

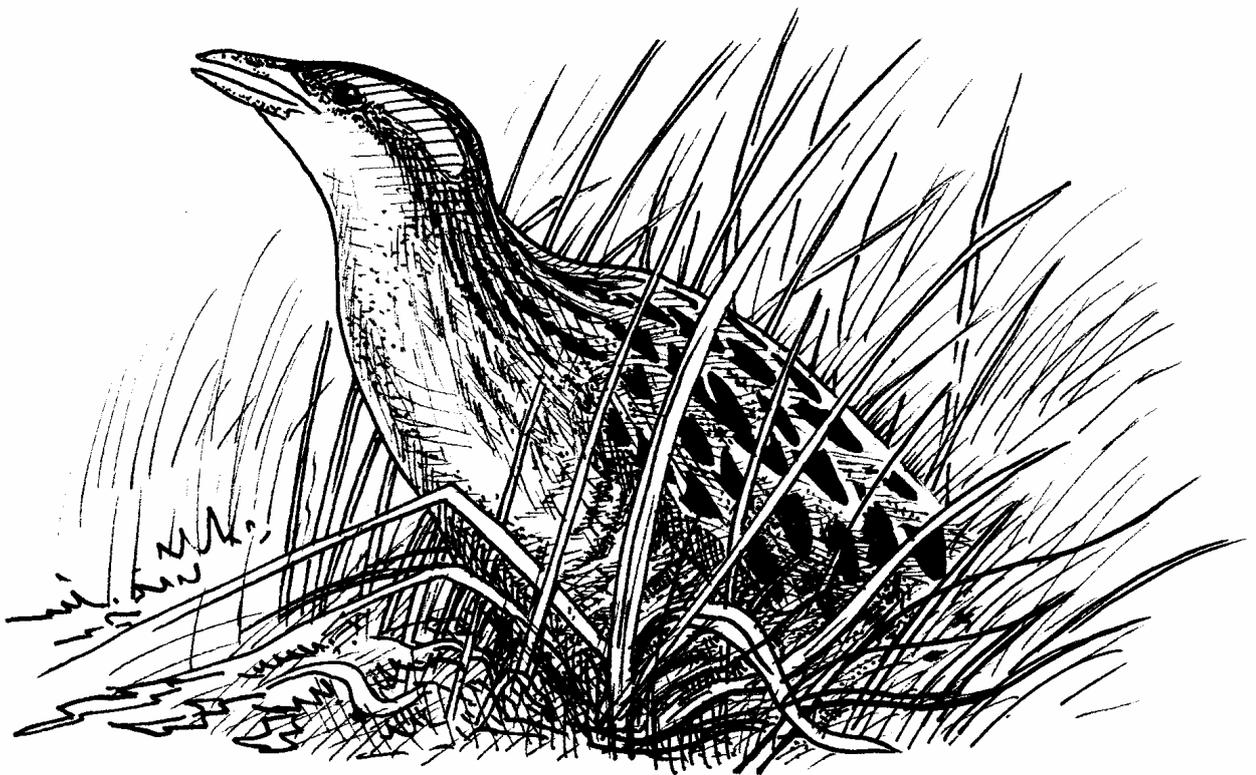
Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Discover Slovakia
Group recce report
27 May – 3 June 2000

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The group

Jenny Loring
Peter Fierlinger
Mundi Smith
Jo Simons
John Durdin
Rosemary Bonney
Mike Bonney
Debbie Scott
Steve Henson
Angela Henson
Chris Durdin
Julie Gayner (now Durdin – plus bump – now Alexander!)

Host and leader: Pavol Kanuch

This was an unusual recce. To make the best use of Pavol's time away from running SOVS, the Slovakia BirdLife Partner, he requested that we bring a small group for the usual recce that precedes a new Honeyguide wildlife holiday. So I put the word around and soon we had this group of 12, taking a chance (at cost price, of course) on a test itinerary and prepared to be guinea pigs for holiday proposed for the 2001 Honeyguide programme.

We all think it worked, and I couldn't have wished for ten better travelling companions for Julie and me, and I'm very grateful. These experienced travellers have also helped fine-tune for next year. Debbie was the bravest of all, new to Honeyguide, taking a break from the RSPB's south-east office. Steve Henson (to be co-leader in 2001, with Angela also returning) kindly wrote the bulk of the holiday report, with valuable contributions from Jo Simons (flowers) and Mundi Smith and Rosemary Bonney (butterflies). Rosemary also found the wonderful Three Ostriches hotel in Prague where most of us stayed after the week in Slovakia. Jenny prepared maps in advance. Peter, born in Prague in the then Czechoslovakia, had all kinds of local insights and his sister Atya gave us a wonderful introductory tour of her home city. Mike and John kept spirits high by trading good-natured insults all week.

Like all Honeyguide holidays, this one contributed to the protection of the wildlife we enjoyed by way of a contribution of £25 per person to SOVS. The £300 left with Pavol is part of the £20,180 raised by Honeyguide in this way since 1991. There's a thank you letter from him at the report's end.

Chris Durdin

Illustrations by Rob Hume. Cover: calling corncrake. Page 10: imperial eagle

Many place names have letters in Slovakian script; some of these have been replaced with simple letters.

Itinerary & daily highlights

Day 1 Saturday, 27/5/00

Morning: flew from London Stansted Airport on 0730hrs *Go Fly* flight to Prague, arriving 0900hrs.

Day in Prague, the capital city of the Czech Republic.

Early evening: onward flight to Košice via Bratislava, arriving 2135hrs. Transferred by minibus 75km to Hotel Energetik at Zemplinska Sirava.

Day 2 Sunday, 28/5/00

Morning & afternoon: travelled 95km east to Nová Sedlica near the border with the Ukraine. Walk through forest in the rolling Bukovské hills, close to the border with Poland.

Hilltop picnic lunch on the Polish border.

Late afternoon: Returned south to the wooden Greek-Catholic church at Uličské Krivé.

Early evening: brief stop along the Cirocha river north of Snina for thrush nightingale. Dinner at Kamienka, before returning to Hotel Energetik.

