

## Birds and Music Hungary May 2012

Seven members of the U3A (University of the Third Age) from Newcastle, Cumbria and Chester set off for an experimental trip combining Birdwatching and Music. The idea had germinated 2 years earlier in Bulgaria, while Balazs was playing some Handel and Bach on his laptop one picnic lunch stop.

**Day 1 (Wed 16th)** Very windy  
Kiskunsag N.P.

We started exploring sites in Kinkunsag N.P. with Attila, first at a gravel pit with Black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls, plus Common Terns nesting on the island. Some of us saw Red-crested Pochard. On the approach along a bumpy track there were Lapwings protecting chicks, Little Ringed Plover and Crested Lark. Corn Buntings and Red-backed Shrikes adorned the roadside bushes while Bee-eaters were fairly common. Next we travelled to a low hill with wide vantage and Attila almost immediately spotted a displaying male and 3 female Great Bustards which we watched in the scope. At a sheltered lunch place a singing Barred Warbler only gave brief glimpses.

During the drive to a marshy area we saw 4 Rollers, my best ever views of Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail (*flava sp.*), 2 Hoopoes, 2 Cuckoos and a Turtle Dove. A Night Heron flew along the drainage channel as we approached the wetland where there were Wood Sandpipers, Black-winged Stilts, Garganey and a Ruff in breeding plumage.

We finished early, to attend a concert in the Palace Of Arts on the shores of the River Danube, Budapest. Beethoven's Eroica symphony being the main item on programme.

**Day 2 (Thurs 17th)** Sunny and less windy  
Kiskunsag N.P.

The day's birdwatching was preceded by a visit to a thatched cottage museum at Ócsa portraying country life as it was over a hundred years ago.



Then we proceeded to a forest when birding began on a high note with an Icterine Warbler singing as we alighted from the minibus. It was quickly located and obliged us with fantastic views at close range. Walking further into the woods we encountered Short-toed Treecreeper, Middle Spotted Woodpecker and best of all a Black Woodpecker, which everyone had good views. This bird has eluded us in several previous trips. Collared Flycatcher, River Warbler and Golden Oriole were heard but not seen. We found a lunch spot with good views of a lesser Grey Shrike and a Roller. Scouring roadside ploughed fields gave us sightings of Collared Pratincoles and another Bustard. Another early finish to see the Hungarian Dance Ensemble performing Eastern European Folk Dances, a show which everyone agreed was a truly memorable occasion

**Day 3 (Friday 16 th)** Bright and sunny with no wind.  
Kiskunsag N.P.

First stop was to check another site for Collared Pratincoles and to scrutinise them for any Black-winged Pratincoles, which have lately begun nesting in small numbers; there were none, but we had the unusual sight of distraction display among the newly arrived Collared Pratincoles.



We did see another Great bustard, Mediterranean Gulls and Blue-headed Wagtail. I heard an unfamiliar song above the nearby Sedge Warbler's rattle, which Balazs quickly identified as Barred Warbler, and we soon had splendid views.

At the next stop we watched a Suslik (European Ground Squirrel) and heard Golden Oriole. We then proceeded to the fish ponds for lunch stop. Excellent views of Ferruginous Ducks, Red-crested Pochard, Reed and Sedge Warblers, and a Savi's Warbler singing. The biggest excitement happened as an immature White-tailed Eagle flew low overhead.

Afterwards we revisited the wetland area of day 1, where most had good views of Penduline Tits. There were several Dunlins, Garganeys, Black-winged Stilts, many Ruff, a Purple Heron and a Curlew Sandpiper in breeding plumage.

A pair of Stone Curlews was nesting at the next site, Turtle Doves were calling and a Red-footed Falcon flew over.

**Day 4 (Saturday 19 th)** Sunny and warm  
South Kiskunsag N.P.

Revisited the forest at Ócsa on the way and what a lucky decision it turned out. Immediately we heard singing River Warbler and it was soon located; everyone had prolonged views in the telescope. A short walk produced Spotted Flycatcher, Greater and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, then we heard a Grey-headed Woodpecker but could not find it. A short distance further most of us managed to see a beautiful male Collared Flycatcher flitting about in the canopy.

Then on to the ringing station at Kolon Lake, where a Marsh Warbler was among the birds being processed. During a short walk to the observation platform a pair of Sparrowhawks passed over, then we had the excitement of a food pass between Montagu's Harriers, who were sharing the reed bed with a pair of Marsh Harriers. Further on a Syrian Woodpecker at its nest gave us brief views. During our picnic lunch, Dorothy noticed another woodpecker in an adjacent tree, which turned out to be a Middle Spotted Woodpecker.

