

Hungary

Birds and Art

2022

Wednesday 18th - Wednesday 25th May

Single-centre, small group tour with Bruce Pearson & Gábor Orbán



Hoopoes should be a regular 'garden bird' on our holiday © Gabor Orban

Limosa's "Birds & Art" holiday to Hungary in May is a small group natural history tour, based at the Kondor Eco-Lodge in scenic Kiskunság National Park. What makes this holiday a little different from Limosa's other trips to Hungary, however, is that as well as looking for a great range of birds and other wildlife with **Gabor Orban** ('our man in Hungary'), the holiday will be co-led by well-known wildlife artist **Bruce Pearson** who will help those who want to learn or improve their wildlife art skills.

Less well known than the similar Hortobágy, Kiskunság National Park teems with wildlife and preserves parts of the once continuous Eurasian steppe or '*puszta*'. Great Bustard and Saker Falcon are the stars but the park's forests, fishponds, oxbows and alkaline lakes hold everything from Pygmy Cormorants and Red-footed Falcons to Rollers and Lesser Grey Shrikes.

So enjoy this easy-paced tour, where you have an opportunity to step back in time and enjoy the birds and wildlife of one of Europe's most important wild areas but there is also an opportunity to work on your artistic skills with one of the UK's best known wildlife artists.

Highlights

- Unspoilt, varied and wildlife rich landscapes typical of eastern Europe perfect for enjoying the birds and working on your artistic skills
- Enjoy birdwatching with English-speaking Hungarian wildlife guide Gabor Orban, our 'man in Hungary', and (for those who wish) improve your artistic skills with 'resident artist' Bruce Pearson
- Specialities including Great Bustard, Pygmy Cormorant and Syrian Woodpecker
- Red-footed Falcon colonies, breeding Saker Falcon and Eastern Imperial Eagle
- Impressive numbers of Rollers, Bee-eaters and Lesser Grey Shrikes close to our lodge

What's Included?

- Limosa Tour and Art Leader
- English-speaking Hungarian wildlife expert
- 7 nights accommodation in Hungary
- All main meals and drinking water provided
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, local guides, entry fees, permits
- All tour-based tips (drivers and staff) and taxes
- Limosa checklist of birds



We can expect to have some fantastic views of European Roller during our trip to Kondor Eco-Lodge © Gabor Orban

Outline Itinerary

Day 1

Fly to Budapest. Transfer south to Kiskunság National Park. Night Kondor Eco-Lodge

Days 2-7

Enjoy the birds and wildlife of the area with the opportunity to improve artistic skills under the tutorage of Bruce Pearson. Habitats include the steppe grassland (puszta), wetlands and forests of Kiskunság National Park. Kondor Eco-Lodge (6 nights)

Day 8

A final morning in the field before returning to Budapest for the flight back to the UK.

Tour Overview

For those looking for a slightly different type of wildlife holiday, we are delighted to offer our first "Birds and Art" trip staying at the delightful Kondor Eco-lodge in Hungary.

Owned and run by Gábor Orban and his wife Andrea, we will spend seven nights based at this very pleasant location surrounded by abundant and varied wildlife.

Whilst the trip will offer 'normal' birding excursions looking for a wide range of great species including Great Bustard, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Red-footed Falcon, Hoopoe, Roller and much more besides, our new 'twist' is that the trip will also be accompanied by one of the UK's best known wildlife artists, Bruce Pearson.

Bruce has spent many years not only selling his artwork (eg he is a regular at the British Birdwatching Fair) and illustrating a wide range of books but has also worked as "artist in residence" on many expedition ships tutoring budding artists in places as diverse as Iceland, Antarctica and South Georgia..

Working closely together, our excursions with Gábor and Bruce will allow those who want to learn off Bruce to do so and the artists will often be able to spend longer at certain sites where the opportunities are most suitable. At the same time, those who prefer to concentrate on seeing a greater range of birds will join Gábor. We believe this combination will work perfectly, for example, for couples where one may be more interested in art and the other in seeing more species.

The unspoiled countryside of central Hungary has a veritable 'by-gone' feel to it and offers a superb diversity of natural habitats, rich in wildlife of all kinds and we plan to alternate between slightly longer excursions (which rarely go more than an hour or so from the lodge) and staying 'closer to home'.

