look their best. Meanwhile you can hear the gentle song of Black Redstart in the garden nearby. We now move to the outskirts of the town and then stop overlooking an expanse of wet grassland and here we find Greylag and White-fronted geese, Mute Swan, Coot, Lapwing, Ruff and Great White Egret plus a Peregrine standing on the grass. We then start to drive back to base and have time to freshen up before having our meal and do the checklist then a good night's sleep.

Thursday 21st October

We drive to Lake Tisza and start to check the area and find Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Shoveler and Eurasian (Common) Teal & Great Crested Grebe but nothing new so we drive on to Derzsi Fish Pond. Here we find our first Ferruginous Duck and then turn our attention to a pair of Bearded Tit that are moving slowly along the base of the nearby reeds and we enjoy their company. We also take note of the Caspian Gulls bobbing on the water before moving on to stop at another viewpoint. Here we walk into the reed-bed trying to find Firecrest but all we find are Goldcrest and a few more Bearded Tit so we then drive around to Elep Fish Pond as dusk starts to creep in slowly. The wind is quite strong and this makes it difficult to keep the telescopes steady whilst we try to identify the smaller waders. We stop near a small building that gives us the shelter we need and then manage to find a pair of Saker Falcon flying around their pylon home. A good mix of waders is seen including: Avocet, Lapwing, Grey Plover, (Common) Ringed Plover, Common Snipe, Eurasian Curlew, Common Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Dunlin and Little Stint. Shelduck, Greylag and (Greater) White-fronted Geese arrive in good numbers before the main event of the evening, the Common Cranes. It is not long before the Cranes start to arrive from all directions and from our position of shelter they pass over our heads before landing on the fishpond. The whole of the sky seems to be full of these birds and we listen to the call of the Young Cranes just making sure they do not get parted from their parents. We have our fill of this amazing scene and start to walk back to the minibus with the glow of the sunset around us and then drive back to base, have our meal and do the checklist before sleep.

Friday 22nd October

After leaving base we drive to Nagyván and pick up a local Ranger for part of the day, he knows the area like the back of his hand as he walks it regularly. The minibus can only take us so far because the track starts to break up. We notice a good number of Hen Harrier playing/hunting and also the odd Marsh Harrier drifting nearby. We stop to look at a group of 16 Great Bustard standing very close to us; they do not appear to be worried by our presence but they do take off when they are ready. We then have the exciting display of a young Saker Falcon cutting through the air and racing away leaving all the other raptors in its wake. We in turn walk back to the minibus and drive back to the village. We then start to look for Stone Curlew that sometime hide in the low vegetation but without success, we do manage to see a few Stonechats and then drive to the other side of the village as the Ranger has found 2 Stone Curlew but even when you know where they are they are still difficult to see. We say thank you and good-bye to the Ranger as we depart and drive towards the Hortobágy Fishponds. We knew before we arrived at Hortobágy that the train was not running but we were surprised that the area looked more like a building site with heavy traffic running along it. There was some life near the car park in the form of 2 'Bootlace' Grass Snake, both very much alive and now moved to a better habitat. We begin to walk along a track and get fleeting views of (Eurasian) Penduline Tit and just beyond a Kingfisher calls. We then move to view a fishpond and find a good mix of birds including: Greylag & (Greater) White-fronted Goose, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail and Eurasian (Common) Teal plus Great & Pygmy Cormorant. We then call our driver to carefully drive along the track and pick us all up and then drop

us off at the end. We then walk towards a watchtower seeing Great Grey Shrike trying to catch Jack Snipe en-route. The view from the tower was good and we could see high numbers of Spotted Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit and Dunlin. The light begins to fade and we walk back to the minibus and drive back to our base once more.

Saturday 23rd October

We drive to Lake Tisza and stop to check if anything new has arrived and as we look a Kingfisher flashes past and away over the water. We do a good search over the lake and find 2 Little Grebe nearby and the usual mix of ducks so we drive on, heading towards Tiszacsege. We then stop next to a large tree that appears to be covered with birds including Corn & Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer, Common Linnet and Chaffinch. We move further along and stop near a farm and find good numbers of Tree Sparrow, White Wagtail, Yellowhammer and Crested Lark. We drive on and find our first Little Owl perched on a chimney and then we move to Tiszacsege and explore woodland next to the River Tisza vehicle ferry. We find very few birds apart from Great Tit and Eurasian Treecreeper but the trees look so good for Woodpeckers. We then enjoy a goulash stop to help warm us through.

