TRIP REPORT MAY 2014

7  11.50am Ferry Dover to Calais. Overnight Hotel Siatel, Metz.

8  Arrived Uberlingen 2.00pm, via Strasbourg, Freiburg, Titisee-Neustadt. Checked into Gasthaus Traube in Bodman-Ludwigshafen. Found our bearings around Gallerturm. After evening meal, went back to Gallerturm in search of Eagle Owl which nests on cliffs below old city wall. Just after dusk, an adult Eagle Owl flew from a site we had been watching for over an hour without seeing anything. It flew across the path and perched on a nearby ledge giving us tremendous views. We watched it until bad light stopped play.

AUSTRIA

9  Drove to Vienna via Munich, Salzburg, Linz. Three nights at Hotel An Der Wein, Hutteldorf.

10  Train to Schloss Schonbrunn. Walked around grounds, through all the woodland. Great Spotted Woodpecker, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, numerous Nuthatch. Afternoon walk (7km+) around north-eastern part of Lainzer Tiergarten. Same birds, with addition of Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchat, Chiffchaff. No sign of either Collared or Red Breasted Flycatcher.

11  Drove to Hohe Wand, but by the time we got to the top, it was raining heavily with poor visibility.

12  Salamandar train from Puchberg to Schneeberg. Two Golden Eagles were seen overhead from the station at Puchberg. Biting cold wind at the summit made it unpleasant for much walking or birding. Onward drive to Illmitz, arriving at 4 pm. Booked into Pension Zur Sonne for 5 nights. Evening drive to Neusiedlersee. Along the causeway, we noted:


13  First stop was at Lange Lacke. We were told reports of Broad-billed Sandpipers being present. We walked to second tower. Met with other birders also looking for the B&B Sandpipers, but we were all out of luck. Birds seen:


Drove 1km further along the road and stopped by some woods on the left. Walked to the lake, where we added Wigeon to our list of water birds. Walking along the side of the woods, Nightingale was heard but not seen. Other birds seen were Linnet, Spotted Flycatcher, Wood Pigeon, Pheasant.

Next we drove along the birding lane from Tadten which led to the canal. Birding was excellent. Birds seen:
Marsh Harrier (numerous males as well as females), Black Kite, Cuckoo, White Stork, Short-eared Owl, Black Redstart, Sedge Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Grey Partridge, Hooded Crow, Curlew, Yellow Wagtail, Stonechat (female with chick), Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, but the highlight thus far was an Imperial Eagle on the nest. There are signs forbidding parking between two markers, so as not to disturb the eagles. We parked a safe distance away and still had magnificent views through the scope. Once we could tear ourselves away from this wonderful sight, we carried on to the end of the lane and stopped briefly by the river, but by then it was raining and not very pleasant. We carried on past the tower to a flooded area and immediately came across a Spoonbill and also a White-tailed Eagle perched in a nearby tree. A Bittern was booming. On the lane back towards Andau we added Red-backed Shrike and Quail. A stop at some reedbeds produced Nightingale and warbler song, but by then it was raining and very unpleasant so we didn't hang around.

As we came into the village of Andau a Syrian Woodpecker flew across and landed in full view.

14 Drove to Marchegg. Walked first to the White Stork colony and then walked around the reserve through the woods. We were a little disappointed in that we didn't see as many birds as we were expecting. The only birds of note were Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Green Woodpecker. The weather may have been a factor, as it was really windy. Back at the carpark, we met a local birder who told us of a Black Woodpecker's nest nearby. We found the nest and spotted a chick which appeared about to fledge. We waited for a good half hour and patience was rewarded when we first heard and then saw the male adult approach the nesthole. It appeared to be encouraging the chick to leave the nest. After a while, the adult flew off and eventually the chick fledged.

We drove 3.5km further north and followed a track to the embankment. We then walked left along the embankment a further 300m reported to be a good vantage point for spotting raptors. Not today!

On our way back, we roamed around the plains behind Neusiedl (Parndorferplatte) and made another visit to Lange Lacke, but the wind made it impossible to use the scope.

A pre-dinner walk at the back of our hotel in Illmitz (battling wind and rain) produced Marsh and Montague's Harrier, together with a noisy colony of Rooks.

15 Weather even worse today, rain and gale-force winds. Impossible to birdwatch, only from the car. Drove the birding lanes from Tadten, but not very productive. We couldn't even see the Imperial Eagle on the nest and worried that something untoward had happened. (We've since been assured that the nest survived and one chick was successfully raised.) Trees were blown down and littered the roads. At one point, the road was blocked and we had to remove a fallen branch. A walk along the canal was out of the question. The noise of the wind made it impossible to listen for birds. We spent the rest of the day driving around the various lakes in the Seewinkel area, finishing along the road which skirts the Neusiedlersee between Podersdorf and Illmitz. Spoonbills were numerous, as were the Greylag and chicks. Not a pleasant day at all, and extremely non-productive bird-wise.

