

Slovakia 2006

Saturday 23 - Saturday 30 April 2006

Leaders:

Keith Grant The Travelling Naturalist, UK
 Martin Hrouzek E Tours, Czech Republic

Local guides:

Dr Du_an Karaska (Sunday)
 Bohu_Murin (Monday)
 Dr Stefan Danko (Wednesday)
 Milo_Balla (Thursday)
 Stefan Matis (Friday evening for bats & Saturday morning)
 Marian & Jan (National Park rangers, the 'bear-men')

Daily Diary

Saturday 22nd April

Arrival

Pleasantly warm with occasional cloud

The four of us met at Heathrow at some unearthly time in the morning to do battle with the Air France queues - oh, the joys of joint check-in desks. Our early Czech Airways flight to Prague, with an onward connection to Kosice, did mean that we arrived just before 2pm to meet up with Martin, who was to be our driver/guide for the week. Two further clients who were to meet us at Prague had unfortunately cancelled at the last minute due to ill health. Apart from a brief refreshment stop in Levo_a, we drove straight through to our hotel near Pribylina. **Ravens**, **Kestrels**, **Buzzards** and a couple of **Lesser Spotted Eagles** were noted en route. We just had time to get into walking boots and fleeces before leaving for one of the bear observation hides. Picking up Marian en route, we settled into one of the hides in the forest. As we approached along the track, we noted **Wolf** poo. We stayed till dusk, no bears but excellent views of **Red Deer**, two hinds and two adolescents. **Song Thrushes** were singing all around us and a large flock of **Chaffinches** were feeding on the spilt corn in front of us. Just at last light, another **Red Deer** appeared, this time a much larger stag with budding antlers in velvet. Back to the hotel for a well-earned dinner.

Sunday 23rd April

Cho_ské Hills

Mixed sunshine & cloud, fine all day until evening

We were away promptly after breakfast to pick up Du_an, our guide for today, our first stop being near Valaská Dubová. We walked up the trail towards the cliffs, finding **Willow Warblers**, **Chiffchaffs** and **Blackcaps** in full song. One or two **Black Redstarts** were seen on the village roof tops. As we crossed an open grassy area, we heard **Tree Pipits**, **Crested Tits** and a **Nutcracker**. The cliffs were being argued over by pairs of **Kestrels** and **Ravens**. *Primula auricula* and the endemic *Pulsatilla slavica* were good plants for the botanists. As we descended, a fine **Stonechat** was spotted. Our next stop near Oravská Poruba produced several **Buzzards** and a nice **Black Stork** flying over. Several **White Stork** nests were occupied in the villages. A picnic lunch near Oravsk_Podzámok nearly resulted in us having coffee in the

restaurant, except that a drumming woodpecker prompted us to another climb up a hillside! A superb male **White-backed Woodpecker** was the result, showing well for all of us in the telescopes. Our final walk near Hru_tín produced more superb views, this time of a really close **Firecrest** at eye level and a little later, a fine **Three-toed Woodpecker** in the scopes. We headed back as time was getting on and we needed to be in the bear hide in good time. This time, we tried a different hide, and the poo along the track was that of **Hazel Grouse**. From the hide, a **Beech Martin** was spotted and the usual many **Chaffinches** were joined by **Jay** and **Wood Pigeons**. As dusk drew on, a **Fox** appeared and made its way slowly across the snow patches.

