

HUNGARY
FESTIVAL OF CRANES
21ST – 25TH OCTOBER 2006
TOUR REPORT

Written by Tour Participant Neville Davies



Grey-headed Woodpecker – Jari Peltomaki

CELTIC BIRD TOURS

TOUR LEADER

Gerard Gorman

TOUR PARTICIPANTS

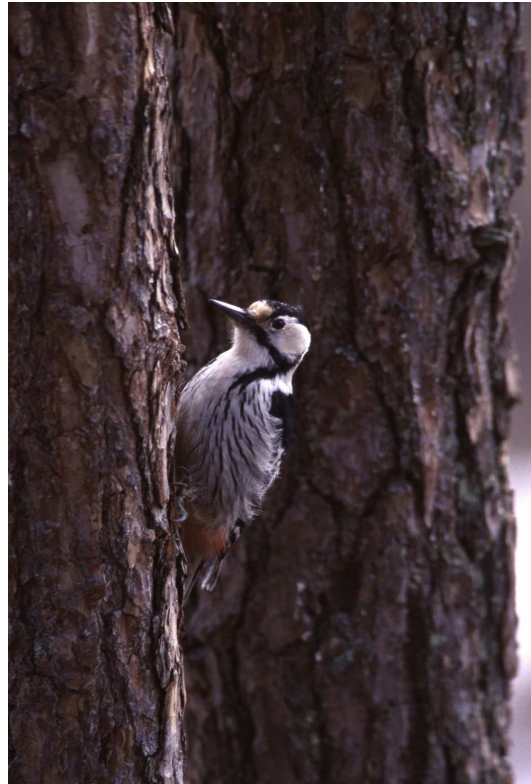
Mike Cram
Neville Davies
Jennifer Gray
Peter Gray
Marjolein Lewis
Peter Lewis

21ST

The group met at Budapest Ferihegy airport for a five day birding break. The flight left on time and the service on the Malev airlines plane was excellent. The weather upon our arrival was mild and dry. We were greeted by Gerard and his driver who was aptly named Attila a nice bloke whose English was limited, but who was nonetheless, very polite and fulfilled his task of driving us everywhere safely and in comfort. After the introductions, we headed off on a two hour journey to our hotel in the Bukk Hills; stopping en route for a picnic. This was the chance to begin our tour list in earnest and common birds seen included Black-billed Magpie, Rook, House Sparrow, Common Buzzard, European Sparrowhawk, Northern Lapwing, Common Raven, Crested Lark and a small group of Tree Sparrows in some roadside foliage, while other species seen from the minibus were Sky Lark, Blackbird, Common Pheasant and Collared Dove. Our first base was at Noszvaj – a beautiful, family run hotel, ideally situated amongst trees and a forest clearing. We checked in to our rooms and managed a brief spell of birding before our evening meal. Among the more interesting species seen were a Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Fieldfare, Black Redstart on the hotel chimney, Marsh Tit and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker showing well in some Popular [sic] Trees! Popular they were too, as they were to play host to another three species of woodpecker throughout our stay; Green, Great Spotted and Grey-headed. Song Thrush, Siskin, Chaffinch and Goldcrest were also noted. Our evening meal was first class and was washed down with a glass or two of local red wine, though in my case more like a glass or five...

22ND

A short, pre-breakfast walk produced a flock of “continental”, white headed form of Long-tailed Tits, a few Greenfinches and Eurasian Jays. The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was located again, as was a fly over Grey-headed Woodpecker. From the breakfast table, we watched a Black Woodpecker flying past – superb! We moved on to the Hor Valley, a nice valley, where we quickly added Grey Wagtail, European Robin, Coal Tit and Red Deer to the trip list. This beautiful woodland is home to Europe’s rarest woodpecker – the White-backed Woodpecker. Any dead trees are left to rot rather than being removed and this helps to support this species. After an hour’s searching, we were rewarded with excellent, close views of a male; a lifer for the whole group and a great opportunity to appreciate the intricate plumage details of this beautiful species. Our next stop was the wine growing region of Bocacs, where we soon had good views of an Eastern Imperial Eagle perched on an electricity pylon, as well as a nearby Great Grey Shrike. Meadow Pipits, Common Buzzards, Salamanders and Agile Frog were also found. The nearby reservoir gave us Great Crested Grebes, Grey Heron and Yellow-legged Gulls as well as an amazing count of 500 Collared Doves perched on telegraph wires and a second Eastern Imperial Eagle. A brief stop nearby produced Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers and twenty or so Tree Sparrows. In the village of Szonolya, we saw a Brown Hare, more Black Redstarts and a pair of showy Syrian Woodpeckers. South of the village, we visited a Black Woodpecker roost site and the bird did not disappoint, as it showed really well on several fly pasts – a great way to end the day. The evening meal was again excellent, as was the wine and we enjoyed running through the trip list, which by now had some good species with several lifers for most of the group.



