

## Birding trip to Kiskunsag, Hungary

25-26 July, 2007

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My wife and I flew to Hungary on July 15 and spent 8 days at beautiful Balaton lake. It was very hot (38 degrees Celsius), however near the lake in the shadow of the trees we felt very comfortable. We did some birds photography in the gardens near Balaton, and it was very exciting; for example – this beautiful **Serin**. However, more amazing trip was still ahead.

On July 24 we were transferred to Budapest to Erzebeth hotel (3+ stars) and the very next morning we met our guide – Bence Kokay – by 7:30 at the hotel lobby. Bence is working with the tour operator [www.hungarianbirdwatching.com](http://www.hungarianbirdwatching.com) who we contacted by email and within a few days we agreed on a personalized itinerary considering our special needs. Bence is a young but very experienced bird watcher with very high visual acuity. He is able to catch a sight of a distant bird when I see nothing. His nickname is Ben and this is how I call him below in this report.



*Serin*

By July 24 the heat wave left Hungary, and the strong wind was blowing all day long. The wind was so strong, that it made the flying almost impossible for some birds.

In this trip I took my Canon EOS 30D camera with Canon EF 300 f/4 IS USM lens with Canon 1,4 extender attached to the lens. So the shots you see in this report were made with this equipment.

It took us 30 minutes to drive outside of Budapest in south direction, and after another 20 minutes we came to a small village where we saw our first birds in this trip – three juvenile **White Storks** sitting in large nest on the top of a pole. The lighting was not very good for photography, so Ben drove us 5 minutes to another nest, where I was able to make a good picture of a White Stork.



*White Stork*

After that we drove for an hour and entered Kiskunsag pusta (steppe). There were numerous agricultural fields on both sides of the road, with rolls of hay scattered on the surface. These rolls are often used by different raptors as the place to sit. Soon we saw our first raptor – it was **Marsh Harrier** that was trying to fly against the strong upwind – and therefore he actually made no progress and was hovering above the same place for few minutes. I went out of our car and tried to get closer to this beautiful bird – however, with no success.

We turned to a small field road and proceeded deeper to pusta. Our next raptor was seen in 40 minutes, it was a **Buzzard** that was sitting on a roll of hay. This time I was more lucky and was able to get close enough for a few good shots – although the lighting was not perfect. After that we saw **Marsh Harriers**, **Buzzards** and **Kestrels** many times – they are common birds in this area.



*Buzzard sitting on a roll of hay*

In 40 minutes after that we arrived to a **Bee-eaters** colony – there were numerous holes in the precipice on the left side of the road. The very characteristic sound suggested that the birds somewhere near us. Of course – they were sitting on the electric wires on the right side of the road. Some of them tolerated me as I was getting closer, and I did some shots. At this time I was totally lost and had no idea where we are – there were so many small roads and various turns so I wondered how our guide Ben is able to remember all of them.

It was lunchtime, so Ben suggested to drive to a special place near a bird observing tower. While we were going there, I saw a hare sitting near the road. We stopped, he immediately ran away, but I was able to make three pictures of him.



*Bee-eaters*

The lunch was good. Sandwiches, tomatoes, pepper, juice, water – all prepared in advance by Ben.

After the lunch we went to large area of artificial fishponds. We observed and photographed there several species including **Black Storks**, **White Storks**, **Purple Herons**, **Grey Herons**, **Great White Egrets**, **Cormorants**, **Whiskered Terns** and others.



*Purple Heron*



*White Storks*

The next destination in our trip was a private farm with large garden, where Ben showed us **Red-footed Falcon**, **Redstarts** and **Long-eared Owl**. A red-footed falcon sat about 15 meters above the ground on large branch of a tree, and allowed me to take numerous shots for 5 minutes. After I finished, she was still sitting there. Nice bird! The only problem still was the wind – the branch was moving back and forth, so it was a challenge to keep the bird focused. Anyway, four shots of twenty were sharp enough.



*Juvenile Whiskered Tern*



*Red-footed Falcon*

It was already 5 p.m., so we decided that it is all for this day, and Ben drove us to the very beautiful place in Kiskunsag countryside – Somodi Tanya, which is a Hungarian farm that was turned into an inn. This is very quiet area, in a forest. We had very delicious supper. In fact, it was the best one in our two weeks in Hungary! And there are numerous birds too – **Redstarts**, **Flycatchers**, **Swifts**, **Larks**, **Swallows**, others – we were able to see them early in the morning. The wind was over, and the day was expected to be hot and sunny. Ben said that he heard two **Nightjars** at night.

Right after our departure from Tanya we saw a **Red-Backed Shrike** sitting on the bush by the road. We stopped, drove few meters back, I opened the window and took five shots of the bird from five meters. In fact, during the trip we saw many shrikes, including **Lesser Grey Shrike**.



*Juvenile Redstart*



*Red-backed Shrike*

After that Ben took us to another destination, where we expected to see **Rollers**. And it was true – three rollers in one place. One of them was tolerating our car, so we were able to approach the tree where she sat and I took about ten photos of a roller.

The next area was a system of fishponds near a salt lake. There we saw many birds, including **Reed Warblers, Great Reed Warblers, Lapwings, Teals, Mallards** and others. However, this time they were too far to photograph them.

It was almost lunch time, getting very hot (+34 Celsius), so we decided to drive to the lunch place and had our meal there.

After lunch we went to another fishpond area where we saw Bee-eaters, Egrets, **Night Heron**, Grey Herons, Whiskered Terns and others.

By this time I had already 5 Gigabytes of birds pictures in my camera, it was very hot for us (we live in northern city Saint Petersburg, with average 22 Celsius in summer), so by 3 p.m. we decided that now we should return to Budapest – happy and completely satisfied with this birding trip. In 1,5 hours we were in Erzsebet Hotel.



*Roller*

All together we saw 62 different species in this trip, and I was able to make about 25 good quality photographs, which I consider a good result – bearing in mind that we were first time in that area and therefore it was not easy to make good pics of birds, and also the end of July is the worse time for birding.

Bence Kokay is very nice guide and we like him very much.

So, my wife Inga and I would like to thank the company Hungarian Birdwatching Team for this nice birding trip. We recommend [www.hungarianbirdwatching.com](http://www.hungarianbirdwatching.com) to other birders and bird photographers.

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