Monday 24th April

Lú_ky & Be_e_ová Lake

Fine and sunny again, cloudy mid afternoon

Our pre-breakfast trip was a short ride in the vehicle up the road to a neighbouring hotel. Here we immediately found several nice **Ring Ouzels** and **Mistle Thrushes** on the meadow and a **Black Redstart** was singing from the hotel aerial. Along the edge of the spruce forest, we found several **Willow Tits** and walking back, we had an excellent view of a **Crested Tit** perched right at the very tip of a roadside spruce. The massed crocuses, *Crocus heuffelianus*, made a superb sight. After breakfast, we drove again to Ru_omberok to pick up Bohu_, our guide for today. We walked a trail near Lú_ky, climbing slowly through mixed forest, checking several nest-boxes as we went. No sign of the hoped-for Tengmalm's Owl, nor indeed Pygmy Owl, but an immature **Golden Eagle** did fly over, being mobbed by several **Buzzards**. A **Hoopoe** was flushed from a sunny embankment and was most unexpected, especially as we flushed it again on our return. We had several good views of **Nuthatch** and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. Bohu_ showed us a **Goshawk** nest from the trail, and we heard the adult birds calling several times. A **Black Woodpecker** also gave excellent views as it flew low over our heads, though landing somewhat distantly. Another **Buzzard** appeared to be carrying a **Slowworm** as it circled with its mate. We also found a **Song Thrush** on its nest just beside the path. As we returned, a nice **Camberwell Beauty** flitted about us. Returning to the vehicle, we slowly drove back down the road, checking the stream for Dippers, unsuccessfully. Our next stop was to view the manmade lake near Be_e_ová. Here, good numbers of **Tufted Ducks** also included several **Goldeneye**, **Teal**, a male **Shoveler** and a pair of **Garganey**. Raptors overhead and circling the nearby hill included **Buzzards**, **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, and a pair of **Hobby**. We drove back alongside the lake, getting closer to the **Garganey** and **Shoveler**, and also enabling us to be much closer to the **Hobby**. A large female **Goshawk** then flew over. Back to the hotel for an hour or so, before returning yet again to one of the bear hides. As we crossed the bridge, two **Dippers** were on the river, but once in the hide, the only thing of note were two rather distant **Hazel Grouse**. No bears unfortunately this trip, though plenty of footprints at various locations.

Tuesday 25th April

Travel to Zemplin Lake

Fine & sunny, thundery from mid-afternoon

We returned up the track for our pre-breakfast walk, though birds were rather quiet. A fine **Nutcracker** appeared, allowing us excellent views through the telescopes as it perched on the spruces. We walked back along the meadow edge, finding **Wild Boar** tracks, a small **Fire Salamander**, this one plain black with a bright orange belly, and **Montandon's Newt**, a species confined to the Carpathians and Tatras Mountains. After breakfast, while waiting to load the vehicles, two **Red Squirrels** were chasing each other along the forest edge, and a **Coal Tit** showed well as it searched for spiders around the terrace and drainage pipes. These birds look quite pale, having almost white underparts and a plain grey back, lacking the warmer buffy tones of British Coal Tits.

Two roadside stops were due to **Lesser Spotted Eagles** seen during the journey, and then a party of **White Storks** which were presumably non-breeding birds. A coffee stop at the café near

Spi_sk_ Castle included good views of **Serins**, **Tree Sparrows** and **Wood Warblers**. A couple of **Sousliks**, a small ground-squirrel, were seen briefly in a roadside meadow. Another stop near a village for lunch was accompanied by **Skylarks**, and we then headed directly for the Senné fishponds for a couple of hours. The ponds were at varying water levels, with **Little Ringed Plover** in the drier pans, and terns, ducks and grebes in the water-filled ones. There were good numbers of **Whiskered** and **Black Terns**, and the **Little Gulls** were excellent. A single **Common Tern** was seen. **Great Crested Grebe** and a single **Little Grebe** were found and at the last tank we checked, a **Red-necked Grebe**. Small parties of **Greylag Geese** were present, and later in the afternoon, a small group of **Taiga Bean Geese** flew over us. The reserve pool at the far end overlooked by a tower was superb with a large **Black-headed Gull** colony amongst which good numbers of **Black-necked Grebes** were on nests, presumably benefiting from gull protection. Ducks in small numbers included **Shoveler**, **Wigeon**, **Teal** and **Garganey**, though there were higher numbers of **Tufted Duck** and **Pochard** in the deeper water. Waders included a flock of about 100 **Ruff**, though these disappeared as soon as we arrived, a **Wood Sandpiper** was heard, and a **Common Sandpiper** was seen on the edge of the channel near the tower. There were a few **White-winged Black Terns** amongst the others. The wooded island held **Night Herons** and the occasional **Little Egret**. **Savi's**, **Great Reed**, **Reed** and **Sedge Warblers** were all in song and in view at least some of the time. Three **Greenshank** and a **Dunlin** flying over us were our last birds before we left as the wind got up and it started raining, having been thundery and threatening all afternoon.

We headed back through Michalovce, with a stop at Tesco's for fuel and munchies, though one of our group bottled out from offering his clubcard for the points! Check-in at the hotel overlooking the Zemplin Lake, to be greeted by three **Nightingales** duetting (not sure that three can 'duet', but you know what I mean!) below our room balconies, and several **Hawfinches** flew off from the cherry tree nearby.

