



Hungarianbirdwatching.com

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Spring tour “C” Lake Tisza – Hortobágy – Zemplén Mountains (5 days, 4 nights)

During this 5-days (4 nights) tour we will visit 2 National Parks, Hortobágy NP and Aggteleki NP (including the Zemplén Mountains) offering us the opportunity to see a great variety of habitats and birds. During birding we try to see the most characteristic birds of Hungary, the Saker, Red-footed Falcon, Imperial and Lesser Spotted Eagle, Great White Egret, White Stork, various woodpeckers including White-backed, warblers, Bee-eater, Roller, Pigmy Cormorant, Ferruginous Duck, Penduline Tit and Bearded Reedling, Eagle and Ural Owl and other species. We also visit wonderful towns and villages including Unesco World Heritage areas (Tokaj Wineregion and Hortobágy) and the historic castle in Boldogkőváralja. As an optional program we can visit Poroszló Ecocenter with the largest fresh-water aquarium of Europe. And of course we will taste prize-winning Hungarian wines and will enjoy the Hungarian cuisine in local restaurants.





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Day 1

Birding at Lake Tisza and Hortobágy, optionally visiting Tisza Lake Ecocenter

Overnight Hortobágy area

After checking out from the hotel, we will drive to Lake Tisza, which is part of the Hortobágy National Park. On the M3 motorway we will stop at certain places from where there is a chance to see Imperial Eagles either sitting on electric pylons or circling in the sky assuming good weather conditions. In that area many times we also see Sakers as well.



Imperial Eagle

Leaving the M3 Motorway on Road 33 we will reach Poroszló, which is an ecotourism center of Lake Tisza.



Tisza Lake

Lake Tisza is actually a large reservoir on the Tisza river, but fortunately it does not look like a reservoir rather a flood-plain of the 18th century.



Yellow Floating Heart

Two-thirds of the lake, whose total area is 127 square kilometers, has been designated to fall under the Ramsar Convention because of its notably significant wetland habitats.

The lake has a special flora, here you can see Europe's largest Yellow Floating Heart and Water Chestnut fields and large part of the lake is covered by White Water Lily.



Grey Heron

Tisza Lake is also an ideal habitat for herons. In bigger continuous reeds heron colonies like Purple Heron, Little Egret, Great White Egret, Spoonbill, Squacco Heron and Little Bittern can be found.

Lots of Cormorants, Grey Herons and Common Terns can be also observed at Tisza Lake and in the gallery forests of the reservoir Black Stork, Black Kite, Saker and Hobby can also appear.

In 2005 a Water Walk and Nature Trail, was created in the Poroszló Basin, via which we can take in the wonderful living world of Lake Tisza as we walk the 1,500 m of the water walkway. The nature trail jetty can be approached by rowing-boat. On our way we will come to two bird hides and an 8-metre high bird-watching tower, which offers an excellent opportunity to shot landscape pictures.





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Optional Program - Visiting Lake Tisza Ecocenter

At Poroszló we can visit the recently opened Lake Tisza Ecocenter, which is adjacent to the Nature Trail. The Ecocentre was designed to collect and show the rich flora and fauna of the Tisza valley and its lake, which is the second largest in Hungary.

The four-storey, 2,600 sq metre visitor centre has permanent exhibitions and a huge freshwater aquarium with a capacity of over 735,000 litres (largest freshwater aquarium of Europe). The natural-looking displays give visitors a truly memorable experience. The aquarium on level -1 contains over 40 native Hungarian fish species and about 15 amphibians and reptiles.

Birders with children will enjoy the Ecocenter's big recreation park, which was designed in the spirit of 'exploring nature' Visitors can closely observe animals, enjoy animal shows and try challenging playgrounds. e.g. boating lake with rafts and ropeways, log playground, cormorant colony and pelican-lake, otter house, kingfisher-watching, Fishermen's Outdoor Museum, Village Museum, Golden jackal's run. Visiting the Ecocenter can be a joy for all family members.

Driving to Hortobágy we stop at an area, where a large colony of Red-footed falcons lives. In a small steppe forest Red-footed falcons nest in the nests of Rooks and also in artificial nest boxes. It's an amazing view to see the dozens of this colourful falcon flying around. Near to the colony we stop at a sand wall, where Bee-eaters and Sand Martins nest.

We will also visit Nagyiván, which is a special Hungarian village. In this village nest the most White Storks per citizen in Hungary, almost on every pylon there is a Stork nest.

At the village there is grassland where we can see Tree Sparrows, Skylarks, Crested Larks, Stonechats, Corn Buntings, White and Yellow Wagtails and Red-backed Shrikes. We arrive to the hotel late afternoon and have dinner in the hotel or nearby restaurant.



