

# **Hungary 2003 September**

## **Hungary – 23rd to 30th September 2003 – dba trip**

After the DBA's (BFA) long-distance trips to Kenya, Canada and India over the past three years it was a pleasant diversion to go on a week's birding trip to Hungary. The trip was organised and lead by Gerard Gorman who lives in Budapest, and who is a very experienced and knowledgeable authority on the birds of Hungary. He is also an acknowledged expert on the woodpeckers of Hungary, and is soon to publish a new book on Picidae. Szabolcs Kokay who joined our tour for some of the time will also illustrate this book. I was privileged to see Szabolcs' drawings for the new book and I was very impressed with his wonderful skills. Originally, five people were going on the trip, but due to a last-minute illness only three of us actually made the flight to Budapest – my wife – Joanna – and me [Brian Anderson], and John Rance from Torquay.

### **Day by Day**

#### **Tuesday, 23rd September 2003**

Arrival at Budapest airport went smoothly. It is a modern and clean airport, and getting John and I off the aircraft went efficiently. The disabled loo facilities were good.

We were met by Gerard, Szabolcs and Attila – our driver – at the airport and then driven for a couple of hours to our hotel in the Bukk Hills in a large, modern Mercedes PSV. On the motorway out of Budapest we were delighted to see distant sightings of an Imperial Eagle and many Common Buzzards 'lining' our route.

The route from Budapest took us to Noszvaj via Godelle, M3 motorway, Ludas (Imperial Eagle), and Mesolcovesd – Noszvaj (Fenyves Kastely Hotel.) Other notable birds seen on route were Corn Bunting, Marsh Harrier, Hooded Crow, Great White Egret and Tree Sparrow.

John and I are wheelchair users. He was able to transfer himself from his chair into the vehicle provided. I had to be lifted in and out. It was not an adapted vehicle in any respect.

Our vehicle – a twelve-seater – was more than large enough to transport our party, luggage and wheelchairs. Because the bus was high off the ground it was not possible for me to slide onto a seat, as I do with my car at home.

For the first few days Szabolcs and Attila lifted me in and out the vehicle every time the vehicle stopped for us to see birds etc. The method of getting me in and out of the bus would not be considered a proper way of handling a disabled person in this situation. One person took all the weight when mounting the step and manoeuvring me on to my seat. Certainly from a health and safety point of view the situation would not be good enough. This was not only because of the chance of dropping me, but the possibility of injuring the lifters.

In the second half of the week Attila – alone – lifted me into the vehicle, which actually proved an easier method, as he was physically strong, and there was less uncertainty in how they were going to manage me.

Mind you I did not object to either methods because I have long ago decided to put up with different attempts of getting me on aircraft and vehicles. It can be undignified, but without my adapting to circumstances I would never have seen so many wonderful birds, people and countries around the world.

We firstly stayed at the Fenyves Kastely hotel in Noszvaj for three nights. The hotel is near the Bukk National Park, which is situated to the north-east area of Hungary.

Entry for wheelchairs was via a rear door that led to a small lift. The dining room was at this level and my room was on the third floor and John's was on the ground floor. My room was actually a family room with a separate bedroom, a lounge and a hallway with a wardrobe. This proved large enough for my wheelchair. There were no adaptations such as handrails etc. The shower cubicle was not suitable for wheelchair transfer.

John's room on the ground floor was large enough for his wheelchair except that the bathroom door was too narrow. He was able to adapt to this by standing and walking past the door from his chair.

The passenger lift was just large enough to move from our rooms to the basement (where the dining room was). The grounds of the hotel were accessible and there was some wooded habitat in the hotel grounds for early morning birding. John/Gerard heard Black Woodpecker here.

Fenyves Kastély Hotel

### **Wednesday, 24 September 2003**

Route for the day: Hotel -Cserepfalu (pair of sparrowhawks), Bogacs (Three Imperial Eagles), Varhegy (Edible Dormouse) and Noszvaj Pond – Hotel.

The temperature was much cooler today at about 15c .There was steady light rain from about midday onwards.

We drove to an area within the Bukk National Park where we had about a 2km walk downhill – well planned for the wheelchairs – we were able to see some good birds. We then went to a picnic site and had lunch set out on a table at the rear of the bus. This was after having seen a possible family of three Imperial Eagles.

After lunch we returned to our hotel and had a longish walk from the hotel and on our return we toured the hotel grounds. Notable birds were; other than those already mentioned, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Raven, Black Redstart, Great Grey Shrike and Black Woodpecker (Heard).

Other sightings: Edible Dormouse and Praying Mantis.

