

## TRANSYLVANIA 2007

“Once more our Hortobagy-Transylvania pairing proved to be the perfect sandwich albeit one with no bread either side: just three layers of filling.

Our first 24 hours in Hungary provided the by-now traditional combination of quantity and quality – over a hundred species including several on the IUCN Red List and six of world conservation importance: Lesser White-fronted Goose, Eastern Imperial Eagle, and Great Bustard (all globally threatened species), plus Pygmy Cormorant, Ferruginous Duck, and White-tailed Eagle (all ‘near threatened’). The equally-impressive supporting cast ranged throughout the whole spectrum of both non-passerines and passerines, from Great Bittern to Corn Bunting and including Black-crowned Night Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill, Common Shelduck, Garganey, Pallid Harrier, Saker, Crane, Avocet, Stone Curlew, a trip of 22 Dotterel, Little Stint, Spotted Redshank, Whiskered Tern, Little Owl, Kingfisher, Red-throated Pipit, Bearded Tit, Eurasian Penduline Tit, and Great Grey Shrike. It would be difficult to imagine a better day’s birding anywhere in Europe.

Even so, our travelling day which followed added 17 new species: Little, Great Crested, and Red-necked Grebes, Little Egret, Black Stork, Tufted Duck, Sparrowhawk, Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone (a rarity so far from the coast), Common Gull, Syrian Woodpecker, white-headed Long-tailed Tit, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, Greenfinch, and Hawfinch. And our arrival at our destination in Transylvania, as in all the best stories and films, coincided with a full moon.

Our first walk in Transylvania yielded a classic high-altitude coniferous-forest selection: Goshawk, Three-toed Woodpecker, (satisfying ‘scope views), close comparisons of Goldcrest and Firecrest and Marsh and Willow Tits, Crested Tit, Coal Tit, Common Treecreeper, Nutcracker (both in flight and perched), Siskin, Crossbill, a pair of obliging Bullfinches beside the track, and over a hundred Hawfinches – plus Water Pipits and Grey Wagtails on the mountain top. We went to bed happy and content as the day closed with views of a magnificent tawny-shouldered European Brown Bear.

Memorable images from the following day included a singing Ring Ouzel perched like the fairy on a Christmas Tree and a Dipper posing on a mid stream rock with a Fire Salamander at its feet. But bird of the day (indeed voted bird of the trip, only two points short of the possible maximum) was a Wallcreeper - more butterfly than bird (and understandably known in China as the ‘rock flower’) - which semaphored close and continuous until we eventually walked away.

Another full moon later saw us back in the coniferous forest at 5000 feet with a picnic breakfast and lunch in the hotel was followed by a visit to Szentpáli fishponds (another Great Bittern plus Hobby and Purple Heron which were new for us) and to Kaloda beech forest and meadows (Woodlarks, Green Woodpeckers, and Fieldfares).

Then came atmospheric Sighisoara with its film-set main square, romantic castle and clock tower, and photogenic old houses which still looks largely as it did when Dracula lived there in the fifteenth century. Equally photogenic - and equally evocative of life in times gone by - were the houses in the UNESCO World Heritage Village of Torocko, some of which housed us for our final night in Transylvania. Coinciding with their annual festival, we were able to enjoy not only the usual home-cooked produce and local brandies but also optional music and dancing well into the night. Others preferred to dream of the day’s birding highlights - Rock Buntings, and another Woodlark, Peregrine and pole-dancing Green Woodpeckers, one of which narrowly missed being grabbed by a Goshawk just yards in front of us.

Back in the Hortobagy, our tight schedule worked to perfection: almost instant Middle Spotted Woodpeckers and Short-toed Treecreepers in Debrecen great wood; thirty Long-eared Owls in Balmazújváros town centre and Wood Sandpiper at the sewage farm; and Long-legged Buzzard and Northern Wheatear at Szeg - leaving us time to drive out over Cserepes puszta to await in absolute silence the evening flight of the Lesser Whitefronts from the fishponds to a grazing area.