Wednesday 26th April

Vihorlat Hills & Se_ovce

Fine & sunny; thundery showers again mid-afternoon

We simply walked across the grass in front of the hotel before breakfast, barely reaching the lake shore, and finding **Serins**, **Goldfinches**, **Lesser Whitethroat** and a lovely **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**. After breakfast, we drove to Michalovce to pick up Dr Stefan Danko. Exploring a lovely area of Hornbean forest enabled us to find a superb **Ural Owl**, sitting near its nest-box. Looking up at the mirror affixed to the box ceiling, we could see that it was unused this year. A large group of four adult **Wild Boar** with about 40 piglets approached us, giving rise to the classic comment, "I think I'll stand behind you!" By moving around and talking loudly, the lead female then realised we were there and all rushed off in the other direction. Ground flora here included **Solomon's Seal**, **Wood Anemones**, **Spring Vetchling** and many more. Heading on, we stopped to check out a wet meadow for **Fritillaria**, to no avail, but we did have a nice flock of **Common Cranes** circling overhead. A south facing slope of the Vihorlat Hills overlooking the Zemplin Lake had a displaying **Buzzard**, performing its roller coaster display flight, but no sign of White-tailed Eagle. Our final stop for the morning was to explore a mixed wood on the outskirts of the town. Four species of woodpeckers here included **Syrian**, **Middle Spotted**, **Grey-headed** and **Green Woodpeckers**, the first three (important ones for us) producing excellent views through the telescopes. After lunch, we headed to the Se_ovce area, first to view an **Imperial Eagle** on its nest in a surprisingly small tree in one of the planted windbreaks. The male appeared overhead, mobbed briefly by a Buzzard, before rising sharply in a thermal till almost out of sight. After a welcome coffee, we headed to a second area of fields, where high tension cables crossed. A nest-box had been erected near the top of one of the pylons here, and this had been taken over by a pair of **Saker Falcons**, though a pair of **Kestrels** were also wanting a home! This had actually caused problems last year when the Sakers failed to rear young due to this interference. A second box was erected on a nearby pylon for the Kestrels but a second pair

have now moved in so there is still a housing shortage! The male **Saker** then appeared, landing by the nest-box (the Kestrels disappeared quickly!), this bird was extremely pale with an almost completely white head. We waited for the late-afternoon thunder clouds to disperse, then walked out across the fields to halve our viewing distance. The male was perched near its mate in the box. Two groups of **Roe Deer** ran off across the fields, and on our return, we found a **Tawny Pipit** very close to the path. On our drive back, we stopped first to view another pair of **Imperial Eagles** perched on the edge of a wood near the road, then again having spotted a dead **Common Hamster** on the roadside. The **Nightingales** welcomed us back to the hotel, and as we were leaning over our balconies, a **Kingfisher** was spotted flying across the little cove.

Thursday 27th April

Latorica River valley

Fine & sunny, usual late afternoon thunder storm

No early morning walk this morning but several **Hawfinches** and **Common Sandpipers** were seen from the room balconies. We picked up Milo_Balla, our guide for today, in Trebi_ov and headed south towards the Latorica River. We stopped briefly by another **Imperial Eagle's** nest close by the road. The female was sitting and the male posed very nicely on a dead stump nearby. As we scanned the trees near one village, we were warmly greeted by the mayor, who drove out to us dressed in a suit, as befits his status, though rather let down by the quad bike! **Wryneck** showed well here and distant **Marsh Harriers** and **Black Stork** were spotted. Walking a dyke near Be_a, we found further **Wrynecks**, then heard **Penduline Tit** and a distant **Golden Oriole**. This promptly flew across between some trees but no-one was really quick enough to see it. This happened again a little later, with better success for some though not all - the moral being one should always choose carefully the time to have a bush stop! Then a **Barred Warbler** was found, newly arrived from its wintering area in Africa. Although close flight views were obtained, it always disappeared into the middle of a bush rather than sitting out in view - very frustrating for all!

We walked back to the vehicle, finding **Crested Lark** on the roadside, and drove on to overlook a small lake near Ba_ka. A small colony of **Black-headed Gulls** was accompanied by **Black** and **Whiskered Terns**. A pair of **Garganey** were tucked into the far reeds and a nice male **Pochard** dropped in. We found a pair of **Penduline Tits** near their nest, a lovely hanging structure of woven reed heads and reedmace fluff. During lunch here, we had good views of **Common Whitethroat**, a brief **Little Bittern** and a **Whinchat** as we left. A small detour to look at the heronry near Svinice where there were good numbers of nesting **Grey Herons** in the taller trees behind and an unknown number of **Night Herons** in the lower bushes in the lake centre in front. There was at least one **Little Egret** here also. Our final birding stop was a quarry where as we pulled to a stop, a **Hoopoe** was feeding on the ground very close to us. As we walked out across the higher level of the quarry, we found a pair of **Wheatears**, a very nice **Green Hairstreak** and several **Scarce Swallowtails**. There were **Pool Frog** and **Fire-bellied Toads** in the puddles on the track. We carefully peered over the edge and found ourselves looking directly into a shallow cave with a female **Eagle Owl** and three chicks. We also found the male roosting in the shade of a blackthorn. Prey items identified in the nesting cave included Magpie, hen Pheasant, Mallard and Hedgehog. Returning to the vehicle, we nearly trod on a **Common Treefrog** beside another puddle on the track.