Lake Tisza Ecocenter



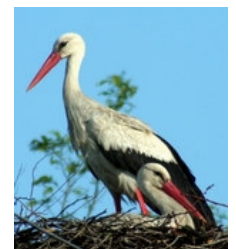
Aquarium



Recreation park



Red-footed Falcon



White Stork



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Day 2

Birding at Hortobágy Great Fishpond

Overnight Hortobágy area

This day we will be birding at Hortobágy National Park (HNP). HNP the first and so far the biggest National Park of Hungary was established in 1973 on a 52000 ha area. This original area is entirely an UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The recent area is about 82000 hectares. The Hortobágy NP has been inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 1999 in the category of cultural landscapes. According to its brief description "the Hortobágy is a vast area of plains and wetlands that have been used by humans for grazing their domestic animals for more than two millennia".

After an early breakfast we visit the Great Fish Pond (Nagy Halastó). In Hortobágy over 300 bird species have been observed here so far by birders and in almost every season ten and hundred thousands of birds can be seen. The system of fishponds of Hortobágy Halastó covering 2073 hectares was created in 1915 in an alkaline grassland area called Bad Lands.

Formerly there were 17 ponds, while now 7 are out of use being covered by reed or other marsh vegetation. Great Fish Pond is a Ramsar site maintaining breeding and migrating waterfowl populations of outstanding importance, so it is considered as one of the most important water bird habitats in Europe.

This lake offers a big variety of species, and the birds of the neighbouring plains also visit the lakes and their airspace. During the trip Great White and Little Egret, Night Heron, Purple Heron, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis and the rare breeder Pygmy Cormorant can be seen. Gulls, terns, plovers, waders occur here in great numbers including Black-headed and Yellow-legged Gull, Whiskered, Black, White-winged Black Tern, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Dunlin, Redshank, Spotted Redshank, Ruff.

We can see the globally endangered Ferruginous Duck either floating on the water or flying, but this area offers new experiences every time you visit it. We will have good chance to see other ducks like Gadwal, Teal, Mallard and Shoveler. We will also have chance to see different raptors in the area like White-tailed Eagle or Marsh Harrier.



*Hortobágy puszta
and tradition*



Great Fish Pond



Pygmy Cormorant



Ferruginous Duck



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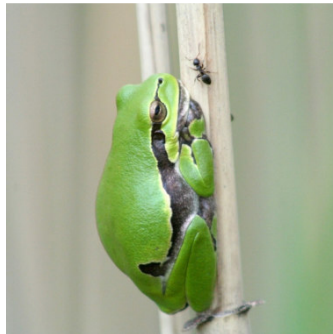
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The reedbeds of the Great Fishpond System also offers an excellent habitat for different warblers. Marsh, Reed, Great Reed, Moustached, Sedge, Savi's and Grasshopper Warblers can be seen and heard with reasonable chance. Bearded Reedling and Penduline Tit will be likely seen or heard too. Beside birds we can also see wonderful plants, flowers, dragonflies, butterflies, frogs.



Great Reed Warbler



Day 3

Driving to Zemplén Mountains, birding in the South part of Zemplén

Overnight Tokaj

After breakfast we check out from the hotel and make a short walk in the Village of Hortobágy by admiring the wonderful 9-arch bridge, which is a symbol of the Hortobágy.

In the village you can also buy hand-made articles for souvenirs. We start our journey to Zemplén mountains, birding en-route.



9-hole bridge



Gray Cattles at Hortobágy



Shepherds Statue



Shed



Folklore program



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On the way to Zemplén we will be birding on the steppe (puszta in Hungarian) habitats of Hortobágy. The rich rodent population of the steppe ensures a healthy numbers of predators. Among the many Common Buzzards and Marsh Harriers we will see Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Long-legged Buzzard as well as the magnificent Saker. Perhaps this is the only place where you can see Rough-legged Buzzard, Long-legged Buzzard and Common Buzzard together.

When we are driving through Hortobágy area on many fields we can see can see archaic, traditional Hungarian domestic animals like the Grey Cattle, the twisted horned Racka Sheep or Water Buffalo. Other traditional domestic animals like the Mangalica Pig, Noniusz Horse, Kuvasz (Shepherd) Dog can be seen in the the Animal Park of Hortobágy.

After some three hours driving, we will arrive to Tokaj, where we spend 2 nights. Tokaj is a small medieval town, which has a wonderful centre with some nice sculptures and interesting buildings. We will check in the hotel, have some refreshments and will make a short walk in the centre.