Highlights of the day were black stork, white-backed woodpecker, firecrest, yellow-bellied toad, the ‘purple’ slug, aconite-leaved buttercup, perennial honesty and (for Steve) the wolf poo. The picnic spot on the ridge with its views into Poland and the Ukraine. The outstanding wooden church at Uličské Krivé. Last but not least, the pancakes with the evening meal at Kamienka!

Day 3 Monday, 29/5/00

Morning: travelled 80km south towards the Hungarian border, east of Streda nad Bodrogom. Walk in the Tarbucka hills.

Lunch and Slovak Tokaj wine degustation at the Zemplin wine cellars at Viničky.

Afternoon: wetland near Bačka and brief roadside stop near the Latorica River south of Vel’ké Kapusany to look for woodpeckers in floodplain forest. Stop southeast of Michalovce for breeding imperial eagle at nest.

Evening: dinner locally (Salaš); a short drive from Hotel Energetik.

Highlights of the day were little bittern, marsh harrier, imperial eagle on the nest, whiskered tern, bee-eater, purple-shot copper butterfly, and the wetland near Bačka. The Slovak Tokaj wine (particularly the five putnya) and the fruit-salad with the evening meal were voted ‘non-wildlife’ highlights!

Day 4 Tuesday, 30/5/00

Early morning: pre-breakfast ‘woodpecker-walk’ in the Slanské hills southwest of Vecheč.

Morning: breakfast in Zmutov. Travelled 25km south, via Vranov nad Topľou, to Davidov. Brief stop near Cabov overlooking Walker’s Valley, to watch for raptors. Walk through Walker’s Valley along the river followed by picnic lunch.

Afternoon: searches for breeding eagle owls in quarries southwest of Vecheč and at Podčičva, northeast of Vranov nad Topľou.

Late afternoon: brief stop in Ináčovce to admire the white storks, followed by Senné fishponds.

Evening: dinner at home in the Hotel Energetik.

Highlights of the day were red-necked grebe at the nest, a family of black-necked grebes, squacco heron, a marsh harrier ‘food pass’, soaring imperial eagles, corncrake, the nest-building penduline tit, golden oriole, beautiful demoiselle damselfly *Calopteryx virgo*, and the scenic Walker’s Valley including the many blue butterflies.

Day 5 Wednesday, 31/5/00

Early morning: Travelled 115km southwest. Breakfast stop in the Slanské hills, west of Secovce.

Morning: stop below Turniansky hrad (castle), north of Turna nad Bodvou, at the 'souslik meadow' and nearby to look for goldendrop *Onosma tornensis*. Brief stop in limestone gorge at Zadiel.

Afternoon: a walk in limestone grassland in the Slovensky Kras region near the Hungarian border, south of Silica, and a visit to the Ochtinská aragonite caves near Ochtin.

Late afternoon: brief potter for plants in the Slovak Paradise National Park north of Dobsina, *en route* to Demänová and our second base Penzión Limba.

Evening: dinner locally (Bystrická izba); a short walk from Penzión Limba.

Highlights of the day were saker, wryneck, Syrian woodpecker, European souslik, aesculapian snake, the karst meadow and the brief potter for plants in the Slovak Paradise National Park.

Day 6 Thursday, 1/6/00

Morning: brief stop overlooking a reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, and a stop nearby for scarlet rosefinch south of Prosiek. Walk northwest along the Prosiecka Valley into the high meadows of the Chočské hills.

Afternoon: visited the Oravská folk museum east of Zuberec.

Late afternoon: viewed goshawk nest near Pavčina Lehota before returning to Penzión Limba nearby.

Evening: dinner at Una.

Highlights of the day were female goshawk on the nest, black woodpecker, greenish warbler (heard), scarlet rosefinch, brown bear, edelweiss and the stunning Prosiecka Valley walk.

Day 7 Friday, 2/6/00

Morning: Nizke Tatry mountains. Uphill 'black woodpecker-walk' west of Penzión Limba, then south to Tri Domceky for the climb to Chopok by chair lift and on foot.

Afternoon: visit to the Demänovská ice-caves.

Late afternoon: Ice-cream followed by relaxing potter in a high meadow east of Tri Domceky [plus optional steep climb through forest above the Demänovská ice-caves to try for three-toed woodpecker!].

Evening: traditional dinner at Koliba.

Highlights of the day were golden eagle, alpine accentor, chamois, alpine marmot, snowbells, the mountains (including the chair lift!) and the ice caves. Mundi voted for the entire day (what a memorable birthday!) and seeing a group of such thoroughly happy Honeyguiders made Pavol's day!

Day 8 Saturday, 3/6/00

Morning: departed Penzión Limba at 0700hrs, after breakfast, bound for Košice. Short break *en route* at Levoca, plus 'photo-stops' including one at Spišsky hrad (the largest Slovak castle).

Morning: Košice town centre.

Early afternoon: transferred to airport for 1430hrs flight to Prague, arriving 1600hrs.

Daily diary

Saturday 27/5/00 – east bound

A cool, blustery early morning found us gathered (somewhat bleary-eyed!) at London Stansted Airport for the first leg of our eastward journey. The no-frills *Go Fly* flight was pleasantly uneventful and, in what seemed no time at all (an hour and a half), we were soon touching down on the western outskirts of Prague, bathed in a very welcome 29°C. Peter's sister Atya, who lives in Prague, kindly met us at the

airport. Atya was to be our guide for the day and, once our larger baggage items were safely stored in Left Luggage, we left for a tour of the famous city.

A combination of bus and tram took us into the old town and from here we ambled downhill towards the Charles Bridge spanning the River Vltava, via the castle (hrad) and St. Vitus Cathedral, joining the thousands of other tourists and acclimatising in the hot sunshine. There was much to see, with lots of cultural attractions, restaurants and bars galore, and many interesting shops. With another stop in Prague to look forward to at the end of the holiday, we simply relaxed and wandered at leisure.