Just down the road, we spent an hour tasting the locally produced Tokaj wines, hearing about the production methods and with a chance to buy! We then dropped Milo_back in Trebi_ov and headed west to the Slovensk_kras for our final two days.

Friday 28th April

Slovensk_kras

Warm though rather cloudy, usual late afternoon thunder

No pre-breakfast walk but we all met outside before breakfast having explored in different directions. A fine **Toothwort**, *Lathraea squamaria*, was found alongside one of the woodland paths. The ground was covered with white **Wood Anemones**, **Yellow Anemones** and **Purple Bittercress**. We headed for the Zadiel Gorge, walking gently up the main track. **Dipper** was seen well, and plants included many **Oxlips**, **Bulbous Corydalis**, **Greater Celandine**, **Rue-leaved Anemone** and **Perennial Honesty**. Several **Long-tailed Tits** were the white-headed eastern race, without the head stripes we are used to seeing on British and West European birds. We then drove round to the nearby Turni Castle. A welcome coffee was interrupted by a **Nightingale** showing well and a migrant **Corn Crane** was heard calling from a nearby field. We took the trail which climbed steadily towards the castle on the summit. This was quite rich botanically with various interesting shrubs in the hedges alongside, then as we reached the more open limestone slopes, we found **Dwarf Iris**, yellow **Mountain Alyssum** and **Potentilla** species. A **Chequered Blue** butterfly showed well, allowing photographs, though a **Large Tortoiseshell** did not stop. A male **Green Lizard** looked very smart with his green and blue colouration. **Common** and **Scarce Swallowtails** were chasing each other around the castle ruins at the summit, and while taking the obligatory group photographs, we found a large **Common Toad**. Distant thunder prompted us to start our descent, finding **Grizzled** and **Dingy Skippers** and **Weaver's Fritillary** on the way. Back at the café, cokes or iced tea all round and then we drove to the other side of the castle hill to have our picnic lunch, watching many **Sousliks** in the fields. We returned to the hotel for a rest (and/or coffee/beer!), listening to the thunder getting closer. Some of us did venture out for a little while, climbing up through the wood overlooking the valley. A male **Collared Flycatcher** played hard to get, though we did manage some poor views in the end. **Herb Paris**, **Asarabacca** and **May Lily** were amongst the ground flora. Stefan Matis arrived for dinner with us, after which we were privileged to see several **Daubenton's Bats** and a **Soprano Pipistrelle** caught in a mist net set just outside the hotel. Stefan is a licensed 'batman' and is undergoing a long-term study of the bats in this part of Slovakia. A little later, we walked up to the chalet and, using his detector, found **Common Pipistrelle** emerging from the roof space.

Saturday 29th April

Quarry near Tur_a & departure

Fine with hazy sunshine

After a leisurely breakfast, we briefly explored the hillside overlooking the hotel. The Collared Flycatchers still played hard to get so we loaded the vehicle and set off with Stefan for a working quarry near Tur_a. As soon as we arrived, we found a male **Rock Thrush** singing heartily from a shed roof perched right at the top of the quarry face. He was completely oblivious to the heavy machinery working the face just below him! We walked in and climbed slowly up the track to one side. A fine male **Rock Bunting** then appeared and we had excellent views as he perched just in front of us. The **Rock Thrush** was still singing, several times performing his display song flight, then he took off and flew right over our heads, down towards the fields and border post below us (We were at this point looking out across Hungary). We then headed back to the **Souslik** fields for a final half hour and an early picnic lunch, before heading off to the airport.

