

Hungary at Leisure

Crane Spectacular & Wild Goose Chase

Saturday 30 October – Friday 05 November 2010

Leaders: Gabor Simay and Mike Witherick

2010 Cost: **£1,499** single room supplement **£110**



Hungary is just a short flight from London, but the country still possesses vast riches for the birdwatcher and naturalist, as it is still easy to find those “wild places” that are now so rare in Britain. The vast Hortobágy National Park is an enormous mosaic of marshes, wooded river valleys, wetlands and commercial fishponds, interspersed with farmland and the ancient puszta – the grasslands of the fertile Hungarian plain. We have timed this tour so that we are here before the winter snows, but at a time when the Hortobágy teems with birds. The main species to be found here at this time is the Common Crane, with perhaps 70,000 present. The evocative calls and the sights of vast flocks flying over our heads to roost is one of world’s great wildlife spectacles. We also visit at a time when geese, ducks and raptor numbers are high. During our five full days in the Hortobágy, we are likely to see Great Bustard, Saker Falcon, Rough-legged Buzzard, Eastern Imperial and White-tailed Eagles, Black, Grey-headed, Middle Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers. We also witness the return movement of waders and the returning geese, mainly White-fronted, Taiga Bean and Greylag, with small flocks of Lesser White-fronted amongst them. By visiting in early November we can also find one of the world’s most beautiful geese, the Red-breasted. The hotel we use is excellent, the roads and motorways quick and efficient, and the food and wine are all very good. This will be Ornitholidays’ 51st tour of this region – our knowledge of this area is unsurpassed amongst European bird tour operators.

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Days 1 to 6

We take the early scheduled flight from London to Budapest, and then transfer to our hotel near Hajduszoboszló. This will be our base for the next six nights for exploring the Hortobágy. The grounds of this impressive rural lodge include a large lake; so birding around the hotel is often exciting, and in the past we have even had excellent sightings of Otter, Black Woodpecker and roosting Long-eared Owl. We begin our

exploration of the vast Hortobágy National Park, which is a mosaic of marsh, wooded valley, wetland and commercial fishpond, interspersed with agriculture. Here we shall look for Saker, Eastern Imperial Eagles and Rough-legged Buzzards that will be learning to hunt in this rich feeding area. This area can also hold 70 White-tailed Eagles in the autumn and winter period, so we should have frequent sightings of these enormous raptors. There is also the chance of finding a Spotted Eagle, which is becoming an increasingly regular visitor here in the early winter

period. Rough-legged Buzzards and Hen Harriers will have arrived from their northern breeding areas to these wintering grounds, and we may also see Goshawk, Merlin and Common Buzzard. The lakes of the Hortobágy provide good feeding sites for migrant waders and we shall search for Marsh Sandpiper and other rarities amongst the more common species. Great Bittern and Great Egrets will still be present, and Eurasian Penduline-Tits and Bearded Reedlings will be numerous, as they roam amongst the phragmites and typha heads.



Common Cranes at sunset



Long-eared Owl

Black-necked Grebe and Ferruginous Duck may be on the open water, and we can scan the gulls to see if we can find some Yellow-legged amongst the numerous Caspian. The geese will have arrived from their northern breeding grounds, travelling in family parties, and we shall scan the flocks of White-fronted, Greylag and Taiga Bean to look for the rarer Lesser White-fronted Goose, as well as for the small flocks of the delightful Red-breasted Goose. If the mixture of birds of prey and wildfowl are not enough, then the sight and sounds of the enormous numbers of Common Cranes will surely be the highlight of the tour. We visit at a time when these flocks are peaking and one of the best moments of this tour will be watching the evening movement of perhaps 40,000 birds as they fly overhead on their way to their roost. The ancient *puszta* is still guarded by Csikos horsemen, who herd the Grey Cattle and Racka sheep. We have the services of one of the local wardens who will help us to find the Great Bustards that still occur in good numbers here. The *puszta* may still hold a special wader to look for at this time of year, the Dotterel, and as we walk in the grassland to look for these birds we may also find flocks of Twite and Lapland Buntings depending on weather conditions in Northern

Europe. The Hortobágy is a very exciting place at this time of year, and there is always something new to be found on each visit.

One of the local villages has become a great attraction for the visiting birdwatchers in the late autumn and early winter as it has a roost of up to 80 Long-eared Owls. We can watch these beautiful birds as they sit in back gardens, orchards and willow trees, and gaze back at us, at close quarters, with their lovely orange eyes.

We shall make sure we visit the Debrecen Great Forest, where amongst the enormous old oaks we can look for Black, Middle Spotted and Great Spotted Woodpeckers as well as Short-toed Treecreeper and the pale headed race of Long-tailed Tit. Overhead we often hear the "clip" note of Hawfinch, and we may be lucky to see small parties feeding on the ground as they look for cherry stones. Syrian Woodpeckers are expanding their range here and we should find them as we take a stroll in one of the local parks.

Day 7
We transfer from Hajduszoboszló to Budapest, where we catch our return flight to London.



Red-breasted and White-fronted Geese

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Budapest and transfer to Hajduszoboszló
- Days 2-6** Hajduszoboszló
- Day 7** Depart Budapest

Party Size

Maximum of 14 clients (two leaders with more than seven clients).

Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms with private facilities.

Transport

By private coach.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, VAT, airport taxes and tips.

Gradings

	Good
	100
	Cool
	Low
	Normal
	Relaxed
	Good
	Easy
	Scheduled



Hotel Trofea