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2-day birding in Hortobágy with Cranes in focus October, 2010

During this 2-days (1 night) tour you will have the opportunity to explore the different habitats of Hortobágy fishponds, steppes, grasslands, and marshes. Hortobágy is the #1 birding hotspot in Hungary, which offers in every season good opportunity to see many birds species. In October the main attraction is the crane migration, when thousands cranes can be seen.

Day 1 – Birding in Hortobágy steppe, crane migration

Your tour will start at your hotel in Budapest at 07.30, where we will pick you up and start our journey to Hortobágy. Along the M3 Motorway we will stop at certain places from where there is a chance to see Imperial Eagles circling in the sky assuming good weather conditions. Leaving M3 motorway we continue our trip along the Tisza river on road 33.

We will stop at Lake Tisza. The Tisza Lake is actually a large reservoir on the Tisza river, but fortunately it does not look like a reservoir but a flood-plain of the 18th century. Two-thirds of the lake, whose total area is 127 square kilometres, has been designated to fall under the Ramsar Convention because of its notably significant wetland habitats. Tisza Lake is an ideal habitat for herons. In bigger continuous reeds heron colonies like Purple Heron, Great White Egret, Spoonbill and Squacco Heron and Little Bittern can be found. Lots of Cormorants, Grey Herons and Black-headed Gulls can be also observed at Tisza Lake.

After checking in into the Hotel in the afternoon we will be birding on the extensive open steppe of the Hortobágy. The steppe habitat is rich in rodents, which ensures the living of many predators like Marsh and Hen Harriers, Common, Long-legged and Rough-legged Buzzards, Kestrel, Peregrine, Merlin as well as the symbolic bird of Hungary the Saker falcon.



Lake Tisza



Grey Heron



Buzzard



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During visiting the Pusta other typical steppe birds like Crested Larks, Sky Larks, House and Tree Sparrows can be seen. Beside these birds large flocks of Fieldfares are moving everywhere on the steppe and Great Grey Shrikes are perching on treetops looking for prey. Before sunset Cranes are starting to fly to their roosting place to the shallow wetlands and drained fishponds. They appear far on the horizon and flying closer and closer, low in the sky above us, in long continuous rows. The usually quiet steppe is now full of their loud crying concert. To see the thousands of flying cranes is an unforgettable experience.



Crane



Day 2 – Birding at the fishponds

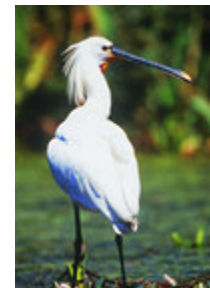
The second day we will spend at the Great Fish Pond (Nagy Halastó) in Hortobágy which is regarded as a birding Eldorado in Hungary. Over 300 bird species have been observed here so far by birders and in almost every season ten and hundred thousands of birds can be seen. The system of fishponds of Hortobágy 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.



Great Fish Pond

We will start birding at 7.15 by visiting the several ponds of the Great Fish Pond system.

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 Egret, Night Heron, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Bittern, Little Bittern, Spoonbill, Cormorant and the rare breeder Pygmy Cormorant can be seen.



Spoonbill



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Gulls, terns, plovers occur here in great numbers including Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean and Yellow-legged Gull.

There is also good chance to see Crakes and Waterrail at the Great Fish Pond at this time of the year.

We will also have the opportunity to see different raptors in the area like White-tailed Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Osprey and Hobby.

Based on water conditions Ruffs, Spotted Redshanks, Curlews and Black-tailed Godwits can be found on the muddy shores of drained fishponds, while amongst the Great Crested and Little Grebes in the deeper ponds we can have a chance to see Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes and Ferruginous Ducks. Wigeon, Gadwall, Showeler, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Pochard, Coot, Avocet, Grey Plover, Lapwing are also species can be seen with god opportunity as well as Black-headed, Common and Yellow-legged Gulls.

At around 4pm we finish our birding in Hortobágy village where we can admire the famous 9-arch bridge, buy some handmade souvenirs and drive back to Budapest. We arrive to the Hotel at around 7pm.



*Yellow-legged
Gull*



Ferruginous Duck



9-arch bridge

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.

Weather

October can be cold, foggy and rainy so be prepared with warm clothes, raincoats and waterproof shoes, however in certain years October is dry and sunny.