SPECIES LISTS

The various species lists below use the following references:

Birds: We use the suggested worldwide English names and systematic order as found in *World Bird Species Checklist: with alternate English & scientific names* (Wells, M.G., 1998). Commonly used alternates are enclosed in [] or separated by /

Also, *Collins Bird Guide* (Svensson, L., Grant, P.J., Mullarney, K. & Zetterström, D., 1999)

Mammals: We use the suggested English names and systematic order as found in *Mammals of the World, A Checklist* (Duff, A. & Lawson, A., 2004)

Also, *Collins Field Guide: Mammals of Britain & Europe* (Macdonald, D. & Barrett, P., 1993)

Amphibians and Reptiles: *Collins Field Guide: Reptiles & Amphibians of Britain & Europe [second edition]* (Arnold, E.N. & Ovenden, D.W., 2002)

Butterflies: *Butterflies of Europe, New Field Guide & Key* (Lafranchis, T., 2004)

Plants: *Collins Pocket Guide: Alpine Flowers of Britain & Europe* (Grey-Wilson, C. & Blamey, M., 1995)

The Wild Flowers of Britain & Northern Europe (Fitter, R., Fitter, A. & Blamey, M., 1985)

BIRDS:

Little Grebe / Dabchick: Singles on 25th & 27th

Red-necked Grebe: 1 on 25th, 2 on 27th

Great Crested Grebe: Noted on 5 days

Black-necked/Eared Grebe: Nesting colony on 25th

Great Cormorant: Noted only on 25th

Grey Heron: Noted on 4 days, on 22nd, 25th, 26th, & a nesting colony on 27th

Great [White] Egret: Noted on 2 days, on 25th & 27th

Little Egret: Noted on 2 days, on 25th & in the heronry on 27th

Black-crowned Night-heron: Noted on 2 days, on 25th & a nesting colony on 27th

Great Bittern: Not seen, but 'booming' heard on 25th & 27th

Little Bittern: 1 on 27th

Black Stork: Noted on 3 days, with 1 on 23rd, 2 on 25th, several on 27th

White Stork: Noted most days, mainly on nests, though 6 seen circling on 25th

Eurasian Spoonbill: 8 on 25th

Mute Swan: Noted on 3 days

Greylag Goose: Small numbers on 25th

Taiga Bean Goose: 3 overflew the fish ponds on 25th

Eurasian Wigeon: 2 males & 1 female on 25th

Gadwall: Several pairs on 25th

Eurasian/Common Teal: Noted on 2 days with c20 on 24th, several pairs on 25th

Mallard: Noted most days

Northern Pintail: 5 on 25th

Garganey: Noted on 3 days with a pair on 24th, 8m2f on 25th, a pair on 27th

Northern Shoveler: Noted on 2 days with 1m on 24th, 2m1f on 25th

Common Pochard: Noted on 2 days, good numbers on 25th, several on 27th

Tufted Duck: Noted on 3 days with c25 on 23rd, c50 on 24th, good numbers on 25th

Common Goldeneye: 5+ on 24th

Montagu's Harrier: 1 on 27th

[Eurasian] Marsh Harrier: Noted on 2 days with 6 on 25th, several on 27th

Eurasian Sparrowhawk: Singles noted on 25th & 28th

Northern Goshawk: 1 on 24th

Common Buzzard: Noted each day, often numerous

Lesser Spotted Eagle: Noted on 3 days with 2 on 22nd, nice views of one on 24th, 3 en route on 25th

[Eastern] Imperial Eagle: Noted on 2 days with a pair on nest plus a second pair later on 26th, nesting pair on 27th

Golden Eagle: An immature on 24th

Common/Eurasian Kestrel: Noted each day

Eurasian Hobby: 2 on 24th

Saker Falcon: Pair in nest-box on 26th

Hazel Grouse: Noted on 2 days with droppings on 23rd, 2 seen from bear hide on 24th

Common Pheasant: Noted on 4 days

Common Crane: 17 circled overhead on 26th

Common Quail: Heard calling on 26th

Common Moorhen: 1 on 27th

Eurasian/Common Coot: Noted on 2 days, on 25th & 27th

Corn Crake: Heard calling on 28th

Northern Lapwing: Noted on 4 days with 1 on 22nd & 25th, 3 on 26th, several on 27th