After a thoroughly enjoyable and exhausting day, we reluctantly said our good-byes to Atya who had ably kept us on the move, filling in the historical and architectural points of interest along the way. It was time to resume our eastbound journey, so we returned to the airport for an early evening flight to Košice in eastern Slovakia. By the time we touched down, it was dark and the temperature a much cooler 13°C. Pavol, our leader and Stan, our minibus driver, were there to welcome us. We loaded up the bus and were soon travelling eastwards the 75km to Hotel Energetik, overlooking the huge reservoir, Zemplínska náhirava. A singing nightingale marked our arrival at the hotel which was, despite the late hour, still a hive of activity. Rather than head for the bar, we opted for some welcome sleep. Exhausted, we climbed the several flights of stairs and retired for the night.

Sunday 28/5/00 – the eastern Carpathians

The morning began warm and sunny, drawing us outside onto the terrace for breakfast. Getting our bearings after last night's arrival in the dark, we had our first views of the vast reservoir that lay beyond the hotel. After breakfast, we loaded up the minibus with our optical gear, butterfly nets and field guides and headed towards the remote northeastern corner of Slovakia and the village of Nová Sedlica, near the border with the Ukraine. Roadside red-backed shrikes were soon in evidence, as well as the occasional soaring raptor, but a circling black stork near Topol'á warranted a longer look, bringing the bus to a halt.

Northwest of Nová Sedlica, we arrived in the Bukovské hills. Leaving Stan and the bus behind, we set off uphill for a climb through forest towards the Polish border. By now the day was hot, and we soon found pearl-bordered fritillaries on the wing on the lower slopes and a small stream produced yellow-bellied toads with their dazzlingly patterned underbellies. Mature forest brought relief from the sun as we made our way slowly onwards and upwards. Birds were difficult to see but there were lots of woodland plants to admire including dusky crane's-bill, May lily, perennial honesty and pyramidal bugle. A bright purple slug provided both interest and amusement, as did Steve's interest in the wolf droppings found by Stefan, our guide. A male collared flycatcher and firecrests were seen reasonably well whereas a male white-backed woodpecker gave only brief and tantalising views to a few of the group.

Walking up through old growth beech forest, at last we reached the tops of the hills. An open 'meadow' along the ridge lay ahead, marking the Polish border and, in the distance to the east, we could see into the Ukraine – magnificent views! After a very enjoyable and welcome picnic lunch (eaten whilst sat on the Polish border!), we pottered along the ridge. Both honey and common buzzards soared overhead and a water pipit gave good views as it sang from the tops of the dwarf, low-stature trees on the ridge. Plants caught our attention and we were soon down on hands and knees noting amongst others, aconite-leaved buttercup, alpine leek, bearberry, chickweed-wintergreen and false white helleborine. As afternoon wore on, we retraced our steps downhill, the stragglers picking up ring ouzel, lesser whitethroat and wood warbler on the way.

On the way back, we stopped at the charming and historic wooden Greek-Catholic church in the sleepy village of Uličské Krivé. The churchyard itself was almost idyllic, with its charming flower-rich meadow, and a very proud kaplan (caretaker) showed us around the beautiful, painted interior of the church, which oozed rustic charm. Making the most of the day, we stopped at dusk along the Cirocha river north of Snina to listen to thrush nightingales singing from dense willow scrub. Adding interest, a corncrake 'rasped' from a nearby field and a black kite flew past on its way to roost, before we too headed off for a splendid dinner at Kamienka.

Monday 29/5/00 – the Hungarian border and the southeast

Monday was overcast as we travelled south towards the Hungarian border. Our destination was an open area of grassland and scattered scrub in the Tarbucka hills, south of Zemplin and east of Streda nad Bodrogom. We met our guide, Milo[▲], and set off on our walk. Bee-eaters were soon sailing overhead and a tree sparrow was 'examined' through the 'scope. Compared with yesterday, birds were easier to see in the open habitats, with tawny pipit, red-backed shrike, hawfinch and corn bunting added to the list. Two quail called from cover only a few metres away and a hastily co-ordinated drive yielded immediate results with brief but good flight views of one bird flushed from beneath Peter's feet.

A gentle climb into hillside scrub brought a hobby, more red-backed shrikes, and good views of woodlark and, in contrast, tantalising views of both barred warbler and golden oriole. Flowering privet scented the air, attracting insects galore including several spectacular purple-shot copper butterflies. This was certainly a good grassland spot for coppers with, in addition to purple-shot, violet and large, as well as dainty green-underside blues. There were lots of plants to get to grips with, including globularia, the pink *Dianthus giganteiformis* and another, regionally-scarce pink, for which the site is designated a protected area.

After a successful morning, a short drive took us to the Zemplin wine cellars at Viničky where we enjoyed a tour of the cool, subterranean wine cellars, including a very entertaining Slovak Tokaj wine degustation, followed by lunch in the somewhat warmer conditions above ground. After purchasing some full bottles of the wines sampled earlier, we headed east to a small wetland near Bačka, which produced excellent views of a little bittern, whiskered terns, great reed warbler and a crane flying overhead.

By now it was raining heavily, so a brief roadside stop near the Latorica River south of Vel'ké Kapusany to look for woodpeckers in the floodplain forest proved unsuccessful. The next roadside stop produced a black kite and four white storks busy taking advantage of the feeding opportunities provided by a freshly ploughed field. The third stop southeast of Michalovce provided arguably the highlight of the day, if not the entire week, as we 'scoped an adult imperial eagle feeding its young at its treetop eyrie, high above the road. A fabulous end to the day, equaled only by the fruit salad, beer and raucous folk singing at dinner!

Tuesday 30/5/00 – Walker's Valley and Senné fishponds - a very special wetland

Today's action-packed itinerary got off to an early start with a pre-breakfast walk in the Slanské hills southwest of Vechec, to look for woodpeckers. Once again, viewing birds in forest proved difficult on the steeply sloping terrain. Wood warbler, tree pipit and several woodpeckers were heard and we had brief views of lesser spotted woodpecker and hawfinch in the treetops. Great spotted woodpeckers were a little more confiding with reasonable views of a family group, but our 'target' nest proved to be empty, the young white-backed woodpeckers having already fledged. Heading back to the minibus, a black woodpecker called loudly nearby, giving annoyingly brief views as it flew off through the trees.