23RD

An amazing pre-breakfast walk saw us clock up seven species of woodpecker in the surrounding trees. Two Syrian, and another Black, Middle Spotted and Grey-headed were the highlights, though it was a pleasure to see the commoner species too and a good identification forum to have them side by side. Two Eastern Imperial Eagles were again seen at Bocacs, while at Poroszlo, we found a cracking pair of Sakers perched on a pylon, as well as a hunting Hen Harrier, and Stock Doves, Sky arks and Eurasian Jackdaws. We said farewell to Noszvaj and headed to our next hotel stopping en route at several places beginning with Lake Tisza which produced several Great White Egrets, Black-headed Gulls and Moorhen. After lunch,



we continued on to the second area of the tour – the Hortobagy National Park. Flocks of Greylag Geese numbered thousands and we also found a couple of Pygmy Cormorants and the first flocks of Common Cranes feeding in the fields. Other notable birds included Northern Shoveler, Penduline Tit, Marsh Harrier, 100 Common Teal, a Great Bittern seen in flight and a Peregrine. On the outskirts of the village of Nagyivan, we visited a site that held three Stone Curlews, and where, a Merlin flew past low and fast. While we waited here, we watched a pair of Little Owls on some farm buildings and a pair of Long-legged Buzzards on a platform in a field and a group of Tree Sparrows were feeding on a path approximately three metres in front of us. Skeins of Common Cranes began to fly in; a marvellous sight as they flew in low V formations, while making their distinctive and evocative bugling calls. The sight of thousands of these birds flying over you is an impressive experience and leaves a warm feeling. It has to be seen to be fully appreciated as mere words can barely do this fabulous spectacle justice. To cap it all off, a traditional Goulash was served for dinner –and excellent it was too!

24TH

Following a continental breakfast, we visited a small village, where Long-eared Owls roost in the roadside trees, and where we were fortunate to see five birds showing. We laughed at the thought of the locals sat in the café opposite who were perhaps thinking “why are they watching trees with binoculars – seen one tree, you’ve seen them all!” In fact, the residents are very bird friendly and are very welcoming to visiting birders. We moved on to a Dotterel site, but experienced our only real dip of the tour here. The site was vast and there were raptors in the vicinity, which no doubt had worried the birds – never mind, you can’t have everything... A fly over White-tailed Eagle quickly lifted our spirits and thirteen Corn Buntings perched on an overhead wire was a good sight. At Derszi Fish Ponds, we clocked up a lot of species including Greater White-fronted Geese, Eurasian Curlews, Eurasian Spoonbills, three Ferruginous Duck and Kingfisher and more Great White Egrets. Grey Plovers, a late Whiskered Tern, Northern Pintail, Spotted Redshanks, Dunlin, Ruff and Common Coots added to the spectacle and a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron was seen in flight. Our final stop was at Feketeret Marsh to watch the cranes coming in to roost. Among the thousands of birds flying over us, we also watched Greater White-fronted and Greylag Geese, Grey Herons, Great White Egrets and a flock of 92 Pygmy Cormorants – a brilliant and memorable sight. This year it is estimated that between 70 and 79,000 Common Cranes are present.

25TH

Your holiday always seems to go quickly, but it had been a fantastic few days and as Neil had booked us on early evening flights, we had plenty of time for more birding. We visited the Kiskunsag region, not far from the airport where Gerard found us a flock of 66 Great Bustards in a crop field – a fantastic count and an awesome sight. Great views were had by all of this much wanted species and we also enjoyed a hunting Rough-legged Buzzard, as well as more Great Grey Shrikes, while Reed Bunting and Common Chiffchaff were also new tour species here.



We rounded off the tour with a visit to the Apaj Fish Ponds, where it was reported that a pair of Buff-breasted Sandpipers had been seen. European Golden Plovers and Hooded Crows showed well, as did a pair of Stonechats. A large flock of Northern Lapwings was our focal point as we searched for the sandpipers and eventually they were found. Everyone had good views of what was just the eleventh record for Hungary of this gorgeous transatlantic migrant – what a brilliant end to a brilliant trip! Hungary in autumn is definitely worth a visit. We totalled 100 species exactly with eight species of woodpecker and eleven species of raptor and additionally enjoyed good food and good company, a beautiful country and friendly people – what more could you ask for?

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Great Crested Grebe
Great Cormorant
Pygmy Cormorant
Great Bittern
Black-crowned Night Heron
Grey Heron
Great White Egret
Eurasian Spoonbill
Greylag Goose
Greater White-fronted Goose
Common Teal
Mallard
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Ferruginous Duck
Common Coot
Moorhen
Common Pheasant
Great Bustard
Common Crane
Stone Curlew
Northern Lapwing
European Golden Plover
Grey Plover
Common Snipe
Ruff
Eurasian Curlew
Buff-breasted Sandpiper
Spotted Redshank
Dunlin
White-tailed Eagle
Eastern Imperial Eagle
Hen Harrier
Marsh Harrier
European Sparrowhawk
Common Buzzard
Rough-legged Buzzard
Long-legged Buzzard
Saker
Peregrine
Merlin
Common Kestrel
Yellow-legged Gull
Black-headed Gull
Whiskered Tern
Little Owl
Long-eared Owl
Feral Pigeon
Stock Dove
Collared Dove
Kingfisher
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Middle Spotted Woodpecker
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
White-backed Woodpecker
Syrian Woodpecker
Black Woodpecker
Green Woodpecker
Grey-headed Woodpecker
Crested Lark
Sky Lark
White Wagtail

Grey Wagtail
Meadow Pipit
Blackbird
Fieldfare
Song Thrush
Stonechat
Black Redstart
European Robin
Northern Wren
Common Chiffchaff
Goldcrest
Great Grey Shrike
Penduline Tit
Common Nuthatch
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Coal Tit
Marsh Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Common Starling
House Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Eurasian Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Eurasian Jackdaw
Rook
Hooded Crow
Common Raven
Chaffinch
Brambling
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Linnet
Siskin
Hawfinch
Yellowhammer
Reed Bunting
Corn Bunting

OTHER WILDLIFE

Red Deer. Roe Deer. Brown Hare. Agile Frog. Tree Frog. Marsh Frog. Edible Frog. Fire-bellied Toad. Fire Salamander. Small White Butterfly. Brown Toad. Clouded Yellow. Peacock. Red Admiral. Roman Snail.