

Hungary

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 – 8

The entire holiday will be spent exploring the varied habitats of the Kiskunsag National Park within easy reach of the Kondor Eco-lodge.

After arriving at Budapest airport, we will be met by our Ecotours guide, Gabor Orban, who will also be our host with his wife at Kondor Eco-Lodge. We could reach the Kondor within a ninety minute drive from the airport, but it would be hard to miss stopping at some of the Upper Kiskunsag habitats, either at a wetland forest with several woodpeckers (Black, Middle Spotted and Lesser Spotted), Collared Flycatcher, Black Stork and butterflies such as Map and Eastern Short-tailed Blue. Or we might stop at some typical grassland habitat with our first songbirds (Corn Bunting, Stonechat) and raptors around. En route you will be treated to coffee, cappuchino, tea and some other goodies. We will arrive at our hotel in the middle of the Kiskunsag National Park to leave enough time to look around, rest a bit and prepare for a great dinner.

Our first full day will be spent at and around our accommodation. Here the air is full of the trills and songs of nesting Chaffinches, Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Swallows, Chiffchaffs, Black Redstarts, Stonechats, Blackcaps, Mistle Thrushes and Willow Warblers. Tree Sparrow and Common Redstart are also a possibility, both have been breeding species in the garden recently. We'll hear the fluting of Golden Orioles and the bubbling sounds of Bee-eaters or female Cuckoos. Various resident woodpeckers in or nearby the garden include Lesser Spotted and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Wryneck and Green Woodpecker.

The hotel is situated in some great habitat, we don't even need to use the vehicles for some of our trips! Trails and rural, sandy dirt roads meander through a flat area dotted by small forest patches, grasslands and a lake. The surrounding area is very good for Rollers and Bee-eaters, in fact they are some of the most common birds! Nearby Syrian and Black Woodpecker are found and Turtle Dove occurs as well. We should find Tawny Pipit, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrike as well. Hoopoe, Tree Pipit, Corn Bunting, Whinchat, Nightingale, Crested Lark and Yellow Wagtail all have good populations. It is not uncommon to hear and see Hawfinch, Garden Warbler, Linnet or Spotted Flycatcher either. The nearby extensive sand dunes covered with different *Stipa* species in the central part of the National Park are ideal for Woodlark populations.

Kiskunsag has an unusual mixture of habitats with sand dunes, special forest steppes, mainly oak and juniper and sand steppes or sand 'puszta' plus alkaline, salt lakes. Thus it is an endemic hotspot for plant and wildflower species. During the first half of June we can discover these various habitats and find a wide variety of unusual local flora, most of the following species will be in flower: Endemics include

Onosma arenaria and *Plantago schwarzenbergiana*. Some of the other species include *Alkanna tinctoria*, *Artemisia santonicum*, *Astragalus dasyanthus*, *Cephalantera rubra*, *Dactylorhiza incarnata*, *Pseudovina-Festuca pseudovina*, *Filipendula vulgaris*, *Fumana procumbens*, *Gymnadenia conopsea*, *Matricaria recutita*, *Ophrys insectifera*, *Ophrys scolopax ssp. cornuta*, *Orchis militaris*, Green-winged Orchid-*Orchis morio*, *Thymus pannonicus* and *Thymus glabrescens*.

During the evenings we offer short night walks to listen to Scops Owl and Tawny Owl. Little Owl usually can be found at nearby farms during the day as well. But the highlight of the after dinner programmes is surely the Nightjar Walk when you can not just hear, but with some luck also witness up-close the display flight of these fascinating birds.

Butterflies seen around the lodge garden, depending on how advanced the Spring is, are Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, Comma, Peacock, Painted Lady and hopefully the first Common Gliders. We'll see the caterpillars of Southern Festoons on *Aristolochias* too. During our daily trips there are many other species possible to find, ranging from various Blues (Short-tailed, Eastern Short-tailed, Common, Provençal Short-tailed, etc.) through various Fritillaries to Graylings and Skippers.