A welcome breakfast in Zmutov followed and, as the morning sun warmed us, we retraced our route southwards, via Vranov nad Topľou, to Davidov. A mid-morning roadside stop to scan for raptors soaring over Walker's Valley brought immediate success with lesser spotted and imperial eagles. Before long, we were below where the eagles had been, for a walk following the river through the aptly named Walker's Valley. Riverine trees and scrub, wet pasture and dry slopes, all contained within a narrow river valley, provided great diversity and in the bright, sunny conditions butterflies as well as birds caught our attention, particularly the 'blues' including little, osiris, silver-studded and Chapman's. Dazzling large coppers fed at water mint and both small pearl-bordered and Queen of Spain fritillaries were caught and identified, whilst Mundi and Jo found a black hairstreak in blackthorn scrub near the river. Notable among the birds were excellent views of lesser spotted eagle, further views of imperial eagle, good views of a corncrake in flight (which also called incessantly within feet of us without once being glimpsed!), a lesser spotted woodpecker foraging on dead hogweed stems, and superb views of river warbler. Barred warblers were also seen, and a black woodpecker flew high over our heads as we ate our picnic lunch.

After our lunch, searches of two local quarries for breeding eagle owl proved unsuccessful and so, as afternoon wore on, we travelled southeast towards the internationally renowned Senné fishponds, stopping briefly *en route* in Ináčovce, to admire and photograph white storks on the nest. Once on site we were itching to get out of the bus, as herons flew by us in all directions. The wetland habitat was tremendous, with willows and scrub, both *Phragmites* and *Typha* reedswamp, shallow pools and dykes, in addition to the deeper, open lagoons. Great white egret outnumbered little, and night herons were trickling out from their roosting sites in good numbers as dusk approached. There were so many birds that, at times, it was difficult to know where to look. It is tempting to list them all here, but highlights must include red-necked and black-necked grebes, squacco herons, a close and easy-to-see Savi's warbler, golden orioles, and close-ups of a penduline tit, busily weaving its hanging nest. Marsh harriers were numerous, and we were privileged to witness a mid-air food-pass.

Wednesday 31/5/00 – on the move: central Slovakia, the mountains region

Today marked the second part of our trip, as we left eastern Slovakia, transferring westwards to a new base in the mountains of the Low Tatras mountains (Nizke Tatry) in central Slovakia. Our day began early again as we hit the road at 6am, stopping *en route* for breakfast in the Slanské hills, west of Secovce. Returning to the minibus after breakfast, a corncrake 'rasped' in the adjacent damp meadow and a river warbler sang, concealed in the scrub next to the car park.

The first main stop of the morning was in a wide valley to the north of Turna nad Bodvou, below wooded hills and the Turniansky hrad (castle). Before us lay an open area of dry limestone grassland. Wheatears were present, no doubt breeding in one of the many souslik burrows dotted across the site. A scan with binoculars soon revealed several of these small, appealing mammals standing upright on their hind-legs in typical fashion, munching on vegetation whilst scanning the horizon for danger. Soon it was time to move on again, but not before an all too brief and dramatic incident, as a saker came hurtling over the meadow, plucking a hapless souslik from the colony before our very eyes. Luckily, we were able to 'scope this large, bulky falcon which landed on a pylon, albeit some distance away.

Following the excitement of the saker, we moved on, stopping nearby to look for goldendrop *Onosma tornensis* on a rocky limestone slope. In addition to the goldendrop, located without too much climbing, were meadow clary and field cow-wheat, as well as a confiding male rock bunting and a male green lizard showing off with its striking blue head.

Our next stop was in a steep-sided limestone gorge at Zadiel. It was going to be a tough and time consuming climb to the top, so we opted to move further west to an area of karst south of Silica, close to

the Hungarian border. Conditions today were much cooler, with rain; ideal for travelling but not so good for finding butterflies in the limestone grassland. Undeterred, Mundi and Rosemary managed to find and identify chestnut heath and we also stumbled (almost literally) across a very sluggish aesculapian snake. Adding to the day's events, we were paid a visit by a couple of border guards keen to check out identity papers and no doubt more than a little inquisitive about a group of people wandering around looking in all directions with binoculars! Nearby, barred and river warblers were singing and a lovely orchard revealed a pair of wrynecks, eventually seen well by everyone.

Cramming as much into our transfer day as possible, next on the itinerary was a visit to the Ochtinská aragonite caves near Ochtina, one of only two such caves known anywhere in the world. From there we headed north, stopping again briefly in the Slovak Paradise National Park north of Dobsina, *en route* to Demänová and our second base, Penzión Limba in the Nízke Tatry mountains.

Thursday 1/6/00 – Prosiecka Valley

The morning began cool again, as we made a brief stop overlooking a reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš. Other than two black-necked grebes on the water and a little gull, our attention was drawn to a foraging white stork and a fox in a newly mown field of hay on the other side of the road. South of Prosieck, we needed only a brief search before locating several scarlet rosefinches including at least two brightly-coloured singing males in treetops close to the reservoir.

At the base of the Prosiecka Valley we left Stan with the minibus and set off on foot for a gentle climb up the valley. Early on, there were one or two tricky bits along the stream and there were a couple of steep ladder climbs to negotiate, but overall the walking was easy, and what a stunningly beautiful valley, one of the highlights of the week! Birds were generally difficult to see in the forest coating the valley sides, but we heard a distant singing greenish warbler and saw dipper, grey wagtail and family groups of black redstart and willow tit. The undoubted highlight for those at the head of the group, and thus fortunate to see it, was definitely non-avian - a brown bear, disturbed from the narrow stream valley floor where it was foraging out in the open! For some of us, it was difficult to recover from the fact we had missed the bear, but we pressed on, hoping to catch another glimpse of this magnificent large mammal. The search of a high crag face in a side valley for wallcreeper provided a diversion and by this time the sun was out. We soaked up the sun and waited, but this gorgeous montane bird didn't show. The gorge deepened as we went deeper into the valley, and the scenery was simply splendid. Alpine and woodland plants provided lots of interest, including edelweiss, alpine clematis, alpine aster, Clusius's gentian, columbine, lesser butterfly-orchid, coralroot orchid, lady's mantle and lily-of-the-valley, whilst woodland ringlet was a new addition to the butterfly list.