A further walk produced glimpses of at least a dozen Golden Orioles and a Nightjar lying on a branch at a distance of 15 metres.



We then proceeded further south to some more fish ponds where we picked out a Temminck's Stint and saw Magpies in traps. On our way to the Kigyos Csarda Hotel we saw a group of Spoonbills in a roadside pool.

**Day 5 (Sunday 20 th)** Sunny  
South Kiskunsag N.P.

We called in at another site to check for breeding Stone Curlews near an alkaline lake and found 1 pair.

At a fortuitous stop for ice cream, we watched a male Goshawk circling nearly overhead. We eventually arrived at the Bronze Age Hill fortification of Tiszaalpár which gave a panoramic view of a shallow wetland below. Great and Pygmy Cormorants were side by side for comparison, a

distant Whiskered Tern was picked out and a Purple Heron stretching its wings caused some puzzlement for a while. Many other wetland birds were present. Then we enjoyed the hospitality of Stephen, the local warden with a picnic lunch in his garden, during which we were entertained by Nightingale and Golden Oriole song, and a nesting Black Redstart. We set off for a Red-footed Falcon colony, and those who braved the vertiginous ladder to the observation platform were rewarded with spectacular views of the birds at their nesting boxes at a distance of less than 5 metres.



Balazs performed his 'party trick' of getting the minibus stuck in the mud, so we had to be towed out again. Then on to meet another local warden George, who showed us to a Long-legged Buzzard nest site where we had great views.

**Day 6 (Monday 21 st May)** Warm sunny/cloudy with slight wind  
South of Kiskunsag N.P.

We saw a male Montagu's Harrier from the bus on our way to meet a local conservation worker, Bela. He was hoping to show us Kentish Plover, but the vegetation had grown too high and they remained hidden, however the Black-tailed Godwits were tall enough to be visible. Bela stayed with us all day and we were able to take advantage of his local knowledge while he was happy to practice his English.

We proceeded to an observation platform on a nature reserve where the Water Buffalo were wallowing, with lots of Great White Egrets, and a Great Reed Warbler sang. Round the back of the reserve Bee-eaters flew overhead and a Whiskered Tern gave good views. From the tower at the lunch place at Szeged, we had another Cuckoo perched, Nightingale singing, Ferruginous Ducks and a Night Heron.

On to another fish pond where a Long-eared Owl had a nest in a tree by the canal; A Black Stork, 7 Little Stints were close; Greenshank, Grey Plover, Curlew Sandpiper and Turnstone were all in breeding plumage, and immature Caspian Gulls were dotted about.

Next to a mist net in a huge reed bed and along a boardwalk, we had brief views of a Bearded Tit but the wind kept the Moustached and Marsh Warblers down in the reeds.

**Day 7 (Tuesday 22 nd May)** Warm and sunny  
Hortobagy N.P.

We set off to drive through Hortobagy N.P. and stopped for lunch at restaurant near the visitor centre. Then we drove into the fish ponds with a miniature railway.

We had hardly walked 50 metres when we found a pair of Bluethroats (white-spotted race) feeding young at a nest several feet away. They seemed totally unconcerned at our presence. Walking further on Rosemary spotted a Squacco Heron lurking among the reeds, then we watched Water Buffalo up to their necks in one of the ponds.



A Black Tern appeared and was seen by most. After climbing the observation tower we found at least 300 Whiskered Terns resting and 3 Ferruginous Ducks flew past.

Continuing our journey on through Little Hortobagy, we saw 2 Cranes from the minibus. Our respect for Balaz's hearing powers increased when he picked out a Grasshopper Warbler singing 50 metres away on the passenger side, above the engine noise and music playing on the audio system. We reversed back a few metres and everyone had excellent views. The encore was a Hobby catching insects and eating them on the wing, for which we had a ringside seat.

**Day 8 (Wednesday 23 rd May)** Showers  
Bukk N.P.

In the grounds of our hotel in the Bukk Hills at Nosvaj, we had Spotted Flycatcher and Wryneck. We travelled several kilometres up the Hor Valley. Overnight rain had created pools on the track, in one of which a Hawfinch was drinking. Glider Butterflies were flitting about and a Fire Salamander was taking advantage of the moist atmosphere. Walking along the path with the accompanying song of Wood Warblers, we came upon a pair of White-backed Woodpeckers performing a courtship ritual. We had fantastic views for at least 20 minutes as they flitted from tree to tree and round the trunks.