After lunch we move to the Darassa Steppes and soon find a male Hen Harrier hunting over the grassland and he is soon joined by a Ring-tailed bird. We look around for other raptors and eventually find three high flying 'Buzzards' two of these birds are identified as Rough-legged Buzzard but it needed the help of a telescope to see the white detail on top of the tail as they drifted around. We continue to look for other birds and then a Little Owl appears on top of a line of round straw bales near the farm. After a quiet period we find a distant White-tailed Eagle drifting over the forest and this is followed by another later on that flew away in the same direction. We continue to look for raptors and just as we think it is time to go we notice two Falcons flying fast close together, the smaller one behind a Kestrel, the larger in front a Saker. The Kestrel slows down but the Saker accelerates past our viewpoint over the trees and disappears at great speed. We board the minibus and drive to Balmazújváros and return to the wet grassland area and start to scan the Geese, we know that 2 Red-breasted Geese are out there somewhere but they prove difficult as we can only achieve now you see me now you don't views and just to make things more interesting a small plane decides to fly over the geese and put them all up! We can only hope that the re-shuffle works in our favour and it does because the 2 Red-breasted Geese are re-found together in full view and not hidden in the dips. We all enjoy great views of the most beautiful geese that breed in central Arctic Siberia and winter mainly in the lowlands by the Black Sea. We also find a Wood Sandpiper and Little Egret nearby and just as we turn to leave a Juvenile Goshawk dashes past and we return to the vehicle, drive back to base and enjoy our last meal together and start to think about packing.

Sunday 24th October

Straight after breakfast we start to load up our entire luggage into the minibus & trailer and begin the long drive to the airport. We stop after several kilometres to look at some Geese feeding in the fields and also find 2 White-tailed Eagles perched in a tree, these were viewed through the telescope before moving on. We continue the drive but break off at regular intervals for comfort stops and brief walks etc. At one point we turn off into the Hór Valley and park. A short walk takes us up to a rock face and a single Rock Bunting is heard and 5 Hawfinch fly overhead. It begins to rain and so we return to the vehicle and move to Noszvaj.

We do find a good mix of woodland birds here including: Robin, Nuthatch, Hawfinch & Great-Spotted Woodpecker, Marsh, Coal, Great & Blue Tit. A Middle Spotted Woodpecker was calling somewhere in the woodland but never showed. We enjoy a magnificent lunch at the Nomád Hotel complete with soup, pudding and a pear liqueur (50% alcohol) but no liqueur for the driver! We then continue our drive and later stop at a service station for hot drinks and Imperial Eagles close by. We

then move on to the airport and arrive spot on time as some of us get out to catch our flight and the rest drive into Budapest.