## TRANSYLVANIA: Bird List...2

On cue they came - a flock of fifty with four more following (half the European population of Europe's rarest breeding bird). Carefully we stalked and 'scoped until we were close enough to see not only the curving white on their baby-face profiles but also the yellow orbital rings around their eyes. A magical moment with the silence now broken by the thrilling bugling of endless lines of Cranes strung out above us.

This alone would have made a sufficient grand finale. But our final morning was no anticlimax. A return visit to the Hortobagy fishpond where we began presented us not only with a welcome reprise of a range of species from Spoonbill to Bearded Tit (over a hundred of them and feeding on the path just yards ahead of us) but also a White Pelican (a new bird for Bryan's Hungary list and only the second for Zoltan) and the first Tundra Bean Goose of the winter flying in to join thousands of Greylags and a smaller flock of Lesser Whitethroats in the bright morning sunlight. A wonderful finish.

A significant feature of this year's trip was our amazing luck with the weather - dry sunny days which enabled us to drive to many localities inaccessible in wet conditions (despite the four days of continuous rain in the Hortobagy between our two visits). This, and the coincidence of the full moon, gave us magnificent sunrises and sunsets and thrilling moon views - at times as red as the sun, at others as pale as a primrose. Other bonuses were the fine lunches at Hortobagy czarda (with gypsy cimbalon, violin, and doublebass trio entertaining us) and the Tiszacsege czarda (surely the tastiest fish soup ever), together with the varied evening meals washed down with surprisingly fine wines, local beers, and fruit brandies. Mountains and puszta looked equally photogenic in the clear light and never have the autumn colours looked more splendid." Bryan Bland

### Bird List:

This is a list of all the species seen during the last three tours to Transylvania.

Column A = Number of tours on which this species has been recorded

Column B = Number of days this species was seen on the last tour

Column C = Maximum daily count for this species on the last tour

H = Heard only

A		B	C	
3	Little Grebe	4	45	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
3	Great Crested Grebe	2	1000	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
3	Red-necked Grebe	1	1	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>
2	Black-necked Grebe			<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
1	White Pelican	1	1	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>
3	Great Cormorant	4	60	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
3	Pygmy Cormorant	1	3	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>
2	Great Bittern	2	1	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
1	Little Bittern			<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
3	Black-crowned Night Heron	1	3	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
2	Squacco Heron			<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
1	Cattle Egret			<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
3	Little Egret	1	1	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
3	Great Egret	6	100	<i>Egretta alba</i>
3	Grey Heron	6	80	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
3	Purple Heron	1	1	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
3	Black Stork	1	1	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
2	White Stork			<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>

