



Kiskunsag-Hortobagy-Bukk National Parks Birdwatching in Hungary

An *8-day-long birding Hungary tour* which focuses on the birdlife of Hungary. During the last decades, Hungary became one of the prime birding and wildlife destinations in Central & Eastern Europe. No wonder since it offers completely different habitats than its neighbours with a long list of special birds, lot of them have the Westernmost strongholds of their populations right here. This birdwatching tour offers a great combination of the Hungarian steppes, grasslands dotted with alkaline lakes, rivers and channels, floodplain forests with the dense beech and oakwoods and limestone slopes and gorges of Bukk Hills.

At the Kiskunsag National Park, you will be hosted at our own characteristic bird and wildlife centre, Kondor Ecolodge while in the Bukk Hills we will stay at another family-run lovely place with amazing Hungary birding possibilities in the garden and at nearby areas.

A friendly, relaxing atmosphere and professional guiding is guaranteed by a guide-couple who lives and guides half year here in Hungary and **other East European destinations**, other half year in **Costa Rica** and other parts of **Latin America!**

Surely once you visit this place you definitely want to return soon!



9 woodpecker species including White-backed, Black, Gray-headed, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, as well as Saker Falcon, Imperial Eagle, Great Bustard, Ural Owl, Collared Pratincole, Moustached Warbler, Penduline Tit, Stone Curlew, Hawfinch await you during this holiday. Our Hungary trip takes you to the best places in the country, first to the famous "puszta" of Kiskunság and then to the Bükk Hills. Both areas are protected as national parks and are partly or entirely World Heritage sites. When we travel from the Kiskunsag to the Bukk we even visit a third one, Hortobagy National Park.

Similarly to Hortobágy, the scenic Kiskunság National Park still preserves parts of the once continuous Eurasian steppe, the so-called "puszta". Bird species found here reflect this special habitat, which is really different to other regions of Europe. The Kiskunság NP hosts one of the biggest populations of Great Bustards in Europe but has other highlights to offer as well. Alkaline lakes and temporarily flooded areas of grassland attract huge numbers of ducks, geese and waders. Species include Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, White-winged Black Tern, during April thousands of Ruff, Golden Plovers and other migrating shorebirds. We might be able to see Stone-Curlew, Collared Pratincole, Tawny Pipit and later in May Lesser Grey Shrike, Roller, Golden Oriole and Bee-Eater.

Most of the Bükk Hills is characterized by vast beech woods and open limestone meadows with all the different karst forms produced by erosion such as fissures, sinkholes, underground streams and caverns. It is a perfect area for birding in Hungary, where raptors soar above the valleys and dense deciduous woodlands provide a home for species such as owls, warblers, woodpeckers including Black, White-backed, Gray-headed, Middle Spotted & Syrian. We also will search for Ural Owl and there is a chance for Eagle Owl, Rock Bunting, Lesser Spotted Eagle as well.



Best Birding Hungary Tour highlights include:

- The most colourful birds of Europe are all around in good numbers including European Bee-eaters, Eurasian Hoopoes, European Rollers, Golden Orioles and many more
- Visiting a huge oxbow lake of River Tisza with a large number of attractive bird species
- Evening walks to find Nightjar, Scops, Tawny and Little Owl
- Visiting channels, alkaline lakes, ponds, rivers for various special birds like Penduline Tit, Bearded Tit, Moustached Warbler, Ferruginous Duck, Squacco & Purple Heron +many more
- Sitting in specially designed Bird & Wildlife-watching and photography hides eye-level at ponds with birds and other wildlife
- Watching East European raptor specialties such as Saker Falcon, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Red-footed Falcon and many more
- Sipping your coffee, tee or a famous Hungarian wine during an evening Moth trapping session where you can see a wide variety of species
- look for 9 woodpecker species including White-backed, Black, Gray-headed, Middle-spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers
- searching Ural Owl in the dense woods of Bukk Hills



