

Birds, Nature & Culture in the Heart of Europe with Naturalist Journeys



June 19 – 30, 2023

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Join us to explore the heart of Europe in Austria and Hungary. Enjoy European birding at its best, and with our expert local guide, Gerard Gorman, we highlight the region's other wildlife, plants, interesting heritage livestock breeds, and fine historic architecture. We enjoy local foods and even visit an old winery in Hungary!

Our route takes us from Vienna to Budapest, visiting the many different and wonderful birding habitats in between. Because of their past Cold War era isolation, many of these border zone places became refuges for wildlife and today some areas have indeed been designated as wildlife preserves.

We stay in small hotels and guesthouses with en-suite rooms and local cuisine, and of course good birding locations nearby. This is central Europe at its finest!

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy walks through scenic mountains, pastures, flower-filled meadows, and forests in search of Golden Eagle and a host of woodpeckers (Gerard Gorman's specialty): Eurasian Green, Grey-headed, Black, White-backed, Middle Spotted, Lesser Spotted, and Syrian.
- Explore Neusiedler See-Seewinkel NP in Austria and Ferto-Hanság NP in Hungary that together protect the mixed wetland habitats around the scenic steppe lake of Neusiedler
- Discover cross-border habitats of both countries that include salt-lakes, saline-marshes, fens, traditionally managed pastures, grazing meadows, and wet woods, looking for breeding shorebirds like Kentish Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Pied Avocet, and Black-winged Stilt
- Bird through Hungary to Kiskunság National Park on the Hungarian Great Plain in search of Great Bustard
- Spend two nights in a rural village at a traditional, family-run guest house in the Bükk Hills
- Search for nine species of woodpecker in the Bükk Hills, as well as Roe and Red Deer, Red Squirrel, Imperial Eagle, and many butterflies on the wing

Tour Summary

12-Day / 11-Night Central European Tour with Gerard Gorman

\$3990 DBL / \$4540 SGL, from Vienna, Austria, departing Budapest, Hungary

Arrival airport is Vienna Intl. (VIE), departure airport is Budapest Ferenc Liszt Intl. (BUD)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Mon., June 19 Vienna | Alpine Foothills

Welcome to Austria! Our tour begins in Vienna at Noon. From the airport/hotel we drive into alpine foothills, which begin after about an hour's drive to the southwest. We bird as we go (be sure to pack your binoculars in your carry on!), enjoying a packed lunch in a suitably birdy spot. This evening we have a late afternoon check in at our family-run guesthouse where we spend the next three nights.

Accommodations at a family-run Gasthof Vralpen Eschenau guest house in the foothills (L,D)

** This is an ideal time to explore Vienna ahead of the tour, you might consider coming early to explore a bit and rest up from your travels.

Tues., June 20 & Wed., June 21 Foothills Birding

Enjoy the next two full days to bird the surrounding scenic mountains, pastures, meadows, and forests outside of Vienna on moderately-paced and scenic walks. Montane and conifer forest birds here include Golden Eagle, Stock Dove, Eurasian Green, Grey-headed, Black, White-backed, and Eurasian Three-toed

Woodpeckers, Common Crossbill, and Spotted Nutcracker. Smaller passerines are lovely and represent a great mix of European breeding species: Western Bonelli's, Wood and Willow Warblers, Crested, Willow, and Coal Tits, Common Treecreeper, Firecrest, Goldcrest, Collared and Red-breasted Flycatchers, Fieldfare, Ring Ouzel, Black Redstart, Tree Pipit, European Greenfinch, Hawfinch should be raising young and announcing their presence with song. Walking along local streams, we hope to spot Common Kingfisher, White-bellied Dipper, and Grey Wagtail. Wildflowers should abound!

Accommodations at a family-run Gasthof Voralpen Eschenau guest house in the foothills (B,L,D)

Thurs., June 22 Neusiedler See-Seewinkel & Ferto-Hansag National Parks

After a lovely few days in the mountains, today we move eastward and down in elevation to the plains along the Austro-Hungarian border. Here two cross-frontier National Parks— Neusiedler See-Seewinkel in Austria and Ferto-Hansag in Hungary — meet to protect the mixed wetland habitats around the large steppe lake of Neusiedler. A large, shallow, saline closed basin or terminal lake, the Neusiedler See covers over 122 square miles, though on average is no deeper than 5 feet. This is very productive bird habitat and also a great place for butterflies and wildflowers. Additionally, we take an easy birding walk on the grounds of Eszterházy Palace at Fertőd, known as the Hungarian Versailles. This beautiful palace is near our hotel, as well as some “Iron Curtain” remains, giving us time to enjoy birds, butterflies, culture, politics, and history all in one area.

We spend three nights just over the border in Hungary at the heart of this great area, a fine example of a former border zone that became a wildlife paradise.

Accommodations at the Polgarmester Guesthouse (B,L,D)

Fri., June 23 & Sat., June 24 Exploring Cross-Border Habitats

We spend the next two days exploring the cross-border habitats of this diverse region — salt-lakes, saline-marshes, fens, traditionally managed pastures, grazing meadows, and wet woods. Breeding shorebirds here include Kentish Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Pied Avocet, and Black-winged Stilt.