Further on we managed to get good views of a male Collared Flycatcher. We came upon a wet meadow which was purple with Ragged Robin, while another Hawfinch perched at the top of a dead tree. After a picnic lunch we arrived at another meadow, which had displaying Barred Warbler with a nearby Red-backed Shrike and many Bee-eaters flying about. We called in to look at Tuff Caves which were inhabited until 200 years ago



Some of us dined at a local wine cellar that evening and sampled the wares, which turned out to be a most enlightening and enjoyable experience.

## Day 9 (Thursday 24 th May)

A walk in the vicinity of Nomad Hotel before setting off for Budapest gave us excellent views of another Hawfinch in the scope, a Middle Spotted Woodpecker and another male Collared Flycatcher. We had a last look at the Wryneck then started our journey.

At our mid-morning coffee stop most of us managed to see the Lesser Spotted Eagle which was difficult to pick out at times against the hillside background.

At our lunch spot near an Imperial Eagles nest we noticed some poisoned meat put out by hunters to kill foxes. This is strictly illegal and we reported this to the local warden who found 4 more pieces of baited meat in the area. The Imperial Eagles gave an impressive flying display and we could just see a chick in the nest, but their future is in the balance if illegal bait laying continues.

Tchaikovsky's Manfred Symphony was the main item on the programme for the final concert that night. Sightseeing in Budapest filled the final day till it was time to catch our flight home after another very enjoyable holiday with Ecotours Wildlife.

Flexibility is one of the strong points of their trips, even if it sometimes means dining rather late. The combination of Birds and Music was appreciated by everyone and we look forward to repeating the experience in the future.

## SPECIES LIST

### Birds

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*  
Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*  
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*  
Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*  
Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*  
Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*  
Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*  
Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*  
Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*  
Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*  
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*  
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*  
Western Great Egret *Ardea alba*  
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*  
Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*  
White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*  
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*  
Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*  
Greylag Goose *Anser anser*  
Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*  
Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*  
Gadwall *Anas strepera*  
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*  
Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*  
Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*  
Garganey *Anas querquedula*  
Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*  
Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*  
Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*  
Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*  
European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*  
White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*  
Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*  
Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*  
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*  
Long legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* Nest

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*  
Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*  
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*  
Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*  
Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* Nest  
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*  
Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*  
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*  
Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*  
Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*  
Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* heard only  
Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*  
Great Bustard *Otis tarda*  
Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*  
Little Crake *Porzana parva*  
Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* heard only  
Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*  
Common Crane *Grus grus*  
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*  
Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*  
Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus*  
Collared Pratincole *Glarcola pratincola*  
Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*  
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*  
Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*  
Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*  
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*  
Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*  
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*  
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*  
Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*  
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*  
Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*  
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*  
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*  
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*  
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*  
Little Stint *Calidris minuta*  
Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*  
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*  
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*  
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*  
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*  
Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* Immatures  
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*  
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*  
Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*  
White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*  
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*  
Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*  
Stock Dove *Columba oenas*  
Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*  
European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*  
Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*  
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* Male & Female  
Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba*  
Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops*



Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*  
Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*  
Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*  
Little Owl *Athene noctua*  
Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* Nest  
European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*  
Common Swift *Apus apus*  
European Roller *Coracias garrulus*  
European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*  
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*  
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*  
Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*  
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*  
Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*  
White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*  
Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*  
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*  
Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*  
European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*  
Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* heard only  
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*  
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*  
Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*  
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*  
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*  
Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*  
Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*  
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*  
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*  
Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*  
Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*  
Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* heard only  
European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* heard only  
Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* Nest  
Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*  
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*  
Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*  
Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*  
European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*  
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*  
Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*  
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* heard only  
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* heard only  
Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*  
Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* heard only  
Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*  
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* Ringing Station  
Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* heard only  
Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*  
River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*  
Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* heard only  
Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*  
Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*  
Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*  
Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*  
Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* Ringing Station  
Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*  
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*  
Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* heard only  
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*  
Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*  
Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*  
Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*  
Coal Tit *Periparus ater*  
Great Tit *Parus major*  
Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*  
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* Ringing Station  
Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*  
Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*  
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*  
Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*  
Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*  
Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*  
Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*  
Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*  
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*  
Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*  
Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*  
Rook *Corvus frugilegus*  
Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*  
Northern Raven *Corvus corax*  
Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*  
Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*  
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*  
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*  
Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*  
European Serin *Serinus serinus*  
European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*  
European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*  
Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*  
Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*  
Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*  
Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* heard only  
Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*  
Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*  
Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*