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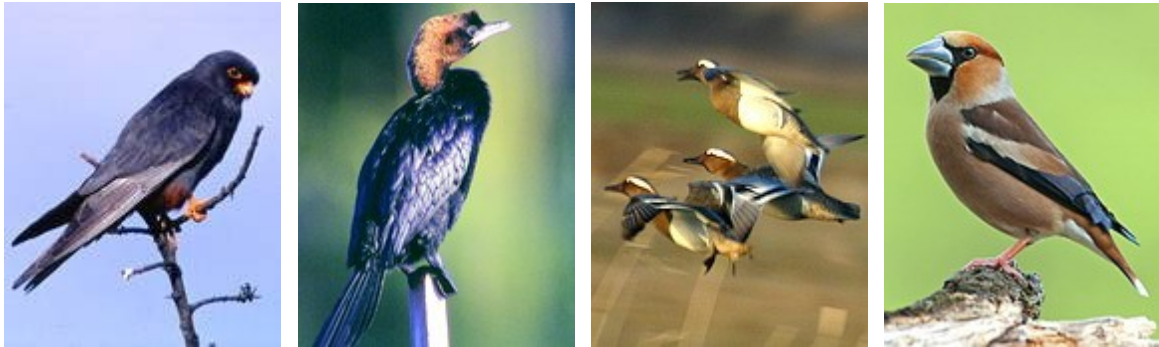
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Day 1 - Arrival and Orientation

After arrival to Budapest Airport we can start either with a quick 1-1,5-hour-long transfer to Kondor EcoLodge or start to travel through the upper part of the Kiskunsag National Park checking out habitats and finding the first birds, perhaps even Great Bustards.

We arrive to our home, the charming Kondor Ecolodge late afternoon, depending also on arrival time of your flights. If time permits we show you the first garden species and you can also try one of our garden photography and wildlife watching hides.

Every evening we discuss what we plan to do next day. Please note that the following itinerary is a sample, depending on the interest of the group, local weather and birdnews we can exchange the order of the days or activities within a day.



Day 2 - Central Kiskunsag National Park - Wet and dry grasslands at Kunpuszta & Kunpeszer

We spend a full day concentrating on local birds and discovering the wildlife surrounding us. The small ponds in the garden are teeming with wildlife with several species of frogs, snakes, pond terrapins and a wide variety of dragonflies among the waterlilies. Various resident woodpeckers in or nearby the garden include Lesser and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Wryneck and Green Woodpecker but even Black Woodpecker is possible. Most of the above-mentioned species are at or around the garden but with different walks, we can find many more interesting things around even without using a vehicle!

The air is full with thrills and songs of nesting Chaffinches, Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Swallows, Chiffchaffs, Black Redstarts, Stonechats, Blackcaps, Mistle Thrushes, Willow Warblers. Tree Sparrow and Common Redstart is also a possibility, both are breeding species in the garden. You won't be bored by the flute of Golden Orioles or bubbling sounds of Bee-eaters or female Cuckoos around.

Trails and rural, sandy dirt-roads meander through a flat area dotted by small forest patches, grasslands and a lake. Our first butterflies would be Chestnut Heath, Little Blue, Knapweed Fritillary, Silver-studded Blues and Queen of Spain Fritillary. We should also notice small groups of European Sousek, a tiny mammal resembles of ground squirrels.

The surrounding area is very good for European Rollers and European Bee-eaters, in fact, they are one of the most common birds around! We have the largest, densest Central European population of European Roller around our Kondor Ecolodge. Almost all of them nesting in one of the nestboxes out of more than 400 what our friends and us put out in the region during the years. Some of them made out of tree-trunks providing a perfect natural setting for photography. Most of the European Bee-eaters in our area nesting alongside sandy roads, not in large sand walls. Nearby Syrian & Black Woodpecker is around & Turtle Dove occurs as well. We should find Tawny Pipit, Red-backed & Lesser Grey Shrike as well. Eurasian Hoopoe, Tree Pipit, Corn Bunting, Whinchat, Nightingale, Crested Lark and Yellow Wagtail all has good populations here as well. It is not uncommon to hear and see Hawfinch, Garden Warbler, Linnet or Spotted Flycatcher either. The nearby extensive sand dunes covered with

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different *Stipa* species in the central part of the National Park are ideal for Wood Lark populations. A Short-toed Snake Eagle can turn up at any moment and song of a Tree Pipit can be heard frequently.