Little Ringed Plover: Noted on 2 days with 2 on 25th, 1 on 28th

Common Greenshank: 3 on 25th

Wood Sandpiper: 1 on 25th

Common Sandpiper: Noted on 2 days with 1 on 25th, c10 on 27th

Dunlin: 1 on 25th

Ruff: c100 on 25th

Yellow-legged Gull: Noted on 2 days with several on 24th, several on 25th

Black-headed Gull: Noted on 4 days, including nesting colonies on 25th & 27th

Little Gull: c50 on 25th

Whiskered Tern: Noted on 2 days with c200 on 25th, several on 27th

White-winged [Black] Tern: c10 on 25th

Black Tern: Noted on 2 days with c200 on 25th, several on 27th

Common Tern: 1 on 25th

Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon: Noted most days

Stock Dove: Noted on 2 days with 1 on 24th, 4 on 26th

[Common] Wood Pigeon: Noted most days

European Turtle Dove: Noted on 3 days with 2 on 26th, several seen & heard on 27th, heard on 28th

Eurasian Collared Dove: Noted on 4 days

Common Cuckoo: Noted on 4 days with several heard on 24th, seen & heard on 26th, heard 27th & 28th

Eurasian Eagle Owl: A pair at nest with 3 young on 27th

Ural Owl: An adult near nest-box on 26th

Common Kingfisher: Noted on 2 days with calls heard near hotel on 25th, 1 seen from hotel on 26th

Eurasian Hoopoe: Noted on 2 days with 1 on 24th, 1 close views on 27th

Eurasian Wryneck: Noted on 3 days, heard on 26th, several seen & heard on 27th, 1 on 28th

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: Noted on 2 days, nice views of 1 outside hotel on 26th, 1 on 28th

Middle Spotted Woodpecker: Nice views of 1 on 26th

White-backed Woodpecker: Excellent views of 1 on 23rd

Syrian Woodpecker: Noted on 2 days with nice views on 26th, briefly on 27th

Great Spotted Woodpecker: Noted on 3 days, heard calling on 22nd, several seen on 24th, 1 on 25th

Three-toed Woodpecker: 1 seen & another heard on 23rd

Black Woodpecker: Drumming heard on 23rd, 1 seen well on 24th

Green Woodpecker: 1 seen briefly on 26th

Grey-headed Woodpecker: Nice views on 26th

Crested Lark: Several at different places on 27th

Wood Lark: 1 in song flight on 27th

[Eurasian/Common] Sky Lark: Noted on 5 days

Barn Swallow: Noted most days

[Common] House Martin: Noted on 4 days

Yellow Wagtail: Noted on 3 days, those seen well were of the Blue-headed race

Grey Wagtail: Noted on 5 days, including a pair feeding young in the nest at our last hotel

White Wagtail: Noted each day

Tawny Pipit: Excellent views on 26th

Tree Pipit: Noted on 3 days, birds singing & seen briefly on 23rd, heard singing on 24th, several on 26th

Red-backed Shrike: A male, then a female later, en route on 26th

White-throated Dipper: 2 on 24th, 1 on 28th

[Winter] Wren: Noted on 4 days

Dunnock / Hedge Accentor: Noted on 3 days

Ring Ouzel: Heard singing on 22nd, several seen well on 24th

Common Blackbird: Noted most days

Fieldfare: Singles on 22nd & 24th, several on 25th

Song Thrush: Noted most days

Mistle Thrush: Noted on 4 days

European Robin: Noted most days

Common/Rufous Nightingale: Noted on 4 days with 3 singing near hotel plus 1 at the fishponds on 25th, singing at various sites on 26th, singing commonly on 27th, seen well on 28th

Black Redstart: Noted on 5 days, usually singing from roof tops

Whinchat: 1 on 27th

Common Stonechat: Noted on 4 days with 1 on 23rd, 2 en route on 25th, couple en route on 26th, several on 27th

Northern Wheatear: A pair on 27th

Savi's Warbler: 1 singing on 25th, heard singing on 27th

Sedge Warbler: Several on 25th & 27th

[Eurasian] Reed Warbler: Several on 25th & 27th

Great Reed Warbler: 1 watched in full song on 25th, heard singing on 27th

Willow Warbler: Noted on 4 days, 23rd – 26th

Common/Eurasian Chiffchaff: Noted each day

Wood Warbler: Noted on 4 days with several at the coffee stop on 25th, then seen & heard singing on 26th - 28th

Blackcap: Noted most days

Common Whitethroat: Several on 27th

Lesser Whitethroat: Noted on 3 days, several seen & heard on 26th, heard on 27th & 28th