This single-centre holiday is based at Kondor Eco-Lodge for seven nights, right in the heart of the lovely Kiskunság National Park but just a 90-minute drive from Budapest Airport. This is the home of Gábor and his wife Andrea and we can expect to be treated like family members, where the delicious Hungarian cuisine will doubtless become a feature of our holiday.

The birdlife of Kiskunság has much in common with that of Hungary's more famous Hortobágy National Park to the east but those in the know would say that the Kiskunság has a more varied and prettier landscape that makes it just perfect for an 'all round' wildlife and art holiday such as this.

The Kiskunság preserves parts of the once continuous Eurasian steppe or *puszta* and hosts one of the largest populations of Great Bustards on the continent. We will make a special effort to locate this majestic bird and as we search for

them, we may encounter Eastern Imperial Eagle soaring above the grasslands. The rare Saker Falcon, which has taken to breeding in nest boxes provided for them on pylons, is also possible.

Close encounters with the beautiful Red-footed Falcon are another highlight here in the spring and summer and we should have the privilege of visiting a breeding colony where, no doubt, the artists will want to linger to sketch or paint these delightful little raptors.



We hope to visit a colony of Red-footed Falcons during our time in Hungary © Colin Bushell

Our rural lodge is thatched and has a lovely garden, so there will be lots to keep us occupied during our stay. The tropical fluting of Golden Orioles and the purring of Turtle Doves will be audible from our rooms. In the grounds, there are some ponds with purpose-built photographic hides and both birders and artists will surely want to linger here to see what comes down to bathe or drink.

Exploring the grasslands close to the lodge, we can expect to find colourful Rollers and both Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, whilst areas of shorter grass are the home of European Souseliks, the ground squirrel of the region and the main food item of many of the local birds of prey.

Bee-eaters will be calling overhead and we should have the opportunity to visit a couple of nesting colonies to watch the comings and goings of the adult birds.

The park's fishponds, oxbows and alkaline lakes will be alive with birds in May. There are breeding colonies of egrets, herons, Pygmy Cormorants, Spoonbills and Whiskered Terns, while Little Bitterns, Great Reed and Savi's Warblers, Penduline Tits and Bearded Reedlings inhabit the reedbeds.

Areas of forest are home to Honey Buzzard and Black Stork, as well as Black, Lesser Spotted and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers and we may also find Lesser Purple Emperor butterflies as these frequent the riverine woods along the Tisza river.

With so many wonderful birds on offer, this is a spring tour is not to be missed and with its unique artistic component, we are sure it will be popular!



Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Hungary © David Walsh, Limosa

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

FLY TO BUDAPEST, TRANSFER TO KISKUNSAG NATIONAL PARK

Our spring birdwatching and art tour to Hungary begins with a flight to Budapest, the Hungarian capital. We will be met on arrival by Gábor and his wife Andrea and head south in our minibus for around 90 minutes to reach their home, the Kondor Eco-Lodge, with the busy airport motorway soon giving way to deserted country lanes!

We expect to arrive at the lodge in the early evening and having checked in to our rooms, we can relax over the first of our lovely home-cooked Hungarian dinners, perhaps washed down with draught lager or a glass or two of the famous red wine Egri Bikavér, the bull's blood of Eger. Set in the heart of lovely Kiskunság National Park, this tranquil lodge will be our base throughout the holiday. *Night at Kondor Eco-lodge, Kiskunság National Park*

Days 2-7

KISKUNSÁG NATIONAL PARK

Our thatched lodge is situated in a small area of woodland and the grounds are cool, shady and a haven for wildlife so a perfect place to both explore and also learn or improve your artistic skills with Bruce Pearson.

From our rooms we can expect to hear the fluty song of the Golden Oriole, the purring of Turtle Doves and the staccato call of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Black Redstarts breed in the lodge buildings and Short-toed Treecreeper, Spotted Flycatcher and Hawfinch are all regular visitors. There will be an opportunity each day to wander in the tranquil gardens before our 8am breakfast. The dining room table will be beautifully laid out with a range of cereals, yoghurts, salads, cold meats and cheeses, home-made jams and fruit. From this sumptuous fare, we make up our own picnic lunches as part of our daily routine.

A short stroll along a nearby track takes us deeper into the forest, which is home to Honey Buzzard, Goshawk and Black Woodpecker, then on to a clearing where it is sometimes possible to see Red-backed Shrike, Woodlark, Wryneck and Barred Warbler. Walking in the opposite direction a path alongside a large hay meadow provides us with opportunities to look for Rollers, Bee-eaters, Hoopoes and Lesser Grey Shrikes, and marvel at the variety and number of birds in the area.