Before long, we left the confines of the steep sides of the valley and came out onto the high meadows of the Chocské hills, with its wide vistas. Stan was waiting with the minibus in the far distance, but meanwhile there was time for some more botanising and broad-leaved marsh-orchids were soon identified, being abundant in the wetter parts of the grassland. 'Parachuting' meadow pipits were a familiar sight to us and a small patch of scrub held a splendid male whinchat in spring breeding plumage, whilst to right and left, a corncrake and quail were calling simultaneously.

By now it was mid-afternoon and we opted to squeeze in a visit to the Oravská folk museum east of Zuberec. Situated alongside a fast flowing mountain river, the museum comprised a cluster of vernacular buildings of a variety of sizes and status, brought here from various parts of Slovakia, all laid out with the traditional furnishings and household belongings relevant to their former occupants. On the bird 'front', several siskins 'wheezed' overhead and a male bullfinch was added to the trip list during this relaxing cultural interlude.

After the Prosiecka Valley and the bear, it was difficult to imagine how the day could get any better, but the highlights just kept on coming, with a great grey shrike and black woodpecker seen *en route*. At a stop near Pavcina Lehota on the way back to Penzión Limba, our guide Peter led us to a goshawk's nest in valley woodland. When we arrived the female was sitting and, at a distance and concealed among the thick understorey, we were able to watch her, almost 'eye-to eye' as it were, through the telescope – stunning! As we chatted excitedly on the walk back to the minibus, firecrest, fieldfare and hawfinch rounded off a day to remember.

Friday 2/6/00 – the Low Tatras mountains

After an early breakfast we climbed a steep forested hill west of Penzión Limba to a known black woodpecker nest but, following the trend of the week's nest 'stake-outs', the young had fledged and the birds were nowhere to be seen. Two hobbies, fieldfare and calling crossbills provided adequate compensation.

As our last full day in Slovakia unfurled, we drove south into the heart of the Lower Tatras National Park (2043m at its highest point) to the chairlift at Tri Domceky, for the climb onto the northern slopes of the Chopok ridge. A red squirrel was seen *en route* and a ring ousel was heard calling near the chair lift. After a short wait, we were soon being launched into the air, high above the Norway spruce which clothed the lower slopes, and from where crossbills were heard calling. After what seemed like only a few minutes we came 'into land' on the slopes of Chopok, high above the treeline.

Other than the ubiquitous black redstart, singing water pipits and dunnoek, birds were thin on the ground. The slopes promised some rewarding botanising and, although alpine bellflower, white pasqueflower, least primrose and snowbell were found, the overall diversity was a little disappointing. The path wound its way uphill and we eventually stopped for our picnic lunch at a good vantage point, overlooking a number of ridges and a valley way below us. Fleeces were in order in the cool wind, although the sun felt hot on any exposed skin in the thinner air. There was a pair of wheatears nearby, and a confiding alpine accentor shuffled across the top of a remnant patch of snow, allowing excellent, close views. Two chamois were spotted way down below us across the other side of the valley and it was a few minutes before everyone had seen them, so well did they blend into the landscape. Further alpine accentors were seen and at least one more chamois before all eyes were on the horizon as first one then two golden eagles came into view, giving excellent views. Lunch over, our party split into two with one group pottering back towards the chairlift, some botanising on the way, and another group heading upslope to the mountain hut at Kosodrevina for welcome refreshment! For those undertaking the climb uphill there was soon respite when, within minutes Peter, our sharp-eyed guide, had spotted two alpine marmots way below us, running around at the base of a scree slope. There was time to enjoy views of these large, chunky rodents through the 'scope before it was time to press on again.

After a hurried descent to catch the chairlift back down the mountainside, we set off to visit the spectacular Demänovská ice-caves nearby. After the morning's exertions, our legs were weary and even reaching the cave entrance necessitated a steep climb! Nevertheless, the deep, cavernous limestone caves were worth experiencing, some with their strange formations and sheets of ice. Afterwards, as the day wore on, 'decision-time' followed, with either a relaxing couple of hours pottering for plants and butterflies in a lovely alpine meadow, or a strenuous, steep forest climb to look for three-toed woodpecker on offer! Most of the group made the correct choice and opted for the meadow, whilst Debbie, Peter and Steve headed uphill once again behind Pavol and Peter (where do they find all that energy!). Needless to say (remember the trend!), there was no sign of *the* woodpecker and we had to be content instead with crested tit, ring ousel, roe deer and globeflower, as well as fresh brown bear droppings and more wolf poo. It's great to know that these two mammals still roam the hills and mountains of Slovakia – and may it always be the case.

In the evening we enjoyed an absolutely tremendous traditional dinner, where we toasted Mundi's birthday and Chris presented Pavol with a Honeyguide holiday donation towards the work of the Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia (SOVS) at Senné fishponds.