Today we do a smaller, more local circle first going through the nearby fields full with European Bee-eaters and Rollers. Here we also can add Northern Wheatear, Tawny Pipit, Whinchat, Stonechat, European Cuckoo and hopefully Montague's Harrier. After this cross-country excursion, we arrive at a proper road, travel a few minutes and then stroll along a trail. This walk was designed to be representative of the variety of dry and wet woodland of the Kiskunsag. It is a good place to find singing Nightingale, Chiffchaff and sometimes even

River and Grasshopper Warbler. Various other species should represent another type of wildlife like Wood White, Eastern Green Lizard, Lesser Purple Emperor and Swallowtail. At the more open meadow 'Blue-headed' Yellow Wagtail, Stonechat, Whinchat is quite common. It is a perfect area for Montague's Harrier as well. This is also an area where we can add new butterflies to the list such as Eastern Baton and Green-underside Blues or Glanville Fritillary. It is hard to miss here Golden Oriole, Red-backed Shrike and Savi's Warbler. Sometimes we are lucky to find Barred Warbler or Marsh Warbler here as well.

We will brake the day with a picnic lunch and also visit a cafe to use the facilities and you can get a cold drink or an ice cream as well. The local pond held a range of common dragonflies including Emperors, as well as Edible Frogs. From here we continue to a dry area where with our Czech friends several years ago we installed a huge nesting platform for raptors. The very next year it was occupied by a pair of White-tailed Eagles which breed successfully here each year since then. Butterflies here include Swallowtail, Cardinal, Safflower Skippers and perhaps White-letter Hairstreak.

On the way back we stop at a 'Transylvanian Gate' at the entrance of a private property where we explain the significance of it and the connection with history. It is also a place where horses and Great Grey Hungarian Cattle come down to drink from a waterhole which also visited by Turtle Doves. Depending on how much time we left from the day we might do a detour to Bösztörpuszta. Here from a tower hide, we can see a huge grassland area. There are a number of very attractive species possible to glimpse from here including Eastern Imperial Eagle, Great Bustard or Saker Falcon. Montagu's Harrier, Stone Curlew and Little Owl is another possibility. Once we also found a very rare bird for us, a Long-legged Buzzard.

Finally, after a wonderfully varied day with a rich variety of wildlife, we return home to our base at Kondor Ecolodge.



Day 3 - Upper Kiskunsag National Park - Great Bustard, Eagles & Falcons plus more

Today we venture out making a driving-walking full-day discovery at excellent habitats of the Northern part of the Kiskunsag National Park. We have excellent local knowledge regarding where to find different sought-after species with a good chance to be able to observe by each member of the group. Kiskunsag grassland is the typical habitat for Great Bustard with the largest population not just in Hungary, but second largest in all Europe as well! Today we travel to the grassland area where we have a good chance of enjoying the view of the enormous males which is quite an unforgettable experience!



We also will look around from the top of an ancient man-made hill to check a perfect hunting area for some great raptors such as Eastern Imperial Eagle, Red-footed Falcon, Saker Falcon or Booted Eagle. It is also a butterfly-rich area where we look for Adonis Blue, Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Swallowtail, Eastern Bath White and Safflower Skipper among others, but even Large Copper is possible.

Certain bird species adapted to the agricultural fields and nest at the edge of these areas. Long-eared and Little Owl usually can be found at farmhouses. During the way, we will stop at a large, fantastic colony of European Bee-eaters which gives a different feeling and possibility to observe them than yesterday. Not too far we can also search for Collared Pratincole.

With a short detour, we visit a fishpond system where from a lookout tower we can check the birds around us. Some of the species we hope to see here: Avocet, Redshank, Black Winged Stilt, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Pygmy Cormorant, Black-necked Grebe, Little Grebe, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill, Common Snipe, Little Bittern and European Kingfisher.

It is also a good site to find Bearded Tit or even a stunning Bluethroat. One of our last stops will be at an attractive Red-footed Falcon colony which offers very good photography possibility even if you have just a small camera. White Stork has a huge nest here as well. Finally, we return to Kondor Ecolodge and prepare for a tasty homemade dinner.

Day 4 - Central Kiskunsag National Park - channels and alkaline lakes plus Saker Falcon

Before breakfast, you can discover a nearby meadow bordered by poplar trees, the favourite place of Golden Orioles and Eurasian Rollers. Butterflies can include Eastern Bath White, Cardinal and different Blues. In the garden, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Short-toed



Treecreeper can show up. After a full breakfast, we drive out West, perhaps stopping alongside the road for a perched Little Owl and then continue towards a channel with some small fishponds and gallery forest.