Unsurprisingly, on our first full day we have no need to venture far from our lodge. An area of short grassland holds good numbers of Sousliks, a rodent which is the main food item for many of the local birds of prey.

We plan to visit an area where Bee-eaters nest in holes in the ground right next to the track and these gorgeous birds allow close approach without being disturbed. This will be a perfect location for those who want to pause, draw and paint under the expert tutorage of Bruce whilst others in the group can do some additional exploring and birdwatching with Gabor.

The flat grassy plains of the Hungarian *puszta* have several different habitat types ranging from dry grassland to marshy meadow and other birds we might see in this area include Little Owl, Corn Bunting, Crested Lark and Tawny Pipit. Quail call from time to time and the concentration of Rollers in Kiskunság undoubtedly makes it one of the best places in Europe to observe this colourful species and for budding artists these will be another fascinating subject.

Kiskunság's roadside verges and flower-rich meadows are filled with butterflies and we will pause to enjoy the magnificent range of species.

The nearest small town offers the chance of a coffee or cold drink and often plays host to a pair of Syrian Woodpeckers.

After getting to grips with the wildlife near the lodge, on some of our subsequent days we will head a little further, although none of the drives are especially long, with nowhere more than an hour or so from Kondor.

The north Kiskunság is perhaps the best place to search for Great Bustards in some of the more remote *puszta*. The Park hosts one of the largest populations of this declining species in Europe but perseverance and patience may still be required to find one!

Although the Kiskunság is largely flat, a small hill increases our chances of spotting a bustard and is also a good place to scan for raptors. We will hope to see the rare Eastern Imperial Eagle as well as Montagu's Harrier.

Another colony of Bee-eaters in a nearby small quarry should allow yet more artistic and photographic opportunities before, via a well-appointed cake shop (!!), we make for a vast area of fishponds.

From a centrally placed tower hide overlooking the water, we will look for Garganey, Ferruginous Duck and Red-crested Pochard out on the water. Great Egret, Purple Heron and Marsh Harrier are all possible and both Savi's and Great Reed Warblers plus Bearded Reedlings could be right below us. Once again, we will be able to split into two groups with the artists spending some time with Bruce whilst those who are wanting to walk and explore can join Gabor. Flexibility will very much be our watch word and you will be able to do whichever activity you wish.

Continuing onwards, another stop will be a Red-footed Falcon colony. These beautiful birds breed in Rooks' nests and, because our chosen spot is used by general tourists, the birds have been habituated to people and allow us to observe them from remarkably close range.

White Storks often nest here too and should provide a fitting end to a varied and bird-filled day.

The habitat of the western area of the Kiskunság includes an impressive area of alkaline lakes, rich in nutrients and Avocet, Black-winged Stilt and Little Ringed Plover are three of the shorebirds which breed in this area.

Whilst some other species of wader will already be on their nesting grounds further north we might see late migrants such as Ruff or Wood Sandpiper. Large flocks of Greylag Geese inhabit the lakes and the sight and sound of the birds taking to the air is impressive and might also alert us to the presence of a majestic White-tailed Eagle!

Another tower hide allows us to look far into the horizon and nearby a large, covered table is the ideal place for our picnic.

A number of roadside ponds are very different in character from the salt lakes, and we may find Black-necked Grebes in dapper summer plumage plus noisy, nesting Whiskered Terns.

The secretive Little Bittern is also possible and we may well also visit another nearby Red-footed Falcon colony but there is an oxbow lake surrounded by tall trees we will want to reach where the star attraction is Penduline Tit. With the birds hopefully attending their wonderfully ornate nest, the artists may be able to pause whilst others go in search of Icterine Warbler which also breeds here.

While scanning the water's edge might produce a Kingfisher or two (as well as a Grass Snake or European Pond Terrapin), this site is one of the best for dragonflies and we will certainly take a look at these as there are an impressive range of species.

The floodplain of the River Tisza, on the eastern side of the Kiskunság, is pitted with oxbow lakes and these wetlands hold high concentrations of waterbirds. As we stroll slowly through an area of 'proper forest' on our way to one of the lakes, we will be on the lookout for Middle Spotted and Black Woodpeckers, as well as commoner woodland species. It is possible to see both Treecreeper and Short-toed Treecreeper together in this area, one of few places in Europe where this occurs.