Barred Warbler: First incoming migrant on 27th

Firecrest: 1 seen very well on 23rd, heard on 24th

Goldcrest: Noted on 4 days

Collared Flycatcher: A male seen poorly on 28th

Long-tailed Tit: About 4 on 28th

[Eurasian] Penduline Tit: A pair attending a nest on 27th

Willow Tit: Heard on 23rd, birds seen well on 24th

Coal Tit: Noted on 3 days

Crested Tit: Heard on 23rd, a nice view on 24th

Great Tit: Noted each day
Blue Tit: Noted on 4 days
Eurasian Nuthatch: Noted on 24th & 26th
Eurasian Treecreeper: Noted on 24th
Eurasian Jay: Noted regularly on 5 days
Black-billed/Eurasian Magpie: Noted each day
Spotted/Eurasian Nutcracker: Calls heard on 23rd, good views on 25th
Western/Eurasian Jackdaw: Noted on 4 days
Rook: Noted most days
Hooded Crow: Noted on 5 days
Common Raven: Noted each day
[Eurasian] Golden Oriole: A male seen twice on 27th
European/Common Starling: Noted on 5 days
Yellowhammer: Noted on 4 days
[Common] Reed Bunting: Several seen on 25th
Corn Bunting: Seen distantly on 26th
Common/European Chaffinch: Noted each day, very common
European Serin: Noted on 4 days with several at the coffee stop on 25th, then several on 26th - 28th
European Greenfinch: Noted on 5 days
European Goldfinch: Noted on 4 days, on 25th - 28th
Common Linnet: A male on 23rd, then several on 26th & 27th
Common/Eurasian Bullfinch: Noted on 24th
Hawfinch: Noted on 2 days with c10 around hotel on 25th, several flight views on 26th
House Sparrow: Noted on 3 days, on 22nd, a female on 26th, several on 27th; surprisingly uncommon
[Eurasian] Tree Sparrow: Noted regularly on 4 days

MAMMALS:

European Mole: Mole hills noted on 3 days, 25th - 27th
Eastern Hedgehog: Road kills noted on 2 days
Daubenton's Bat: Several caught on 28th
Common Pipistrelle: 1 detected on 28th
Pygmy Pipistrelle: 1 caught on 28th
Red Fox: A road kill noted on 22nd, 1 watched from the bear hide on 23rd, 2 en route on 25th
Eurasian Wolf: Poo noted on track near bear hide on 22nd
Beech Marten: 1 seen briefly from the bear hide on 23rd
Eurasian Badger: Road kill noted on 28th
Brown Bear: Footprints found (in mud and snow) on 23rd & 24th
Eurasian Wild Boar: Tracks found on 25th, 4 adults plus c40 piglets encountered on 26th, 'diggings' noted on 27th
Red Deer: 5 on 22nd
[Western] Roe Deer: 14 overall on 26th
Eurasian Red Squirrel: Noted on 3 days with a road kill on 22nd, 1 seen on 24th, 2 seen on 25th
European Souselik: Noted on 3 days with 2 brief views on 25th, then many near castle on 28th & 29th
Muskrat: 3 at the fish ponds on 25th, a burrow noted on 27th
Brown/European Hare: 1 seen on 24th, 1 during the lunch stop on 25th, 3 on 26th, a road kill noted on 27th
European Rabbit: 1 found dead near hotel on 26th

Bank Vole: 1 found dead on the path on 27th

Common Hamster: Several burrows noted in fields plus road kills on 26th & 27th

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES:

Fire Salamander: A small specimen found on 25th, then 1 on 27th, 2 on 28th

Montandon's Newt: One found in wet grass on 25th

Fire-bellied Toad: Many heard calling at the fishponds on 25th, heard on 26th, a young one seen plus others heard on 27th

Yellow-bellied Toad: Calls heard on 23rd

Common Toad: 1 at the castle on 28th

Green Toad: 1 found dead, apparently frozen, on 25th

Common Frog: Singles seen on 23rd & 24th

Marsh Frog: Calls heard on 27th

Pool Frog: 1 found in a puddle at the quarry on 27th

Edible Frog: 1 seen at the fish ponds on 25th, another on 27th

Viviparous/Common Lizard: Several on 23rd & 24th

Sand Lizard: A stunning male in breeding condition on 26th

Green Lizard: 1 seen on 27th, several on 28th

Slowworm: 1 caught by Buzzard on 24th

Common Treefrog: 1 found in a puddle at the quarry on 27th

BUTTERFLIES & other taxa:

Swallowtail: 2 on 27th, several on 28th

Scarce Swallowtail: 5 on 27th, several on 28th

Large White: 1 on 27th, several on 28th

Small White: Several noted on 3 days

Green-veined White: Noted 25th - 28th

Orange-tip: Noted on 3 days, 26th - 28th

Brimstone: Noted most days

Wood White: Noted on 4 days, on 25th - 28th

Green Hairstreak: 1 on 27th

Holly Blue: 2 at the fish ponds on 25th, 1 probably this species on 27th

Chequered Blue: 1 seen well & photographed on 28th

Camberwell Beauty: Singles on 23rd & 24th

Large Tortoiseshell: 1 seen well but briefly on 28th

Peacock: Noted on 5 days

Painted Lady: 1 at the fish ponds on 25th

Small Tortoiseshell: 1 on 23rd

Comma: 1 on 23rd

Map butterfly: Noted on 4 days, on 25th - 28th

Weaver's Fritillary: Several on 28th

Grizzled Skipper: Noted on 28th

Dingy Skipper: Noted on 28th

SELECTED PLANTS:

(Just a few, those which we particularly noted!).

<i>Viscum album</i>	Mistletoe
<i>Asarum europaeum</i>	Asarabacca
<i>Stellaria holostea</i>	Greater Stitchwort
<i>Isopyrum thalictroides</i>	Rue-leaved anemone
<i>Caltha palustris</i>	Marsh Marigold
<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>	Wood Anemone
<i>Anemone ranunculoides</i>	Yellow Anemone
<i>Pulsatilla slavica</i>	Slavic Pasque-flower
<i>Adonis vernalis</i>	Yellow Pheasant's-eye
<i>Corydalis cava</i>	Bulbous Corydalis
<i>Chelidonium majus</i>	Greater Celandine
<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>	Garlic-mustard
<i>Cardamine enneaphyllos</i>	Drooping Bittercress
<i>Cardamine glandulosa</i>	Purple Bittercress
<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	Cuckoo-flower / Lady's Smock
<i>Cardamine bulbifera</i>	Coral-root Bittercress
<i>Lunaria rediviva</i>	Perennial Honesty
<i>Alchemilla sp.</i>	Lady's Mantle
<i>Cotoneaster niger</i>	'Black' Cotoneaster
<i>Lathyrus vernus</i>	Spring Pea/Vetchling
<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>	Wood-sorrel
<i>Geranium phaeum</i>	Dusky Cranesbill
<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>	Dog's Mercury
<i>Daphne mezereum</i>	Mezereon
<i>Viola arvensis</i>	Field Pansy
<i>Viola ?reichenbachiana</i>	Early Dog Violet
<i>Cornus mas</i>	Cornelian Cherry
<i>Primula vulgaris</i>	Primrose
<i>Primula elatior</i>	Oxlip
<i>Primula veris</i>	Cowslip
<i>Primula auricula</i>	Auricula / Bear's-ear
<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>	Common Privet
<i>Vinca minor</i>	Lesser Periwinkle
<i>Onosma tornense</i>	Golden-drops
<i>Pulmonaria officinalis</i>	Common Lungwort
<i>Pulmonaria mollis</i>	Mountain Lungwort
<i>Symphytum tuberosum</i>	Tuberous Comphrey
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Common Bugle
<i>Lamium maculatum</i>	Spotted Deadnettle
<i>Lathraea squamaria</i>	Toothwort
<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	Coltsfoot
<i>Petasites albus</i>	White Butterbur
<i>Petasites hybridus</i>	Butterbur
<i>Maianthemum bifolium</i>	May Lily
<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i>	Common Solomon's Seal
<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	Lily of the Valley
<i>Paris quadrifolia</i>	Herb Paris
<i>Crocus heuffelianus</i>	Purple Crocus
<i>Iris pumila</i>	Dwarf Iris
<i>Leucojum vernalis</i>	Spring Snowflake
<i>Leucojum aestivum</i>	Summer Snowflake

It is always nigh-on impossible to pick out particular highlights from a trip like this. As ever, each of us will have taken away our own special memories – the **Imperial Eagles** at their nests, the colony of **Black-necked Grebes**, the **Eagle Owl** with its three chicks, the **Beech Marten** and **Red Deer** at the hides.

*Unfortunately this year, we failed to see Brown Bear though we did find plenty of footprints. The **White-backed Woodpecker** was stunning, returning again and again to its drumming tree, and we did remarkably well with the other species, with **Three-toed, Lesser Spotted, Middle Spotted, Great Spotted, Syrian, Grey-headed, Green and Black Woodpeckers**, and **Wryneck**, all being seen. The good-natured humour of you all was most important and I would like to thank you all very much for making this trip so enjoyable and hope to see you all on another trip, sometime in the not-too-distant future.*

Keith Grant, April 2006

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