Vast reed-beds are a haven for nesting bitterns, grebes, herons, and rails. This is also a particularly good area for finding wetland songbirds like Penduline Tit. We should also see White and Black Storks, Little, Black-necked, and Great Crested Grebes, Gadwall, Garganey, Northern Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Common and Red-crested Pochards, White-tailed Eagle, Green Sandpiper, Whinchat, Common Stonechat, Bluethroat and Icterine, Savi's, Sedge, Marsh, and Great Reed Warblers, Common Cuckoo, Eurasian Wryneck, Syrian Woodpecker, Golden Oriole, Woodlark, Red-backed Shrike, Common Nightingale, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Common and Lesser Whitethroats, and Yellowhammer. Raptors include Western Marsh Harrier, Eurasian Hobby, Honey Buzzard, and Eurasian Sparrowhawk. These are sure to be bird-filled days! We will also visit the impressive gardens of the spectacular Eszterhazy Chateau where Haydn and other composers played.

Accommodations at the Polgarmester Guesthouse (B,L,D)

Sun., June 25 Birding Through Hungary to Kiskunság National Park

Today we move on eastwards, deeper into Hungary, birding as we go. Our final destination is Kiskunság National Park on the Great Hungarian Plain, a flat and fertile lowland that extends into Croatia, Serbia and Romania as well as southeastern Hungary where we spend the next three nights.

Before we reach our destination, we make stops in areas where two very special eastern European raptors reside: Eastern Imperial Eagle and Saker Falcon — Hungary has the strongest population in Europe of both.

Other birds en route should include Turtle Dove, European Roller, the blue-headed race of Yellow Wagtail, Crested Lark, Corn Bunting, and more White Stork on their roadside nests. We arrive in Kiskunság in the late afternoon.

On one of our evenings here we search for Eurasian Scops Owl and European Nightjar.

Accommodations at the Kunsagi Major Ranch (B,L,D)

Mon., June 26 & Tues., June 27 Kiskunság National Park

Over the next two days we explore in the Kiskunság's grasslands, marshes, and reed-fringed fish-farms. A UNESCO biosphere reserve, the park provides refuge for tens of thousands of migratory birds as well as resident species. The wetlands here host some birds which we may have seen in the previous days, but also some others of a more easterly distribution such as Pygmy Cormorant, Ferruginous Duck, and Little Crake. Ponds have colonies of Whiskered Tern and marshes host Black and White-winged Terns in most years. Purple Heron and Little and Great White Egrets are fairly common. Some Mediterranean Gull breed amongst the Black-headed Gull, and both the recently split Yellow-legged and Caspian Gulls can be compared here.

The other main habitat is *puszta* (lowland grazing land) and we explore it for the magnificent Great Bustard, Hungary's national bird. Other species include Collared Pratincole, Stone Curlew, Little and Long-eared Owls, and Lesser Grey Shrike. Raptors include Long-legged Buzzard, Montagu's Harrier, Saker Falcon, and Red-footed Falcon, the latter breeding in colonies at this time.

Accommodations at the Kunsagi Major Ranch (B,L,D)

Wed., June 28 Bükk Hills

Today we move northeast to the Bükk Hills, one of a series of forested hill ranges that run across the north of the country. As usual, we stop for birds as we go. We spend two nights here in a wonderful, family-run guesthouse in a rural village. The food, drink, and hospitality here is tremendous — don't expect to lose any weight on this holiday! This was our favorite place on past adventures and we look forward to a return.

Accommodations at Hotel Nomad in Noszvaj, a fine country hotel in the Bükk Hills (B,L,D)

Thurs., June 29 Bükk Hills

We spend the entire day in the pleasant rolling country of the Bükk, a limestone region typified by orchards, vineyards, and woodlands with clearings. The most diverse mountain system in Hungary, the Bükk Hills and associated valleys are rich in biodiversity, rich with wildflowers, butterflies and other insects along with birds.

Nine species of woodpecker are here and we search in particular for any that we may have missed on the previous days. As author of *Woodpeckers of the World*, our local guide Gerard Gorman knows where to find them!

Birds around our country hotel include Tawny Owl, Spotted Flycatcher, Serin, Black Redstart, Long-tailed and Marsh Tits, Hawfinch, both Common and Short-toed Treecreepers, Eurasian Nuthatch, and Song Thrush. There are colonies of European Bee-eater nearby and raptors above the hills include Lesser Spotted and Short-toed Eagles and Common Goshawk.

Other wildlife includes Roe and Red Deer, Red Squirrel, and Wild Boar and many butterflies on the wing.

Accommodations at Hotel Nomad in Noszvaj, a fine country hotel in the Bükk Hills (B,L,D)

Fri., June 30 Departures

After breakfast we head for Budapest, a two-hour drive. We take you to your Budapest hotel if you are staying on in the city, or to the airport if you are flying home today. Again, it's a grand time to extend your vacation with some city time if you wish to explore. (B,L)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#). Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

The cost of the journey, **\$3990 DBL / \$4540 SLG** from Vienna, Austria, is based on double occupancy and includes: airport transfers, accommodations for 11 nights, meals as noted in the itinerary, professional guide services, local guides, local park and reserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. It does not include roundtrip airfare to Vienna and from Budapest, or items of a personal nature such as: laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities. With fewer than six participants, a small group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300 per participant) may apply.

Travel Information

Arrive on June 19 no later than 12:00 PM at Vienna International Airport (VIE). We recommend arriving at least one day ahead of time so that flight delays, etc. don't interfere with you arriving in time for the start of the trip. We can recommend hotels in Vienna; please ask. Please plan flights out after 1:00 PM on June 30 from Budapest Ferenc Liszt International Airport (BUD).

Photo Credits

European Kingfisher, Tom Dove (TD); Little Ringed Plover, Gerard Gorman (GG); Orchards near Eschenau, GG; Hoopoe, GG; Great Bustard, GG; Hawfinch, GG.

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