Saturday 3/6/00 – return to Prague

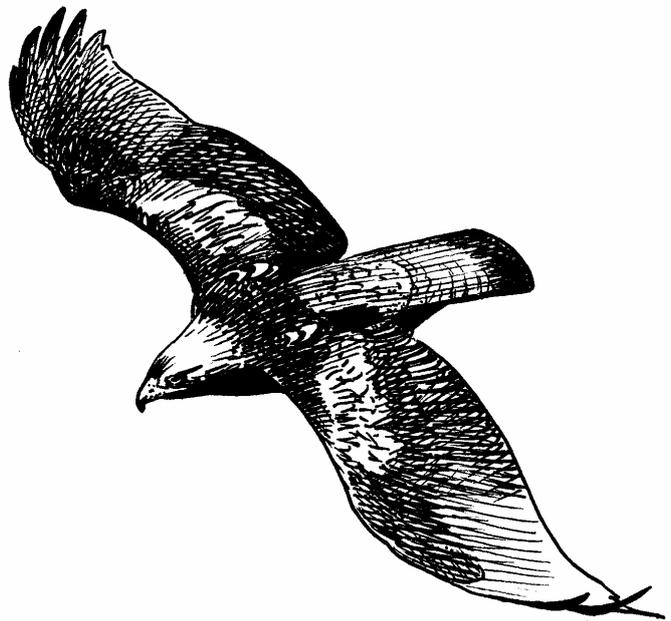
After an early breakfast, we loaded up our bags into the minibus once again and, on a clear, hot and sunny morning, headed off from Penzión Limba for the last time. It was time to leave behind the mountains of the Lower Tatras and head for Košice, and our flight back to Prague. The weather lent itself to viewing the lovely countryside as we headed east, stopping *en route* to take photos of the mountains and Spišský hrad, the largest castle in Slovakia. We also made an unscheduled stop in the lovely old town of Levoca, where there was just time for a stroll and a coffee.

The town of Košice, with its square, cathedral and rows of busy shops brought us back down to earth. We set off in the hot sun among the throng of shoppers and tourists in search of presents and souvenirs to take home – we hadn't seen this many people since Prague! Later, arriving back at the minibus, Pavol's wife Monika was waiting, having driven over from Vranov nad Topľou armed with t-shirts and other SOVS goodies.

Our week in Slovakia was nearing an end as Stan drove us back to the airport. We said our farewells to Pavol, Monica and Stan and reluctantly checked in for our early afternoon return flight to Prague. Before long we were touching down again and soon being whisked into the city of Prague by whirlwind-like taxis. Peter opted to fly straight home to the UK, whilst the rest of us were intent on squeezing a few last drops from our holiday with a one and, in some cases, a two-night stay at the well-situated Hotel U T★× P★tros◆ (The Three Ostriches), next to Charles Bridge.

What a fantastic week it had been, with many memories to treasure. Many thanks to Chris for staging the recce and giving us the opportunity to visit such a beautiful country. Thanks to Peter and his sister Atya, for showing us Prague. Thanks to Pavol for the packed but rewarding itinerary and thanks to Pavol and Monika for ensuring that we returned to the UK a few pounds heavier – the menus were superb! Thanks to Stan for driving and last, but not least, thanks to our guides Stefan, Milo^, Ricardo and Peter, who all helped enrich our stay.

Finally, I'd like to thank Jenny for annotating and supplying maps of the recce, making my task of compiling this report so much easier.



Imperial eagle

Systematic lists

Birds

Little Grebe

3, plus others calling, wetland near Bačka, 29/5; 2, plus others calling, Senné fishponds, 30/5 and on the reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6.

Great Crested Grebe

2, Zemplinska Sirava, 29/5 and 5, 31/5; 2, wetland near Bačka, 29/5; Senné fishponds, 30/5 and on a wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 31/5.

Red-necked Grebe

Superb views of an adult on the nest, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Black-necked Grebe

3, plus a group of 3 with young, Senné fishponds, 30/5; 2, reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6.

Cormorant

Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Bittern

1 (distant views), and several heard booming, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Little Bittern

2-3, wetland near Bačka, 29/5.

Night Heron

Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Squacco Heron

2, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Little Egret

Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Great White Egret

Outnumbering little egret, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Grey Heron

Wetland near Bačka, 29/5; Senné fishponds, 30/5; present at a reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš. Seen whilst travelling: several, 29/5 & 5, 1/6.

Purple Heron

Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Black Stork

1 circling over the turn to Topol'a, Poloniny National Park, *en route* to Nová Sedlica, 28/5; 4, 29/5; 1, Walker's Valley, 30/5, and 1 seen whilst *en route*, 31/5.

White Stork

Seen 29/5; 30/5; 31/5, 1/6 and 3/6, including 4 foraging on a freshly ploughed field, 29/5, and 6 occupied nests in the village of Ináčovce on 30/5.

Spoonbill

4, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Mute Swan

Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Gadwall

Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Mallard

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6.

Garganey

Senné fishponds, 30/5 and 1 on a wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 31/5.

Pochard

2 males, wetland near Bačka, 29/5; Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Tufted Duck

Senné fishponds, 30/5 and on a reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6.

Honey Buzzard

Singles, 28/5, 29/5 & 31/5.

Black Kite

1, near the Cirocha river, north of Snina, 28/5; 1 hunting over a freshly ploughed field, 29/5.

Red Kite

1 over cereal fields, *en route* to Nová Sedlica, 28/5.

Marsh Harrier

Seen daily, 28/5-31/5 and on 3/6. At Senné fishponds on 30/5, 12 could be seen in a single field of view, hunting over a small area of reedbed (a food-pass also seen).

Goshawk

A female on the nest, in woodland near Pavcina Lehota, 1/6.

Sparrowhawk

A female at the north end of Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Buzzard

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6 and on 3/6.

Lesser Spotted Eagle

3, Slanské hills (including Walker's Valley) near Davidov, and 2 seen hunting over farmland, 30/5; 1 in hilly terrain, *en route* to Demänová, 31/5.

Imperial Eagle

Adult feeding small young at nest, southeast of Michalovce, 29/5; 2 pairs, Slanské hills (including Walker's Valley) near Davidov, 30/5.

Golden Eagle

2, Chopok, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Kestrel

Seen daily, 29/5-2/6.

Hobby

1, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5; 1 at dusk, Senné fishponds 30/5, and 2, Nizke Tatry mountains west of Penzión Limba, 2/6.

Saker

1 carrying off a souslik from the 'souslik meadow', near Turniansky hrad (castle), 31/5.

Quail

1 seen and another heard close-by, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5; heard, Walker's Valley, 30/5, and heard, Slovak Karst, south of Silica 31/5. 1 calling from fields near the reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, and 1 heard on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Pheasant

Seen on 29/5, 30/5 & 31/5.

