

Trip report

Slovakia 11-14 April 2018

Guide

István Péntek

Participants

David and Sue Morgan,
Mark Chaubey

Daily log

Day 1, 10th April

The group arrived on time to Poprad airport. After 45 minutes of driving we arrived to our hotel called Svatojansky Kastiel in Liptovsky Jan. After a delicious dinner we went to bed to prepare for the following day.

Day 2, 11th April

After having breakfast we first checked the birds in the hotel garden. It was quite noisy but we were able to spot Mistle Thrush, Fieldfare, Black Redstart, Hawfinch, Serin and Linnet. Then we headed north towards Orava Lake where we met our local guide Dusan.

With Dusan we first drove into the mountains on the southern side of Orava Lake to a height of 1,200 meters. The place looked promising to find Three-toed Woodpecker. After about 200 meters of walking we found a pair of these fantastic birds and watched them for a long time.

After visiting the mountain we went down to the north side of Orava Lake where we had a picnic lunch at a wonderful place. During lunch we had the chance to observe the biggest colony of Steppe Gulls in Slovakia. We also saw the first Common Tern of the season and several duck species including Garganey and Gadwall.

After lunch we continued our trip north to the meadows close to Polish border. Here we observed a Lesser Spotted Eagle and some nice Winchats in breeding plumage.

Late afternoon we moved to another mountainous area east of the lake. After some searching we found one of our main targets, a White backed Woodpecker. Then the show continued and we had fantastic views of a Pygmy Owl.

On the way back to the bus we discovered two very friendly Spotted Nutcrackers and watched them for a while. On our way home, we stopped at the scenic Orava Castle to take some photos.

What a day!

Day 3, 12th April

After check-out we started the day in one of the most beautiful valleys of the Low-Tatras, Jánska Dolina. Just after the parking lot we found our first Dipper looking for food in the stream. We took a short walk in the valley searching for Firecrest. After roughly 10 minutes we heard the first bird and sometime later we saw a few of these lovely little birds. Males were quite active and did not seem too shy, the closest specimen was less than 5 metres from us.

Our next stop was at Liptovská Mara, a big reservoir with views of the High Tatras. We encountered various species of ducks and also found a Willow Tit and many beautiful, singing male

Yellowhammers. Later we spotted two Lesser Spotted Eagles flying low above us in lovely sunny weather.

We left the lake behind us and drove to the southern tip of the High Tatras to have lunch at a scenic place. Before lunch we stopped briefly at a place that looked suitable for Ring Ouzel. It turned out to be a good idea because we found a nice male at the top of the trees near the road. We ate our picnic lunch enjoying a picturesque panorama from the mountain top, then set off to the Slovak Karst National Park. After three hours of driving we arrived and got into our rooms at Réva Pension.

Before dinner we went down to the nearby lake, where we saw Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Wryneck. The first Nightingales had also arrived and we listened to their beautiful song as we were scanning the lake.

We still had some time until dinner so we decided to pass the border and visit two quarries in Hungary. At the second quarry, a male Eagle Owl called from the pine forest above the rocks, but unfortunately he was not to be seen. After the darkness fell we returned to our accommodation and had a delicious dinner with some cold beer.

Day 4, 13th April

In the morning we met Stefan at the Hotel, who was our local guide that day. First we visited the lakes near Jasov and took a walk in the valley where we saw Grey Wagtail, several splendid male Collared Flycatchers, Hawfinch, Middle Spotted and Grey-headed Woodpecker.

From here we drove to the famous Sadiel valley, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. We had lunch at the entrance to the valley and then went to search for birds in the surrounding fields. We found Eurasian Hoopoe and Rock Bunting and we also had great views of Soslíks, small ground squirrels that are the main prey of Saker Falcon. On the way back, we searched several places for Syrian Woodpecker. We stopped at every place that seemed to be potentially good for these birds and finally we managed to find a pair.

We had an early dinner this evening because after dinner we went to a bat ringing session with Stefan. We learned a lot about the life of bats from Stefan and we had hands in views of Lesser and Greater Horseshoe as well as Schreiber's Bat. It was a perfect ending of a day full of great sightings.