16 Drove to Sarrod, across the Hungarian border south of Pamhagen, to the canal in the Fertoujlak National Park. Weather still atrocious. We attempted a walk along the footpath to the observation
platform, but had to turn round after about 500m. Back at the carpark, we managed a bit of bird-watching from the car. Picked up Garganey, Grey Plover and Purple Heron.

We decided to return to Marchegg, as the woodland might give us some protection from the weather. We did a longer walk this time (Beaver Trail). Almost immediately we heard a chick calling and found a nesthole. Within minutes, a male Great Spotted Woodpecker came to feed one of the chicks. Shortly after the female did the same. We watched them for a while, busy feeding the chicks. We were again surprised at the lack of birds. We only picked up a Black Stork, Purple Heron and two Mute Swans with cygnets. The woodland birds were limited to Chaffinch, Blackbird, Great Tit and Chiffchaff.

**HUNGARY**

17 Drove A85 to Gyor, then motorway to J67. We then drove through part of the Vertes Hills to the Csakvar meadows. Not much around, but added Turtle Dove to our list. What we did see were several large hovering birds of prey. They were rather distant, but thought they might be Long-Legged Buzzards. Then we made our way to Lake Velence but were disappointed with lack of access either to the water or the extensive reedbeds.

On arrival at Budaors, we booked into the Olympos Panzió for two nights. Drove into Budapest, parked on the Buda side and enjoyed a meal overlooking the Danube and the Hungarian Parliament Building.

18 Weather still cloudy with showers. Drove south of Budapest to Retimajor Fishponds near Cece. We walked for some distance around the large ponds. Amongst the birds we saw were: Great White Egret, Spoonbill, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Night Heron, Whiskered Tern, Common Tern, Black Tern, Black Stork, Great White Egret, Pochard, Red-Crested Pochard, Mallard, Greylag, Great Reed Warbler, Reed Warbler, Golden Oriole, Nightingale, Blackcap, Hoopoe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Cuckoo, Turtle Dove, Marsh Harrier. A good walk and good birding. Ferruginous Duck, however, eluded us.

We finished the afternoon off by driving back into Budapest (lots of Common Buzzards perched along the motorway) and taking the Metro to Pest and getting the sightseeing bus (ugh!). Still, we've done it.

19 At last! Woke up to blue sky and sunshine. Somehow managed to drive through Budapest to the M3 motorway. Exited at J114. Took route 33 through Tiszafured to Hortobagy. Brief stop at the river, several Night Heron seen. Took the farm track with the trees holding Red-footed Falcon nest boxes. Male and female Red-footed Falcon were easily seen both in and around the nest boxes. Such close views! Just around the corner we came to the carpark from where the track leads to the woods containing the Red-Footed Falcon colony. Bee-Eaters and Sand Martins were flying around the carpark. We would return and obtain permits to walk the track, but it would be impossible to get better views of these birds than we'd already had. Opposite the carpark there was a road leading to Nagyiván. Along this road we had good sightings of Lesser Grey Shrike. We also saw a male Reed Bunting, numerous Great-White Egret, White Stork and Marsh Harrier.

Further along route 33, we spotted Pygmy Cormorant flying over the road. We parked by a small track and found ourselves overlooking a fishpond. Pigmy Cormorants galore, Night Herons galore. We then
drove on through Hortobagy and turned off right towards Nadudvar in search of the Saker nestbox reported to be on one of the electricity pylons. We found the box but sadly it was empty.

We made our way to Bogács, stopping off for a coffee on the way. From this stop, we saw yet another large hovering bird of prey low over the field and this time we could identify this bird at least as a Long-Legged Buzzard. A lake on the way held nine Spoonbills. We booked into the Alabástrom Panzió at Bogács for two nights. We had a late afternoon drive into the foothills of the Bukk Hills and found a driveable track through the woodland. Among the birds seen: Song Thrush, Long-tailed Tit (white head), Jay, Chiffchaff, Yellowhammer, Common Buzzard, Red-Backed Shrike and Lesser Whitethroat.

20 Drove to Eger and then took the 2505 signed Repashuta. After about 2km a Lesser Spotted Eagle flew across in front of us. We jumped out and enjoyed great views as it circled overhead. Suddenly it plummeted to the ground out of sight. A few moments later it rose again, followed by an agitated Common Buzzard. They chased each other for a couple of minutes and then went their separate ways.