Water Rail

Several heard, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Corncrake

1 heard near the Cirocha river, north of Snina, 28/5; 1 seen and others heard, Walker's Valley 30/5; 1 heard at the breakfast stop, west of Secovce, Slanské hills, 31/5, and heard on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Moorhen

2, wetland near Bačka, 29/5; 1 and others heard, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Coot

Wetland near Bačka, 29/5; Senné fishponds, 30/5; wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 31/5; reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6.

Crane

1, high over the wetland near Bačka, 29/5.

Avocet

3 pairs, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Little Ringed Plover

2, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Lapwing

Several, wetland near Bačka, 29/5; 1 seen mobbing an imperial eagle, Slanské hills near Davidov, 30/5; Senné fishponds, 30/5; seen in farmland, 29/5, 31/5 & 1/6.

Redshank

c.3, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Little Gull

2, Senné fishponds, 30/5; 1 immature, reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6.

Black-headed Gull

1, Zemplinska *irava, 29/5 & 31/5; c.5, wetland near Bačka, 29/5; Senné fishponds, 30/5; reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6. Also seen whilst travelling, 31/5 & 1/6.

Herring Gull

Several present, reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6.

Yellow-legged Gull

Senné fishponds, 30/5; 1, Zemplinska *irava, 31/5.

Common Tern

Several, reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6.

Whiskered Tern

Small breeding colony: c.20-30, wetland near Bačka, 29/5.

Feral Pigeon

Seen 29/5, 30/5 & 31/5.

Stock Dove

2, Slanské hills near Davidov, 30/5; seen in farmland, 28/5 & 31/5.

Woodpigeon

2 heard, Slanské hills southwest of Večec, 30/5; 1, Slovak Karst, south of Silica, 31/5; 1 seen whilst travelling, and 1, reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6, and 1, Penzión Limba, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Collared Dove

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6 and on 3/6.

Turtle Dove

1, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5; 3+, Slanské hills near Davidov, and several, Walker's Valley, 30/5; Slovak Karst, south of Silica, 31/5, including a flock of c.20-25. Also seen on 1/6.

Cuckoo

Seen or heard daily, 28/5-1/6.

Swift

Seen 28/5, 30/5, 31/5, 1/6 & 3/6.

Kingfisher

1, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Bee-eater

Small breeding colony, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5.

Hoopoe

1 calling near the Hotel Energetik, 31/5.

Wryneck

2 in an orchard, in an area of the Slovak Karst, south of Silica, 31/5.

Black Woodpecker

1 calling and seen briefly, and another calling in the distance, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, 30/5; 1 flying between patches of forest, high overhead, at the northern end of Walker's Valley, 30/5; 1 seen from the minibus, south of Zuberec, 1/6.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

2, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5; 1 adult with at least 1 young, and others heard, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, 30/5; 1, Slovak Karst, south of Silica, 31/5, and heard, Nizke Tatry mountains west of Penzión Limba, 2/6.

Syrian Woodpecker

1 heard in Ináčovce, 30/5; 1 seen well near the minibus, Moldava, 31/5.

White-backed Woodpecker

A male, and another bird calling nearby, Bukovské hills, 28/5; 1 calling, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, 30/5.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

1 and another calling, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, and a female, Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Crested Lark

1 by the roadside on the outskirts of Laborec, 29/5; 1 near the 'souslik meadow', near Turniansky hrad (castle), 31/5.

Woodlark

2, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5; 1, Slovak Karst, south of Silica, 31/5.

Skylark

Seen daily, 29/5-1/6.

Sand Martin

4+, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5; several over the reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6.

Swallow

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6 and on 3/6.

House Martin

Seen daily, 28/5-3/6.

Tawny Pipit

1, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5.

Tree Pipit

3, ridge meadow, on the border with Poland, Bukovské hills, 28/5; 2 heard singing, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, and 1, Walker's Valley, 30/5; 2, Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Meadow Pipit

Several on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Water Pipit

1, food carrying, ridge meadow on the border with Poland, Bukovské hills, 28/5; several, Chopok, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Yellow Wagtail

2+, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Grey Wagtail

1 seen from the minibus, 28/5; 1, Walker's Valley, 30/5; 2, Prosiecka Valley and 1, Oravsk· folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6; 1, Tri Domceky and 2 seen from minibus, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

White Wagtail

Seen daily, 28/5-3/6.

Dipper

2-3, Prosiecka Valley, 1/6

Wren

Heard, Bukovské hills, 28/5; heard, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, 30/5; heard around the Ochtinsk· aragonite caves near Ochtin·, 31/5, and Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Dunnoek

Bukovské hills, 28/5; Prosiecka Valley, 1/6; Chopok, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Alpine Accentor

c.5, Chopok, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Robin

Seen 28/5 & daily, 30/5-2/6.

Thrush Nightingale

1 seen briefly and a further 3 heard singing, Cirocha river, north of Snina, 28/5.

Nightingale

Heard, Hotel Energetik, Zemplinska *irava, 27/5, 28/5, 30/5 & 31/5; Walker's Valley, 30/5; heard, Senné fishponds, 30/5; several singing around the goldendrop site area, south of Turniansky hrad (castle), 31/5.

Black Redstart

Seen 28/5 & daily, 30/5-3/6 including a family and a pair food carrying, Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Redstart

1 seen briefly in low-stature forest and another heard, on the ridge (border with Poland), Bukovské hills, 28/5.

Whinchat

Seen daily, 29/5-1/6, including 1 at the 'souslik meadow', near Turniansky hrad (castle), 31/5 and 1 on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Stonechat

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6.

Wheatear

2, Viničky, 29/5; 1 on the 'souslik meadow', near Turniansky hrad (castle), 31/5; 2, Chopok, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Ring Ouzel

A male and another heard, Bukovské hills, 28/5. A female seen from the minibus; 1 calling, Tri Domceky; 1 in forest above the Demänovská ice-caves, and a conspicuous male at dusk, feeding on the ground near the restaurant, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Blackbird

Seen daily, 28/5-2/6.

Fieldfare

2, near Pavcina Lehota, 1/6; 3, Nizke Tatry mountains west of Penzión Limba, 2/6.

Song Thrush

Seen daily, 28/5-2/6.

