

BIRDING TRIP REPORT TO TURKEVE, HUNGARY, 14th/15th SEPTEMBER, 2010

Hungary is a wonderful country for bird watching and sure, I 'm biased, as my wife is originally from Budapest and we therefore visit the country two or three times a year. On this occasion we were attending a wedding in the Bukk hills in the North of Hungary and afterwards I had the opportunity to do some birding. I have visited the more famous areas like the Hortobagy, the Kiskunsag and the Bukk and Zemplen hills s number of times, so on this visit, I decided to spend two days in an area in the centre of the great plain based around the town of Turkeve in the county of Jasz-Nagykun-Szolnok. Never heard of it? Probably, but older readers may well remember the Korda brothers, dions of British cinema during the 1940's. Well, they were all born here in Turkeve.

The town can be easily reached from Budapest via the railway station at Kisujszallas or, as I did by bus from Szeged in the south of the country. It is a great spot for a family holiday there are plenty of spa facilities for those members who are not keen birders.

My host was Zoltan Pabar, an agronomist and birder who speaks excellent English and has a thorough knowledge of the area and the wild life that inhabits it. He met me off the bus on the first morning and took me to 'Kevirigo', the house he rents out to visitors and showed me the sunken hide at the end of the garden which is waterproofed and heated so that in the winter visitors can get close up views and of course photos of **Tree Sparrows**, **bramblings**, woodpeckers etc. and in the spring, enjoy golden orioles, etc.

Following this, a short walk from the house to a wooded area produced **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Black Redstart**, **Syrian Woodpecker**, **Pied and Spotted Flycatchers** among other birds, but the highlight was a group of roosting **Long Eared Owls** in the grounds of a local school.

We also checked out another of Zoltan's woodland hides, sited near a small pool and ideal for photographing orioles, woodpeckers etc.

Then, with my appetite truly wetted, we were off in his four-wheeled-drive vehicle to an area known as the Ballai Puszta, normally dry grassland but on this occasion, slightly damp after the large amount of rainfall occurring in Hungary this year. The sun shone beautifully for us on this day, however, and we had great views of soaring **Buzzards**, including a **Long Tailed Buzzard**, **Kestrels**, **Red Footed Falcons**, a single **Hobby**, 5-6 **Marsh Harriers**, a drifting **Imperial Eagle** that didn't stay around too long unfortunately along with a supporting cast of **Red Backed Shrikes**, **Winchats**, **Stonechats**, **Corn Buntings**, **Crested Larks** and surprise of surprises, my very first visual of a **Corncrake**!

After lunch, a local delicacy, mutton stew, we visited Turkeve Puszta nearer the town itself and picked up a **Saker Falcon** and an **Osprey** both sitting and preening themselves on the same pylon. These were followed by good views of a **Barn Owl** (interesting to note the darker plumage of the continental birds), a **Little Owl** and a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** in flight on the outskirts of the town. Near the barn owl site, Zoltan showed me the hide from which the winter feeding of raptors such as White Tailed Eagle can be observed at very close quarters! Now, this exercise rally is for toughies; it involves spending several hours in the hide with minimal heating, but the rewards can be fantastic.

After a welcome supper, I was off to bed in a charmingly renovated and typically Hungarian cottage in Turkeve, where I slept soundly until woken by Zoltan at about 7 am the following morning for the next day's bird watching. This began at the fishponds near the town of Kisujszallas where a wide range of waders were seen. These included **2 Bar Tailed Godwits**, Sanderling, (both quite rare here), Curlew and Common Sandpipers, Little Ringed Plovers, **Avocets**, **Curlews**, **Ruffs**, **Dusky Redshanks** and **Wiskered Tern** amongst others. On a nearby pylon, we found an **Osprey**, a **Red Footed Falcon**, a **Saker** and a number of **Buzzards** nearby.

We then visited a wet area on the puszta near the town of Karcag were the most interesting birds were **Squacco Heron, Wood Sandpipers, Little Grebes, Black Storks**, several **Bearded Tits** and a number of **Marsh Harriers**.

A famous landmark around here is a 5 arched bridge over a dry area of puszta near Zadar. From here we had good views of **Sparrowhawk** and an **Imperial Eagle**. From here, we drove to our final destination, the fish ponds near the town of Kunhegyes. The cast of waders was similar to that at the earlier ponds but in addition, **Dunlin, Black Tailed Godwits** and **Little Stints** were seen together with 2 **White Tailed Eagles, Pigmy Cormorants, Ferruginous Ducks, Red Crested Pochards** and 75 **Black Storks**, a fitting end to two wonderful days birding.

I was very pleased to see so many birds and that the weather, in what was a relatively wet summer, held out so well. The area around Turkeve is a great place to go bird watching, particularly a little earlier in the year, when birds such as Montague's Harrier, Pratincole, Kentish Plover, Stone Curlew etc. could have been seen and of course, with more time Bustards could have been looked for around their nearby stronghold at Devavanya and I certainly will be back.

Species seen

Little grebe	Moorhen
Great Crested Grebe	Coot
Pigmy Cormorant	Avocet
Grey Heron	Grey Plover
Squacco Heron	Lapwing
Little Egret	Little Ringed Plover
Night Heron	Curlew
Great White Egret	Black Tailed Godwit
Spoonbill	Bar Tailed Godwit
Black Stork	Spotted Redshank
Mute Swan	Greenshank
Greylag Goose	Wood Sandpiper
Gadwall	Common Sandpiper
Mallard	Snipe
Teal	Sanderling
Shoveler	Little Stint
Pochard	Curlew Sandpiper
Red Crested Pochard	Dunlin
Ferruginous Duck	Ruff
Tufted Duck	Caspian Gull
Osprey	Yellow Legged Gull
White Tailed Eagle	Common Gull
Imperial Eagle	Black Headed Gull
Marsh Harrier	Wiskered Tern
Sparrowhawk	Feral Pigeon
Buzzard	Woodpigeon
Long Legged Buzzard	Collared Dove
Kestrel	Barn Owl
Hobby	Little Owl
Red Footed Falcon	Long Eared Owl
Saker Falcon	Green Woodpecker
Corncrake	Syrian Woodpecker

Great Spotted Woodpecker
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Skylark
Crested Lark
Swallow
House Martin
Pied Wagtail
Red Backed Shrike
Starling
Robin
Black Redstart
Whinchat
Stonechat
Blackbird
Reed Warbler
Great Reed Warbler
Lesser Whitethroat
Spotted Flycatcher
Pied Flycatcher
Bearded Tit
Long Tailed Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Corn Bunting
Reed Bunting
Goldfinch
Greenfinch
House Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Magpie
Jay
Jackdaw
Rook
Hooded Crow

100 species

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