At Repashuta, we followed the road through the village until it became a track. We walked the track down through beech forest to the meadows. We added a Treecreeper to our list. Once in the meadows a Black Woodpecker flew across. It then started to rain heavily so we made our way back up the track to the car. On leaving the village we saw several Hawfinch.

Back up to the 2505, we parked in the layby and saw more Hawfinch in the puddles at the edge of the woods. We followed a marked trail in search of Collared Flycatcher and White-backed Woodpecker. Within minutes we heard Collard Flycatcher. We soon spotted a male coming and going to a nesthole. We continued along the trail for a bit but only saw Great Spotted Woodpecker. Another stop produced Coal Tit. Had a brief glimpse of a Grey-headed Woodpecker on the grass at the side of the road, but not a good sighting. Once we had made our way back down to Miskolc, we took route 3 towards Bogacs. We noticed another Saker box on one of the pylons, but again it proved to be empty.

21 Happy Birthday Phil, the big Seven 0. Drove south into the Borsodi Reserve in our search for Saker. On the road from Mezacsét towards Árokto, we checked a line of pylons and found a box (third pylon on right-hand side of the road). There were three Saker chicks in the box. After about half an hour, an adult flew in and then took off again and circled overhead, shortly to be joined by its mate. Spectacular!

Passing through Egyck, we walked a track looking for Roller and Golden Oriole, but found neither. In the afternoon, we went back to Repashuta in the Bukk Hills and walked another trail from the layby.

22 Leaving Bogács, we crossed the motorway and made our way south to Árokto to have another look at the Saker chicks. From this direction, we found a track on the left, giving us closer views. An adult soon arrived and we had great views. At the same spot, a pair of Lesser Grey Shrike, Red-footed Falcon and lots of yellow wagtails.

We then doubled back through Árokto and took the ferry across the river Tisza, driving to Egyky and then left on route 33 to the carpark opposite the bar Kaparo Csarda. We obtained the required permits and
had good views of Red-Footed Falcons all around and overhead, together with dozens of Bee-Eaters in and around the quarry. Very hot and sunny.

We then continued on to the Halastó Fishponds. We walked a little around the nearer ponds, but these were small and overgrown. New for our list was Squacco Heron and Penduline Tit. We also flushed two Ferruginous Duck. Walking back along the line of trees holding Kestrel nestboxes, we saw a female feeding five chicks. Most of the boxes either contained chicks or brooding adults. We continued onto Hortobágy and booked into the Sóvirág Vendegáz hotel.

23 After a quick look at the Ohat fishponds, we parked at the Halastó Fishponds. Excellent 5 hours’ birding. We walked to the furthest observation tower (2.5 hours walk) birding all the way. Very hot - 30 degrees. From the watchpoint to the right, we had an unexpected surprise - a colony of Caspian Gull. Amongst birds seen: Imperial Eagle (sub-adult), Crane (2), Bittern (2), Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Night Heron, Grey Heron, Great White Egret, Little Egret, Glossy Ibis, Cormorant, Pygmy Cormorant, Mute Swan, Greylag, various ducks including close views of Ferruginous Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Black-Necked Grebe, Red-Necked Grebe, Whiskered Tern, Black Tern, Red-Backed Shrike, Golden Oriole, Cuckoo, Hoopoe, Nightingale, Bluethroat (white spot), Bearded Tit, Reed Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Marsh Harrier, Kestrel. A straight walk back, with stops only for drinks, took 1.5 hours.

We finished the day driving to the Cserepes-Pusztas and Daressa Raptor Watchpoints but only saw distant views of Buzzards over the woods.

24 Drove through Debrecen to the Rumanian border. We were not allowed through, as we didn't have our passports. The first time anyone has asked to see them since we left England. Returned to Hortobágy and spent the afternoon trawling the tracks around Nagyiván looking for Tawny Pipit. Saw Skylark, Red-backed Shrike, Stonechat, Marsh Harrier, Kestrel, Common Buzzard, Corn Bunting, White Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, but no Tawny Pipit.

25 Left Hortobágy and drove to St. Wolfgang in Austria. 1 night in Hotel Seerose. A nostalgia trip for both of us.

26 2 nights in Hotel Scheulinghof, Mayrhofen. The plan was to go up to the Hinter Glacier to look for Snowfinch, but once again the weather was against us and we decided against it. We took a short cablecar ride from the centre of Mayrhofen, but at the top, visibility was non-existent. We only managed to locate a singing Alpine Accentor through the mist.

N.B. The weather definitely put a damper on this trip, but we will hopefully return, as the birding was excellent. With better weather, we should be able to add a few species we missed out on this time.