

Birds

Routes 1 and 5 are particularly suited for finding marshland species, with the addition of route 4 during wet years. Route 1 and 8 should be scheduled for the steppe birds, in particular the raptors. To see the rare steppe birds (including Great Bustard) you should book a guided tour (route 7). Birds of the river floodplain are best observed along route 9 and, to a lesser extent, routes 2 and 3. A birdwatching guide is provided on page 169.

The Hortobágy has an attractive landscape, a fascinating natural and cultural history and an interesting flora, but its international fame lies in its birdlife. On any list of the best bird-watching sites in Europe, the Hortobágy would appear in the top ten. There are only few areas with such a year-round wealth of birds. Moreover, in the Hortobágy many species are almost handed to you on a platter, making the area one of the classics that any self-respecting birdwatcher should have visited.

From an ornithological perspective the area's strong point lies in the presence of several 'eastern' bird species that have their westernmost occurrence in the Hortobágy. These are joined by a large number of temperate European and Mediterranean species. Furthermore, the Hortobágy is a major stepping stone in the central European bird migration route, adding yet another dimension to the bird list.



Great White Egrets are probably the most conspicuous birds of the Hortobágy.

For a region that has the reputation of being a dry steppe area, it might come as a surprise that the prime avian attraction lies in the wealth of marshland birds. The Hortobágy is host to large numbers of herons, Spoonbills, cormorants and waterfowl, which are often present in easily surveyed spots, such as the fishponds. British bird expert and traveller, Dave Gosney, has said of the Hortobágy fishponds that “You haven’t done Europe, if you haven’t been here”.



Spoonbills feed in the shallow parts of the fishponds.

The birdlife of the puszta is perhaps the most exotic, featuring several eastern birds of the steppes and steppe woodlands of eastern Romania, Bulgaria and the Ukraine (see page 93).