Day 5, 14th April

After leaving our hotel in the morning, we went to the lake to take a look at the reeds where we saw singing Savi's Warbler and also heard Great Reed Warbler. Then we drove to Kosice where we met Mihok, a fantastic man who knows a lot about the raptors of the area.

First we saw an Eastern Imperial Eagle on the nest. Then we walked in a nearby forest in search of Ural Owl. After a short time we found a Ural Owl perched in a tree and had great views. A Black Woodpecker was a really unexpected bonus here. It was our tenth species of woodpecker during this tour. We still had time before our flight so we decided to search for other species in the area. We got very lucky as we have found two Saker Falcons and watched them from fairly close. The last bird we saw was an adult White-tailed Eagle that flew above us majestically.

On the way to the airport we took a coffee break with some ice cream and then arrived at the airport on time. It was a fantastic tour, we had good views of most species and we saw a good range of species.

Bird list

Mute Swan

Greylag Goose
Eurasian Wigeon
Gadwall
Mallard
Northern Shoveler
Common Pochard
Tufted Duck
Common Goldeneye
Common Pheasant
Great Crested Grebe
Great Cormorant
Great Egret
Grey Heron
Black Stork (1 bird close to Jasov)
White Stork (Several on the nest)
White-tailed Eagle (Last bird of the trip, a fantastic view close to the Hungarian border)
Western Marsh Harrier
Eurasian Sparrowhawk
Common Buzzard
Lesser Spotted Eagle (1 bird close to the Polish border and a pair that flew above us at Liptovska Mara)
Eastern Imperial Eagle (One nesting bird close to Kosice)
Common Kestrel
Saker Falcon (Nice view of a pair close to the Hungarian border)
Common Moorhen
Eurasian Coot
Northern Lapwing
Black-headed Gull
Caspian Gull
Common Tern
Stock Dove
Common Wood Pigeon
Eurasian Collared Dove
Feral (Rock) Dove
Common Cuckoo
Eurasian Eagle-Owl (We only heard a bird)
Eurasian Pygmy Owl (1 bird seen from a 5 metre distance)
Ural Owl (Great views of a male close to Kosice)
Eurasian Hoopoe
Eurasian Wryneck (Great views from very close)
Grey-headed Woodpecker (Several birds giving great views near Jasov)
European Green Woodpecker
Black Woodpecker (A flying bird in the forest near Kosice)
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Syrian Woodpecker (Great views of a pair close to Reva Pension)
Middle Spotted Woodpecker (Several birds)
White-backed Woodpecker (Great views from 10 metres)
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (Great views near Reva Pension)
Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker (Fantastic views of a pair)
Crested Lark
Eurasian Skylark
Barn Swallow

Common House Martin
Meadow Pipit
Grey Wagtail
White Wagtail
White-throated Dipper (Very good views at Janska Dolina and also at Jasov)
Wren
Dunnock
European Robin
Common Nightingale
Black Redstart
Whinchat
European Stonechat
Ring Ouzel
Common Blackbird
Fieldfare
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Savi's Warbler
Eurasian Reed Warbler
Great Reed Warbler
Lesser Whitethroat
Eurasian Blackcap
Common Chiffchaff
Willow Warbler
Goldcrest
Common Firecrest (Brilliant views from 3 metres at Janska Dolina)
Collared Flycatcher (Some nice males close to Jasov)
Long-tailed Tit
Marsh Tit
Willow Tit
Coal Tit
Eurasian Blue Tit
Great Tit
Eurasian Jay
Common Magpie
Spotted Nutcracker
Alpine Chough
Western Jackdaw
Rook
Hooded Crow
Northern Raven
Common Starling
Common Chaffinch
European Serin (Singing male at the airport parking and close to Kastiel)
European Greenfinch
European Goldfinch
Eurasian Siskin
Common Linnet
Red Crossbill
Hawfinch (We've seen a lot during the trip at different places)
Yellowhammer
Rock Bunting (We've seen more than 10 birds close to Sadiel)

Common Reed Bunting

Mammal list

Lesser Horseshoe Bat

Greater Horseshoe Bat

Schreiber's Bat

European Hare

European Sousek

Roe Deer