### **Thursday, 25 September 2003**

Route for the day: Hotel – Hor Valley – Csereepfalu – Bukkszerc – Felsotarkany – Eger – Hotel.

The day was bright but cold because of a strong north-east wind. Temperatures ranged from 15c to 20c but the wind chill made it feel colder.

We toured various wooded areas in search of woodpeckers but I think the strong wind deterred bird activity and we were unfortunate in having a difficult time in finding expected species despite the efforts to find them. A fallen tree further hampered us across our path. This shortened our woodpecker searching.

Notable birds of the day: Middle Spotted Woodpecker and Serin.

### **Friday, 26th September 2003**

Route taken: Hotel – Mezokovesd – Borsodivanka – Poroszlo – Lake Tisza – Patkos – Hortobagy (Omat Fish Ponds) – Patkos Motel.

We left the Fenyvesi Hotel by 8.30 a.m. and did some more bird watching in the Bukk National Park looking for Imperial Eagles before moving to the Heves grasslands and the Hortobagy National Park area and accommodation at the Patkos Motel near Tiszafured.

On arrival at the Motel we were put into a chalet – style building that was basic but o.k. I could only just get into the bathroom and to help out the bathroom door was removed. A ramp was provided for our chalet and John's accommodation.

Temperatures ranged from 10c to 23c. The weather was dry with a strong breeze.

The number of birds seen and their variety were a welcome change from yesterday's hard graft.

Notable birds for the day: Lesser Spotted Eagle, Great Grey Shrike, Red-footed Falcon, Long-legged Buzzard, Yellow-legged Gull, Ferruginous Duck, Great White Egret, Pygmy Cormorant, Great White Egret, Kingfisher, Penduline Tit and White Stork.

Other interesting sights: Danube Clouded Yellow butterflies, Red Squirrel, Red Deer.

### **Saturday, 27th September 2003**

Route taken: Motel – Csecsi Fish Ponds – Hortobagy Village – Angyalhaza Puszta – Fenyves Fish Ponds – Motel

We spent the day in Hortobagy National Park and saw many interesting birds. Principally the White-tailed Eagle. We said goodbye to Szabolcs and were joined by his brother "Ben".

"Ben" managed to get me on and off the bus o.k. but it was more of a struggle for him.

Temperatures ranged from 12c to 23c. It was sunny with some wind.

Notable birds for the day: White-tailed Eagle, Bearded Tit, Spoonbill, Red-backed Shrike, Crested Lark, Common Crane, Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Hobby, Syrian Woodpecker, Black-necked Grebe and Dotterel.

### **Sunday, 28 September 2003**

Route taken: Motel – Nagyivan Puszta (bustards) – Borzas (Goshawk) – Tiszafured – Motel

We breakfasted early because to meet Dr. Gabor Kovacs an expert on the Hortobagy N.P. who kindly showed us around certain parts of the Park where we were able to see Great Bustard, Saker Falcon, Dotterel and Stone Curlew.

After further touring the Hortobagy National Park we returned to base for a while and then went in to the town of Tiszfured to seek out the Syrian Woodpeckers. This time we were unlucky.

Temperatures ranged between 12c and 29c and the weather was sunny with no wind.

Other notable birds: Bittern, Great White Egret, Hen Harrier, Goshawk, Crested Lark, and Red-throated Pipit.

### **Monday, 29 September 2003**

Route taken: Motel – Csecsi Fish Ponds (Caspian Gull), Hortobagy Village – Balmazujvaros (Orchards) – Darassa Puszta – Tiszacsege (River) – Ohat Ponds – Motel

On our last day we toured the Hortobagy (north part) and bird watched throughout the day. Notable birds seen: Caspian Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Spotted Redshank, Spoonbill, Pygmy Cormorant, Saker, White Stork, Little Owl, White-tailed Eagle and Penduline Tit.

### **Tuesday, 30 September 2003**

We were having breakfast at 7.00 p.m. and on our way to the airport in Budapest by 8.00 a.m. Once again, we saw an Imperial Eagle from the motorway before entering Budapest. We had a grand tour of a very pretty city and arrived at the airport in good time. The flight was on time and the two-hour plus trip went without a hitch.

We thoroughly enjoyed our trip, despite the non – disabled friendly facilities. I was impressed with the prettiness of Hungary, its lovely capital – Budapest – and the good road system that is far less congested than U.K. roads.

The habitats visited and the birds seen in the north-east of the country were a nice change from U.K. bird areas and birds. I will always remember the wonderful flights of the Cranes over the Hortobagy. Apparently, this has been a record year for them with over 82,000 flying through on their annual migration.