Those who are interested in moths will be delighted to see that during the evenings our lights in front of the large white walls of our buildings attract several different species of moth and we now run a professional moth trap similar to a Robinson trap on suitable nights here. Plus during our daily outings we can find some further species. Kiskunsag has several specialities, some are very localised, others relatively common. Depending on location and timing some of the possibilities are: *Narrage tessularia pannonicus*, *Semiothisa/Diastictis artesiarica*, *Eucrostes Indigenatus*, *Rhyparioides Metelkana*, *Orthosia Schmidtii*, *Aspilates formosarios pannonicus*, *Coleophora eupepla*, *Coleophora pilicornis*, *Metzneria ehikeella*, *Oprosamma wertheimsteini*, *Zygaena laeta*, *Porphyria pannonica*, *Oxytripia orbiculosa*, *Staurophara celsia*, Peppered Moth (*Biston betularius*), *Tephronia sepiaria*, *Cucullia tanacetii*, Spurge Hawk, Bedstraw Hawk, Goat Moth (*Cossus cossus*).

Close to the Kondor Eco-Hotel it is easy to observe different mammal species such as Roe Deer, Brown Hare, Eastern Hedgehog, Red Fox and European Sousek, which looks like a kind of ground squirrel. Golden Jackals are often seen close to the property now. Other mammal species occur in the surrounding area but are much harder to see, these include Russian/Eversmann's Polecat, Southern Birch Mouse, Root Vole, Pond Bat, Otter and Badger.

One of the typical habitats of Kiskunsag is the flat plain of the "puszta" which has several different habitat types ranging from dry grassland to marshy meadows. Kiskunsag grassland is the typical habitat for Great Bustard with the largest population not just in Hungary, but in all Europe! On one of the days we can travel to the grassland area where we have a good chance of enjoying the view of the enormous males, quite an unforgettable experience! This area is also home for Stone Curlew, Tawny Pipit, Lesser Grey Shrike, Northern Wheatear, and a perfect hunting area for some great raptors such as Imperial Eagle, Red-footed Falcon,

Saker Falcon. Certain species are adapted to the agricultural fields and nest at the edge of these areas. This is where we can search for an occasional Black-winged Pratincole among the Collared Pratincoles. Long-eared and Little Owl usually can be found around farm houses.

During the days we will check the most important natural alkaline lakes which generally have very high salt and mineral concentrations. Different species can be found at gravel pits filled with water and alongside the canals connecting River Tisza or River Danube with drier areas. Floodplains of River Tisza and its several oxbow lakes are also perfect birding spots. This is where we will look for breeding Avocet, Redshank, Black Winged Stilt, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Kentish Plover, Pygmy Cormorant, Black-necked Grebe, Little Grebe, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Night Heron, Spoonbill, Common Snipe and Kingfisher. It is usually easier to hear than to see Great Bittern, Corncrake, Spotted Crake and Little Crake, but we should be able to get a glimpse of some of these species as well. Beside the numerous Marsh Harriers we should find Montagu's Harrier, but White-tailed Eagle or Saker Falcon cause much bigger alarm amongst the flocks of Ferruginous Duck, Shoveler, Garganey and Red-crested Pochard. Terns will be represented by Common and Whiskered Tern and during "wet years" Black and White-winged Black Terns are present as well. Alongside Black-headed and Yellow-legged Gulls there are nice colonies of Mediterranean Gulls. Reed beds are teeming with Penduline Tit, Bearded Reedling, Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Moustached Warbler, Sedge and Reed Warbler. Alongside the rivers are the so called "gallery forests" or riparian forests where we should find Lesser Spotted and Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Black Woodpecker and Black Storks, plus plenty of Golden Orioles.

Depending on timing, alongside the rivers and lakes there are always different really great dragonfly species to be found such as Migrant Spreadwing/Southern Emerald Damselfly, Lesser Emperor, Emperor Dragonfly, Yellow-spotted Whiteface, Norfolk Hawker, Ruddy Darter and Spotted Darter.

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