This is a perfect place for various dragonflies so we can compare Scarce Chaser, Black-tailed and White-tailed Skimmers. There should be a lot of White-legged Damselflies and a few Four-spotted Chasers as well. Another highlight here the beautiful Norfolk Hawker. Black-crowned Night Heron will be perhaps new during the tour

here and we will have a second chance for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker again.

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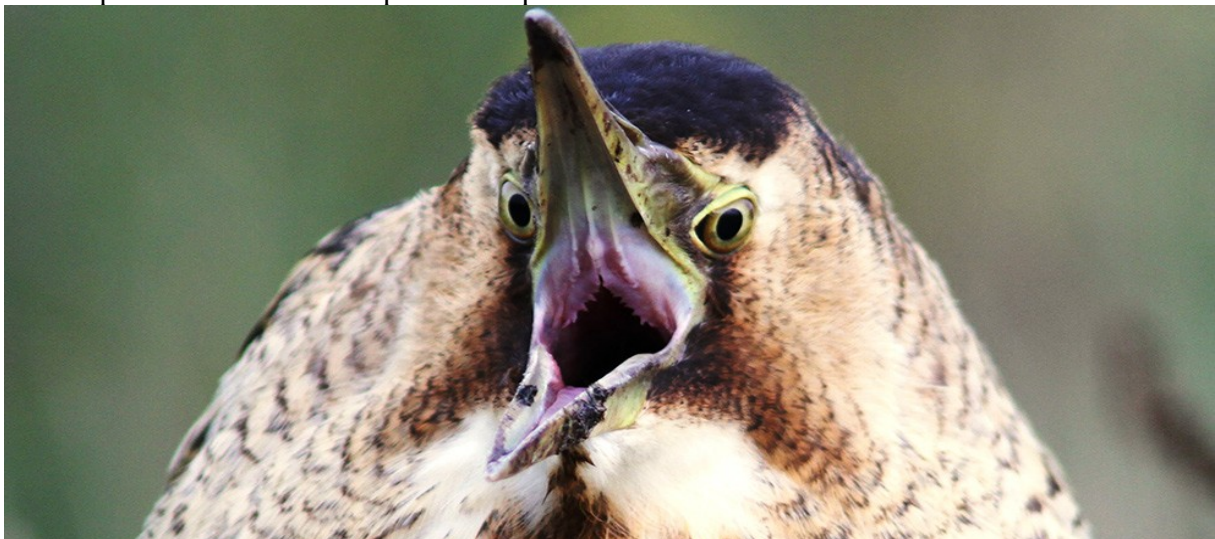
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Some of the ponds can be dry by this time of year but where there is still water it should be good for several species like Black-winged Stilt, Green Sandpiper, Redshank, Little Ringed Plover and very rarely even Kentish Plover. At the reedbeds apart from the usual stuff such as Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Great Reed Warbler there is a chance to find even Bluethroat. We allowed time to investigate another colony of Red-footed Falcons, enjoy good views of Kestrels and Rollers as well. If it is a hot day then we can return to the café for a cold drink or an ice cream before we continue. It is worth checking the nearby meadow which is a reliable site for Large Copper and for different dragonflies such as Scarlet Darter, White-tailed Skimmer, Small Red-eyed Damselfly. Worth checking the sky as well for raptors and/or for a Black Stork.

Finally, we can finish the day by visiting an agricultural land on a dirt road where a pair of Saker Falcons hunt and feed their juvenile offsprings. By this time of the day, we hope not too much heat haze so we can have superb views with some luck through the scopes. Saker Falcon is not just one of Europe's most sought-after raptors but it is a sacred bird of Hungarians. Will be happy to tell you the story why! :-)

This evening we can arrange an early dinner so after that timing would be perfect for a short stroll from Kondor Ecolodge to a large clearing. Around 8.30-8.45 we should hear the first Nightjars churring. Males are usually very active and if we are lucky one of them will perch on an open branch so we can put the scope on it.





Day 5 - Eastern Kiskunsag National Park - Oxbow Lakes, Floodplain Forests & travel through edge of Hortobagy National Park to Bukk Hills

Today after breakfast we drive about 1 hour to East to the floodplains of River Tisza and its several oxbow lakes which are also perfect birding spots. Alongside the river and its oxbow lakes, we will visit a so-called “gallery forest” or riparian forest where the old trees provide a perfect Woodpecker Paradise. We should find Lesser, Middle, Great Spotted Woodpecker, but will look for Grey-headed & Black Woodpecker as well. The forest is a nesting site for Black Storks and Tawny Owls as well.