TRANSYLVANIA: Bird List...3

3	Eurasian Spoonbill	2	20		<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
3	Mute Swan	1	2		<i>Cygnus olor</i>
2	White-fronted Goose				<i>Anser albifrons</i>
3	Lesser White-fronted Goose	3	54		<i>Anser erythropus</i>
2	Taiga Bean Goose	1	2		<i>Anser (fabalis) fabalis</i>
1	Tundra Bean Goose	1	1		<i>Anser (fabalis) rossicus</i>
3	Greylag Goose	4	000s		<i>Anser anser</i>
1	Barnacle Goose				<i>Branta leucopsis</i>
2	Common Shelduck	1	1		<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
3	Wigeon	5	15		<i>Anas penelope</i>
3	Gadwall	4	300		<i>Anas strepera</i>
3	Teal	5	4000		<i>Anas crecca</i>
3	Mallard	6	2000		<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
3	Pintail	3	25		<i>Anas acuta</i>
2	Garganey	3	4		<i>Anas querquedula</i>
1	Blue Winged Teal				<i>Anas discors</i>
3	Shoveler	5	200		<i>Anas clypeata</i>
3	Pochard	2	120		<i>Aythya farina</i>
3	Ferruginous Duck	1	10		<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
3	Tufted Duck	2	7		<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
2	White-tailed Eagle	2	5		<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
3	Marsh Harrier	6	8		<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
3	Hen Harrier	2	2		<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
2	Pallid Harrier	1	1		<i>Circus macrourus</i>
3	Goshawk	2	2		<i>Accipiter gentiles</i>
3	Sparrowhawk	4	5		<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
3	Common Buzzard	9	40		<i>Buteo buteo</i>
3	Long-legged Buzzard	1	1		<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
1	Honey Buzzard	1	1		<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
1	Spotted Eagle				<i>Aquila pomarina</i>
3	Eastern Imperial Eagle	1	3		<i>Aquila heliaca</i>
2	Golden Eagle				<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
1	Short-toed Eagle				<i>Circaetus gallieus</i>
3	Kestrel	7	40		<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
2	Red-footed Falcon				<i>Falco vespertinus</i>
3	Hobby	1	1		<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
3	Saker	2	2		<i>Falco cherrug</i>
2	Peregrine Falcon	1	1		<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
1	Merlin				<i>Falco columbarius</i>
1	Hazel Grouse				<i>Bonasa bonasia</i>
2	Capercaillie	1	2		<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>
1	Grey Partridge				<i>Perdis perdis</i>
3	Common Pheasant	6	6		<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
3	Water Rail	2	1	H	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>
1	Little Crake				<i>Porzana parva</i>
2	Common Moorhen				<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
3	Eurasian Coot	4	200		<i>Fulica atra</i>
3	Common Crane	5	000's		<i>Grus grus</i>
3	Great Bustard	1	5		<i>Otis tarda</i>
3	Pied Avocet	3	24		<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
3	Stone-curlew	1	12		<i>Burhinus oedinemus</i>
3	Little Ringed Plover	2	5		<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
3	Ringed Plover	3	8		<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
3	Grey Plover	1	1		<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
3	Dotterel	1	22		<i>Eudromyas morinellus</i>
1	Golden Plover				<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>

TRANSYLVANIA: Bird List...4

3	Northern Lapwing	5	400	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
1	Sanderling	1	2	<i>Calidris alba</i>
1	Ruddy Turnstone	1	1	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
3	Little Stint	3	12	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
3	Dunlin	3	80	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
3	Ruff	4	25	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
1	Buff Breasted Sandpiper			<i>Tryngites subruficollis</i>
3	Common Snipe	4	60	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
3	Black-tailed Godwit	2	80	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
1	Bar-tailed Godwit			<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
3	Eurasian Curlew	5	95	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
3	Spotted Redshank	4	35	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
2	Common Redshank			<i>Tringa tetanus</i>
3	Common Greenshank	1	8	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
3	Wood Sandpiper	1	2	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
1	Green Sandpiper			<i>Tringa ochruros</i>
3	Common Sandpiper	1	3	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
3	Black-headed Gull	5	1200	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
3	Common Gull	2	1	<i>Larus canus</i>
1	Lesser Black-backed Gull			<i>Larus fuscus</i>
3	Caspian Gull	4	100	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
1	Little Gull			<i>Larus minutus</i>
3	Yellow-legged Gull	4	20	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
3	Whiskered Tern	1	1	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>
2	Black Tern			<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
2	Feral Pigeon	9	100	<i>Columba livia</i>
2	Stock Dove			<i>Columba oenas</i>
3	Woodpigeon	5	60	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
3	Collared Dove	9	00s	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
3	Little Owl	2	1	<i>Athene noctua</i>
1	Ural Owl			<i>Strix uralensis</i>
3	Long-eared Owl	2	30	<i>Asio otus</i>
3	Common Kingfisher	2	2	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
1	Grey-headed Woodpecker			<i>Picus canus</i>
3	Green Woodpecker	4	4	<i>Picus viridis</i>
1	Black Woodpecker			<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
3	Great Spotted Woodpecker	7	2	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
3	Syrian Woodpecker	2	2	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>
3	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	1	2	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>
1	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker			<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>
3	Three-toed Woodpecker	1	2	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>
3	Crested Lark	5	12	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
3	Wood Lark	2	10	<i>Lullua arborea</i>
3	Sand Martin	2	10	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
3	Barn Swallow	4	800	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
1	Red-rumped Swallow			<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
2	House Martin	1	20	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
3	Eurasian Skylark	5	50	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
3	Meadow Pipit	1	1	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
2	Tree Pipit	1	1	H <i>Anthus trivialis</i>
3	Red-throated Pipit	2	4	H <i>Anthus cervinus</i>
3	Water Pipit	1	6	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
3	Grey Wagtail	2	4	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
3	White Wagtail	9	00s	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
3	Yellow Wagtail	1	6	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
3	Dipper	1	2	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>