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SPECIES LISTS

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*. Recorded on 5 days.
 Greylag Goose *Anser anser*. Recorded on 6 days sometimes in high numbers.
 Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* Recorded on 5 days.
 Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* 2 on the 23rd at Balmazújváros.
 Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* 3 on the 21st at Elep Fishpond
 Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* Recorded on 5 days.
 Gadwall *Anas strepera* Recorded on 3 days.
 Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Recorded on 5 days.
 Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Recorded on 4 days.
 Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Recorded on 3 days.
 Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Pair on 22nd at Hortobágy Fishpond.
 Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Recorded on 3 days.
 Common Pochard *Netta rufina* Recorded on 1 day.
 Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* 2 on the 21st.
 Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Recorded on 2 days.
 Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Recorded on 3 days.
 Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Recorded on 4 days.
 Great White Egret *Egretta alba* Recorded on 6 days in good numbers.
 Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Recorded on the 23rd only.
 Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* Recorded on 3 days.
 Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* Recorded on 3 days.
 Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Recorded on 7 days.
 Merlin *Falco columbarius* Recorded on 2 days.
 Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* 2 Pairs plus 3 singles.
 Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* Recorded on 2 days.
 White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Recorded on 4 days.
 (Western) Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* Recorded in good numbers on 5 days.
 Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* Recorded in good numbers on 6 days.
 Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* Recorded in good numbers on 7 days.
 Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* Recorded in good numbers on 2 days.
 Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* Recorded in good numbers on every day.
 Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* Two on the 23rd.
 Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* 3 pairs seen.
 Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* Pair with 2 Immature on the 19th.
 Great Bustard *Otis tarda* 16 _ on the 22nd.
 Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* Heard on the 22nd.
 Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* Recorded in good numbers on 5 days.
 Common Crane *Grus grus* Recorded in high numbers on 5 days.
 Eurasian Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* 2 at Nagyiván on the 22nd.
 Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avocetta* 2 on the 21st & 21 on the 22nd.
 Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* Recorded in good numbers on 5 days.
 Grey/Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* 6 on 21st & 1 on 22nd.
 (Common) Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* 3 on the 21st.
 Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus* 3 on the 22nd.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* Single on the 21st.
 Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* Recorded in good numbers on the 22nd.
 Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* Recorded on 3 days.
 Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* Recorded in good numbers on 5 days.
 Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* 2 on the 21st.
 Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* Single on the 21st.
 Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Single on the 23rd.
 Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* Single on the 21st.
 Little Stint *Calidris minuta* Single on the 21st.
 Dunlin *Calidris alpina* 20 on the 21st.
 Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* 2 on the 20th.
 Common/Mew Gull *Larus canus* Small numbers on 2 days.
 Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* Good numbers on 6 days.
 Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* Good numbers on 5 days.
 Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* Common & seen every day.
 (Common) Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* Seen in small numbers most days.
 Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Common & seen every day.
 Ural Owl *Strix uralensis* One seen at Harom Huta on 18th.
 Little Owl *Athene noctua* 2 on the 23rd.
 Long-eared Owl *Asio atus* 60+ on the 20th.
 Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Singles on 22nd & 23rd.
 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* Singles on 18th & 19th.
 Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius* Heard only on the 24th.
 White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* Single on the 19th.
 Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* Two on the 18th.
 Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* 4 on 18th & singles on 19th & 24th.
 Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* Heard on 18th, seen on 19th & 20th.
 Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* Heard only on the 18th.
 Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* Good views on the 19th.
 Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* Seen most days max 4 on the 19th.
 Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Common, seen most days.
 Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* Common, seen most days.
 Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* Recorded on 20th & 22nd.
 Rook *Corvus frugilegus* Common, seen most days.
 Hooded Crow *Corvus corone cornix* Common, seen most days.
 Common Raven *Corvus corax* Seen on 4 days, max count 15 on 19th.
 Marsh Tit *Parus palustris* 8 on the 18th & fewer on the 24th.
 Willow Tit *Parus montanus* Single on 18th & a few on the 19th.
 Coal Tit *Parus ater* Seen in small numbers on 4 dates.
 Great Tit *Parus major* Common and seen most days.
 Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* Common and seen most days.
 Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* Two seen and one heard on 22nd.
 Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* seen on six days in good numbers.
 Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* seen on six days in good numbers.
 Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* Small numbers on two days.
 Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* Singles calling on 3 days.
 Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus* Six on the 21st & One on the 22nd.
 Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* Recorded on 6 days, max count 10 on 18th.
 Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* Seen in small numbers most days.
 Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* Seen on 3 days, max count 4 on 18th.
 Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* Small numbers seen on 4 dates.
 Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* Seen every day, sometimes in huge numbers.
 Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* Singles on 4 days.
 Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* Two on the 19th.
 Redwing *Turdus iliacus* Two on the 19th.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* One on the 19th & 2 on 24th.
 European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* Two on the 24th.
 Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Seen most days, max 6 on 22nd.
 Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* Singles on 17th & 23rd plus 3 on 22nd.
 House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Common and seen every day.
 Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Common and seen every day.
 White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba* Small numbers on 4 dates.
 Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* Four on the 21st.
 Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* Small numbers on 4 dates.
 Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* Small numbers seen on 5 dates.
 Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* Small numbers on the 20th.
 European Serin *Serinus serinus* Immature on the 20th.
 European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* Small numbers on 6 days.
 Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus* Small numbers on most days.
 European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* seen most days, max count 40 on 17th.
 Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* Small numbers on 4 dates.
 Common/Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* Heard only on 18th & Pr on 19th.
 Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Single on 19th & 15 on 24th.
 Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra* Small numbers on 3 days.
 Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* Small numbers on 4 days.
 Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* Heard only on the 24th.
 Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* 2 on 22nd & 1 on 23rd.

MAMMALS

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* Seen most days in small numbers.
 European Sousek *Spermophilus citellus* Colony seen at the airport.
 Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus* Single on the 20th.
 Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra* One Dead near the motorway on the 24th.
 Beech Marten *Martes foina* Evidence seen on the 24th.
 Common Mole *Talpa europaea* Evidence seen on the 24th and 1 seen on the 24th.
 Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*? One on the 17th & 5 on the 24th.
 Noctule *Nyctalus noctula* Singles on the 17th, 19th, 20th, 2 on the 23rd.
 Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* Evidence seen on the 18th.
 Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* Singles on the 18th & 19th.
 Mouflon *Ovis orientalis* One on the 19th.

AMPHIBIANS

Great-crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*
 Fire-bellied Toad *Bombina bombina*
 Common Spadefoot *Pelobates fuscus*
 Common Tree Frog *Hyla arborea*
 Edible Frog *Rana esculenta/lessonae*
 Marsh Frog *Rana ridibunda*
 Common Newt ?

REPTILES

Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* One dead on the 19th & 2 young on the 22nd.

BUTTERFLIES

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui*

DRAGONFLIES

Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*

Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*

OTHER TAXA

Ladybird *sp*