Later we visit another nearby site where we will look down from the top of an ancient earth-fortress to the surrounding vast area with meandering oxbow lakes full of birds. It is a paradise for Great White & Little Egret, Great & Pygmy Cormorant, Black-necked & Little Grebe, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Night Heron, Spoonbill, Common Snipe, Kingfisher and of course plenty of ducks, including Ferruginous Duck, Shoveler, Garganey. We always see a couple of raptors hunting around, sometimes even White-tailed Eagle or Saker Falcon.

With a short walk, we can visit the edge of a little lake and a marshy area. We have a good chance here for Penduline Tit, Bearded Reedling, Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Sedge and Reed Warbler. Night Heron and Kingfisher are usually here as well.

We will have a picnic lunch here with might be Wryneck & Syrian Woodpecker around. After filling ourselves up we will have a long journey across the Great Hungarian Plain which we will brake at Lake Tisza, part of the Hortobagy National Park. It is a good place to catch up with any of the lakeside birds we might have missed before. Also gives a proper restroom possibility and stretch our legs. Another shortstop is a roadside site which during the afternoon can be good for spotting raptors flying around. Both Eastern Imperial Eagle & Saker Falcon possible here.

Finally, we arrive to the Southern slopes of the Bukk Hills where our next family-owned small hotel nestled between a local lake and the forest. You will surely remember here not just the surrounding birds but the great food and hospitality as well.

Day 6 - Bukk Hills - Southern Slopes & Valleys

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We can start the day nearby to our accommodation searching for Middle-spotted and Syrian Woodpecker in the orchards. Wryneck, Hawfinch and Golden Oriole is also possible. After a full breakfast, we drive out, stopping shortly to scan whether Lesser Spotted Eagles started to search their breakfast as well. Then our major stop will be at an entrance of a valley where several pairs of Rock Bunting breed in an abandoned quarry. Some years this is also a breeding site for Eagle Owls and during Winters we can photograph Wallcreeper here. Later we enter the old beech forests of the hill searching for Grey-headed, Black and the elusive White-backed Woodpecker. If possible to drive up further then we reach wet mountain meadows which hold Corncrake, River Warbler and the dry scrub is inhabited by Barred Warbler. From mid-May in a good year, a few pairs of Red-breasted Flycatchers are found here, but Collared Flycatcher and Wood Warbler are singing from earlier on.

If time permits we can try to see Ural Owl in appropriate habitats. We also check the Southern slopes of the hills for Imperial Eagle and Saker Falcon. Here we often see Goshawk and Lesser Spotted Eagle too. After a long but exciting day, we will return to our base where our hosts will wait for us with an excellent dinner.



Day 7 - Bukk Hills - Central Part with dense Beech Woods & karstic meadows

Today after breakfast we will drive first down towards the historical town of Eger which is also the centre of the wine region of the famous Bull's Blood. We stop before at a point to look for raptors such as Honey Buzzard or Short-toed Eagle and if we missed before also Wryneck at the edge of a vineyard. We do not waste time now with proper sightseeing but save this possibility for later at the end of the day.

Anyway, we cross the town and soon reach the Western edge of the Bukk Hills from where on a scenic road we start to travel deeper in the Central part of the region crossing small gorges, huge mountain meadows and dense forests. We plan a few stops at different elevations and various habitats. At each place, we will do short walks and try to find any species which we missed before. Some of our target species will include Common Treecreeper, Hawfinch, any of the forest woodpeckers which we perhaps missed before and of course it is always worth to check the sky for raptors so we can add Goshawk or Golden Eagle. We also should find Coal Tit, Marsh Tit and Collared Flycatcher. Since the Bukk Hills made out of limestone it is rare to find any streams or surface water but still, there should be some Gray Wagtails around. On the way back we stop at a panoramic point from where we can explain a bit of the historical significance of the town and why a strongly catholic centre has a mediaeval Turkish Minaret as well. In the evening we will have a filling farewell dinner but hopefully, you will be full with not just that but great memories of several good species, excellent wildlife, friendly guiding and hospitality.

Day 8 - Garden and Forest around the Bukk accommodation till Departure

After the final breakfast together depending on your flight schedule we can spend some time in the vicinity of our accommodation. Even without using the vehicle we still have chance for Black, Grey-headed or even White-backed Woodpeckers!

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