Enjoying a relaxing trip by electric boat on Lake Kolon, Hungary © David Walsh, Limosa

A lake covered in water lilies provides ideal habitat for Whiskered Terns and Squacco Heron and a perfectly positioned tower hide should allow us some nice views and opportunities for the artists to do some further sketching.

Having enjoyed our picnic in the picturesque town of Tiszaalpár, we head next to a viewpoint that will give us an idea of the sheer scale of one of the best wetland areas of this region, as well as another chance to find Syrian Woodpecker, which favours town parks, gardens and squares rather than the woodlands.

Pottering down to the water's edge, we cannot fail to be impressed by the numbers of Great and Pygmy Cormorants, Great and Little Egrets, Black-crowned Night Herons, Black-necked Grebes and Spoonbills. Scanning above the trees might reveal a party of thermalling Black Storks or raptors such as Short-toed Snake Eagle or Osprey.

Reacquainting ourselves with one of the areas not far from our lodge will take us to a nature trail through an area of damp woodland. We have a further chance to see Black Woodpecker and Honey Buzzard.

Grasshopper Warbler, Whinchat and Northern Wheatear are possibilities nearby and it will be worth keeping an eye out for one of the local pairs of Marsh Harriers performing a food pass.



Juvenile Penduline Tit © Gordon Small, wildlifeimagegs.com

A nearby open area usually holds nesting Barred Warbler, Tawny Pipit, Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes and we shall make a special effort to see the powerful Saker, which breed in nest boxes provided for them on pylons.

On one day, we intend to visit the reserve at Lake Kolon. A relaxing boat trip out on the water should allow us to enjoy the likes of Penduline Tit, Pygmy Cormorant and Squacco Heron and we might hear Savi's Warbler reeling, Bearded Reedling pinging and Water Rail squealing. Once again, there should be a great range of dragonflies.

By way of a contrast, we may divert to an area of *puszta* where another tower hide affords panoramic views and further opportunities to scan for Great Bustards and watch for Sakers hunting Sousliks.

In the garden of our lodge there are two wildlife hides overlooking the ponds so perfect for photographers and artists. Both are available for our use and ideal places to watch for birds coming to drink and bathe in the early morning or late afternoon.

On one night, we hope to run a moth trap and marvel at the quantity and variety of insects. On another, we stroll up a track to a forest clearing which is home to several pairs of European Nightjars and we will hope to see and hear them. *Six further nights Kondor Eco-Lodge*

Day 8

RETURN TO BUDAPEST, FLY TO UK

After breakfast, we have a couple of hours to enjoy our last encounters with the local Golden Orioles, Rollers, Bee-eaters and Lesser Grey Shrikes before returning to relax over our picnic lunches in the shade of the garden.

In the early afternoon, we load up the minibus and return to Budapest Airport, where we bid farewell to Gábor and Andrea. We check in for our flight home to the UK where our spring tour to Hungary concludes.

Trip Information

Group Size Max 10 participants and 2 leaders

An 8-day natural history tour to Hungary focusing on birds but with a deliberately flexible schedule to allow for those who want to join Bruce Pearson, our "artist in residence", to improve their artistic skills whilst others join Gabor Orban for more bird and wildlife watching.

You are likely to be impressed not only by the variety of birds but by their abundance and this is especially true in the area close to our lodge.

Visiting in May, many of the passerines will still be singing and, of course, the larger and more colourful species such as Rollers, Bee-eaters and Hoopoes will be conspicuous giving perfect subjects for those who are more into their art than seeing every species.

There should also be a selection of butterflies and dragonflies but unlike our June holiday, less emphasis will be placed on these although we will still pause to enjoy those we encounter.

Birds 120-140 species

Other wildlife Some interesting mammals, amphibians and reptiles. We hope to run a moth trap on one evening if the weather is suitable.

Accommodation 7 nights in simple but comfortable and characterful accommodation, as befits a rural eco-lodge. All rooms are en suite. Kondor Eco-Lodge is perfectly situated within the Kiskunság National Park of central Hungary and we can expect a warm welcome and delicious, home-cooked Hungarian cuisine often using locally sourced produce.