During sightseeing we will also see Bee-eaters on the walls of the hill behind Tokaj and White Storks nesting in the town. We will also walk down to the river, where the Bodrog and Tisza Rivers meet. Likely we spot here Kingfisher and many times we see here Green Woodpecker or even Grey-headed Woodpecker as well. At the Bodrog River we have also chance to spot River Warbler as well.



Long-legged Buzzard



Grey Cattles



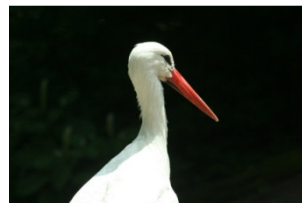
Tokaj



Bee-eater



Kingfisher



White stork



Grey-headed WP

Early afternoon we will also visit some places where raptors usually appear. In the Zemplén area Imperial Eagles, Lesser Spotted Eagles, Golden Eagles or even Short-toed Eagles might be observed in good weather conditions. During our trip if you are interested in architecture and history we can stop at Boldogkőváralja, which is one of the most beautiful ruins of Hungary.



Lesser-spotted Eagle



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Boldogkőváralja castle



Hejce village

During this day we will visit several areas and will see wonderful landscapes and castles. Tokaj region is an Unesco World region a so-called Historic Cultural Landscape. We will pass through old villages, will see vineyards, abandoned stone mines.



Tokaj wine region

In the evening before sunset we will visit a volcanic stone-mine in Southern Zemplén, looking for Eagle Owl. In the last few years in this abandoned quarry Eagle Owls regularly nest, so chances are reasonable either to see the adults or chicks. We have dinner at our hotel.



Eagle Owl

Day 4

Full day birding in Zemplén Mountains

Overnight Tokaj

After an early breakfast we will drive immediately to the Northern part of Zemplén Mountains. We will visit the inner parts of the mountains, observing woodpeckers, raptors and songbirds. The first bigger region where we will start birding is the surroundings of Újhuta, where our target species are woodpeckers.



Black Woodpecker

Beside the Great-spotted Woodpecker we have good chance to hear and see Black Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Middle-spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers. With some luck we can find even Grey-headed and White-backed Woodpeckers. In the surroundings of Újhuta we will also likely see Willow Tits, Marsh Tits, Long-tailed Tits, Mistle and Song Thrushes.



*White-backed
Woodpecker*

In this area in wet and rainy weather we will likely see the wonderful amphibian the Fire Salamander. Zemplén is also famous of its Adder viper population (*Vipera berus*). From mammals we will likely see Roe Deers.



Fire salamander



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We will also visit Beech forest areas where we will have a chance to see Ural Owl. Thanks to the nesting program its population is steadily growing in Hungary. Currently some 200 pairs nest in Hungary most in the Zemplén area. Likely we see the owls in the areas where artificial nest boxes are placed. We will return to Tokaj late afternoon and have dinner in the hotel and as an optional program we can visit wine cellars.



Ural Owl

Evening program - Winetasting: In the evening we can visit a wine cellar in Tokaj, where the world famous Tokaji wines can be tasted. The Tokaj wine region is noted for its sweet wines made from grapes affected by noble rot, a style of wine which has a long history in this region. Aszú, Szomorodni, Furmint and Muskotály are the most characteristic wines of the region.



Wine Cellar

Day 5

Birding en-route

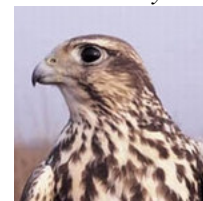
Return to Budapest

In the morning we will make a short birding around the hotel where beside the common Great Spotted and Green Woodpecker we usually see or hear Wrynecks as well. Spot again Bee-eaters and Kingfisher. After breakfast we check out from the hotel and will drive back to Budapest or to the airport. We will be birding en-route passing by meadows, marshes, flooded areas.



Wryneck

We likely see Marsh Harrier, Kestrel, Buzzard, White and Yellow Wagtail, Black Redstart, Whinchat, Stonechat, Red-backed Shrike, Skylark, Crested Lark, Tree Sparrow, Corn Bunting, White Stork, Great White Egret, Grey Heron, Lapwing, Pheasant. During our drive to Budapest we can stop again at the area where we give a second chance to see Imperial Eagle and Saker. We arrive to Budapest afternoon.



Saker

Disclaimer

We cannot guarantee good birding weather and cannot guarantee that all the birds or any of the specific birds listed in our itinerary can be observed. We take no responsibility for any damages, lost or injuries during the trip, so please arrange proper insurance. Some programs may change due to unfavourable weather conditions or unforeseen reasons.