TRANSYLVANIA: Bird List...5

3	Wren	7	2	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
3	Dunnock	1	1	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
3	Robin	8	10	<i>Erithacus rubecola</i>
1	Bluethroat			<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
2	Common Redstart	1	1	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
3	Black Redstart	5	7	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
3	Whinchat	3	3	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
3	Stonechat	7	20	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
3	Northern Wheatear	1	1	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
3	Common Blackbird	6	4	<i>Turdus merula</i>
1	Ring Ouzel	1	1	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>
3	Fieldfare	4	6	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>
2	Song Thrush	2	6	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
3	Mistle Thrush	3	40	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
1	Savi's Warbler	1	1	H <i>Locustella luscinioides</i>
3	Sedge Warbler	1	4	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
1	Moustached Warbler			<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>
2	European Reed Warbler	1	4	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
1	Blackcap			<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
1	Lesser Whitethroat			<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
3	Chiffchaff	5	20	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
3	Willow Warbler	3	6	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
3	Goldcrest	5	20	H <i>Regulus regulus</i>
2	Firecrest	2	3	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
3	Spotted Flycatcher	1	1	<i>Musicapa striata</i>
3	Bearded Tit	2	100	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>
2	Long-tailed Tit	2	12	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
3	Marsh Tit	4	1	<i>Parus palustris</i>
3	Willow Tit	3	5	<i>Parus montanus.</i>
3	Crested Tit	3	4	<i>Parus cristatus</i>
3	Coal Tit	3	20	<i>Parus ater</i>
3	Blue Tit	6	30	<i>Parus caeruleus.</i>
3	Great Tit	6	25	<i>Parus major</i>
3	Nuthatch	3	8	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
3	Wallcreeper	1	1	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>
3	Treecreeper	2	4	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
3	Short-toed Treecreeper	1	2	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
3	Eurasian Penduline Tit	1	20	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>
3	Red-backed Shrike	1	2	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
3	Great Grey Shrike	5	4	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
3	Magpie	9	60	<i>Pica pica</i>
3	Eurasian Jay	7	40	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
3	Nutcracker	2	3	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>
3	Western Jackdaw	9	00s	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
3	Rook	8	1000	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
3	Hooded Crow	9	00s	<i>Corvus corone</i>
3	Common Raven	5	12	<i>Corvus corax</i>
3	Common Starling	9	10000	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
3	House Sparrow	9	00s	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
3	Tree Sparrow	7	150	<i>Passer montanus</i>
3	Common Chaffinch	8	200	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
1	Brambling			<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
1	Serin			<i>Serinus serinus</i>
3	GreenFinch	3	8	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
3	Goldfinch	3	40	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
3	Siskin	3	30	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>

## TRANSYLVANIA: Bird List...6

3	Common Linnet	3	40	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
3	Common Crossbill	3	20	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
2	Bullfinch	1	2	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
3	Hawfinch	3	100	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
3	Yellowhammer	4	20	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
1	Cirl Bunting			<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
3	Rock Bunting	1	10	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
3	Common Reed Bunting	2	20	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
3	Corn Bunting	1	50	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>