Meals All main meals are included in the tour price, commencing with dinner following our arrival on Day 1 and concluding with a picnic lunch on Day 8. Breakfast and dinner will be taken at our lodge, whilst our picnic lunches will be enjoyed in the field.

Walking Easy. Most walks are short, over good tracks and trails and all are on the flat except one very short hike up a man-made hill. We may enjoy one or two slightly longer walks during the week, although always at a gentle pace.

Sturdy waterproof walking shoes with good corrugated soles for comfort and grip are advised but often something more casual will suffice.

Weather Spring temperatures in this part of eastern Europe typically oscillate around 20-25C (68-77F). Short periods of spring rain (sometimes heavy) are not unusual. It is rarely windy in summer and the weather forecast is generally reasonably reliable, helping in organising our daily plans.

Flights Due to the pandemic, it is proving extremely difficult to predict future flight prices and schedules, especially when a trip is scheduled for beyond the period when flights can be booked. As a result, we have taken the decision to price our holidays as excluding all international flights.

To keep the process as simple as possible for our clients, however, we are now working closely with an agent from Travel Counsellors who will be able to advise you on which flights we are recommending for each holiday and he will be able to book these for you.

Ground Transport By minibus driven by Gábor or a local driver depending on the final group size.

Boat Trip Our short trip on Lake Kolon lasts approx. 60-90 minutes, in an electric boat so progress is almost silent. Please note, however, that the boat is uncovered, so this trip is weather permitting.

Photos Good photographic opportunities covering a broad range of wildlife.



European Bee-eater is one of the species we can expect to see well during our time in Hungary © David Walsh

Tour Cost

2022 (8 days):

Land only cost: £2150

Deposit: £500

Single Supp: £350

Cost includes

- Limosa Tour and Art Leader
- English-speaking Hungarian wildlife expert
- 7 nights accommodation in Hungary
- All main meals and drinking water provided
- Minibus transport and boat trip on Lake Kolon
- All excursions, local guides, entry fees, permits
- All tour-based tips (drivers, staff) and taxes
- Limosa checklist of birds

Cost excludes

International flights, insurance, drinks, airport/in-flight meals and snacks and other items of a personal nature.

About Your Guides

Bruce Pearson has worked as an artist for over 45 years completing private commissions for individuals, museums and other institutions. He has participated in art events and exhibitions all over the world displaying his paintings at both solo and group gallery shows and many Limosa clients will undoubtedly have seen his work at the British Birdwatching Fair where he has had a stand for many years.

Although his work has taken him all over the world, since 2013 Bruce has regularly worked as a guide and “artist in residence” on expedition ships advising and tutoring clients on how to develop and improve their artistic skills.

Bruce has worked with our sister brand, *WildWings*, for a number of years and we are delighted that he has agreed to join the Limosa team as our “artist in residence”.

Gábor Orbán Gábor participated in his first birding camp during the 1970s as a young boy at Lake Kondor in Hungary and became fascinated by birding very quickly.

He later broadened his interest to include other wildlife, particularly mammals and butterflies.

Gábor began leading tours in the 1980s, at first within Hungary, then to other Eastern European countries and beyond.

He became a licenced professional birdwatching and nature guide in the 1990s and today leads numerous birding, nature and culture, butterfly and photo tours to destinations worldwide.

Those who have travelled with Gábor would undoubtedly agree that he is passionate to share his knowledge not only of the natural world, but also the history and culture of the country in which he is leading.

Our June holiday to Hungary is based at Kondor Eco-Lodge, the home of Gábor and his wife Andrea.

How to Enquire

Due to the considerable uncertainty created by the pandemic, Limosa Holidays are not currently accepting bookings for any trips, however, you are welcome to contact us either by email or phone to register your interest in any of our holidays.

Whilst some tour companies may be willing to take a deposit from you and say a trip is a “confirmed departure”, our approach is going to be to wait a little longer as we consider this both honest and realistic.

Once we are confident that the trip can run, we will be in touch to confirm your place and ask for a deposit.

We do encourage you to register your interest as we are expecting considerable demand, once the consensus is that it is safe to travel again.

Any Questions

Please do not hesitate to contact us by email or phone. Our office is generally open from 09:30-17:30 but you are welcome to contact us outside these times too. We are happy to take calls in the evening and at weekends but if no one is available the call will go to our answerphone.

Thank you for your interest in our tours. We do hope that you will be able to join us once the pandemic is over and we look forward to hearing from you.