Mistle thrush

1 heard singing on the Slovak Karst, south of Silica, 31/5; 1, near Penzión Limba; 1-2, reservoir, south of Prosieck; 3, Prosiecka Valley, and also at the Oravsk· folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6.

River Warbler

1 seen well, Walker's Valley, and 1 heard singing, Senné fishponds, 30/5; 1 heard at the breakfast stop, west of Secovce, Slanské hills, and 1 heard on the Slovak Karst, south of Silica, 31/5.

Savi's Warbler

1 seen very well and others heard 'reeling', Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Sedge Warbler

2, and others heard, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Marsh Warbler

1 seen briefly and several others heard, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Reed Warbler

Several heard singing, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Great Reed Warbler

2, and others heard, wetland near Bačka, 29/5; 2, and others heard, Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Barred Warbler

Several seen and heard in scrub, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5; 3 seen plus others heard, Walker's Valley, 30/5, and heard, Slovak Karst, south of Silica 31/5.

Lesser Whitethroat

1 heard singing on the lower slopes, Bukovské hills, 28/5.

Whitethroat

Seen and heard daily, 28/5-1/6.

Garden Warbler

1 heard singing, Bukovské hills, 28/5; heard, 30/5; heard singing from around the edge of the reservoir, south of Prosiek and in Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Blackcap

Seen, or heard in song, 28/5-2/6.

Greenish Warbler

Heard briefly, Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Wood Warbler

2, Bukovské hills, 28/5; 1 heard, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, 30/5; 2 heard singing, Prosiecka Valley, and also heard singing at the Oravsk· folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6.

Chiffchaff

Seen, or heard in song, 28/5-2/6.

Willow Warbler

Heard singing, Bukovské hills, 28/5; 1, Penzión Limba, 31/5; 1, reservoir, south of Prosiek, and 2 heard singing, Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Goldcrest

Heard around the Ochtinsk· aragonite caves near Ochtin·, 31/5; 1 heard singing near Penzión Limba, 31/5 & 1/6.

Firecrest

2, Bukovské hills, 28/5; 1, in woodland near Pavcina Lehota, 1/6.

Spotted flycatcher

1 outside Penzión Limba, and 1, Oravsk· folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6.

Collared Flycatcher

A male, Bukovské hills, 28/5; 1 in floodplain forest near the Latorica River, south of Vel'ké Kapu*any, 29/5; a female plus a male heard singing, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, 30/5.

Long-tailed tit

3, Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Marsh Tit

2 heard, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, 30/5.

Willow Tit

A family party, Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Crested Tit

Several in forest above the Demänovská ice-caves, 2/6.

Coal Tit

Heard around the Ochtinsk· aragonite caves near Ochtin·, 31/5; 1 and others calling, Prosiecka Valley, 1/6; heard, Penzión Limba, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Blue tit

1, carrying food, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, 30/5. Also seen, 31/5-2/6.

Great tit

Seen and heard daily, 28/5-1/6.

Nuthatch

1, flying over the ridge meadow on the border with Poland, Bukovské hills, 28/5; heard, Slanské hills southwest of Vehec, and at Podčičva, northeast of Vranov nad Topľou, 30/5.

Treecreeper

1, Podčičva, northeast of Vranov nad Topľou, 30/5.

Short-toed Treecreeper

1 heard in floodplain forest near the Latorica River, south of Vel'ké Kapu*any, 29/5.

Penduline Tit

Heard, wetland near Bačka, 29/5; several seen, Senné fishponds, 30/5 including one nest building.

Golden Oriole

2-4, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5. Seen and heard, Walker's Valley; heard calling from riverside trees, Podčičva, northeast of Vranov nad Topľou; and 2 seen well, plus others heard, Senné fishponds, 30/5. Heard, Slovak Karst, south of Silica, 31/5.

Red-backed Shrike

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6 and on 3/6.

Great Grey Shrike

1, on telegraph wires over dry grassland, south of Zuberec, 1/6.

Jay

Seen daily, 29/5-2/6.

Magpie

Seen daily, 29/5-1/6 and on 3/6. 1 seen mobbing an imperial eagle, Slanské hills near Davidov, 30/5.

Jackdaw

Seen daily, 29/5-1/6.

Rook

Seen 29/5, 31/5 & 1/6 including an active rookery at Liptovská Mikuláš.

Hooded Crow

Seen daily, 29/5-1/6 and on 3/6.

Raven

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6.

Starling

Seen daily, 29/5-1/6 and on 3/6.

House sparrow

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6 and on 3/6.

Tree sparrow

Several, wetland near Bačka, 29/5; 1, Hotel Energetik, 30/5 & 2+, 31/5. Seen whilst travelling, 31/5.

Chaffinch

Seen daily, 28/5-3/6.

Serín

Seen and heard daily, 28/5-3/6. Conspicuous outside Hotel Energetik.

Greenfinch

Seen daily, 28/5-2/6.

Goldfinch

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6 and on 3/6.

Siskin

Several seen and heard, Oravsk· folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6.

Linnet

2, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5; 1, Slanské hills southwest of Večec, 30/5; 1, Nizke Tatry mountains west of Penzión Limba, 2/6.

Crossbill

Heard on 1/6, and heard, west of Penzión Limba and on the lower forested slopes north of Chopok, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Scarlet Rosefinch

5 in willow scrub and scattered trees at the edge of the reservoir, south of Prosiek, 1/6. Excellent views of 'scarlet' males, singing in treetops.

Bullfinch

A male, Oravsk· folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6.

Hawfinch

Seen and heard daily, 28/5-1/6.

Yellowhammer

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6.

Rock bunting

A male in song at the goldendrop site, south of Turniansky hrad (castle), 31/5.

Reed bunting

Several, Senné fishponds, 30/5; wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 31/5; 1 in song at the edge of the reservoir, south of Prosiek, 1/6.

Corn bunting

Seen daily, 28/5-1/6 and on 3/6.

Birds recorded in Prague on 27.5.00:

Mute Swan 1
Mallard
Tufted Duck 2
Kestrel 5+
Black-headed Gull
Woodpigeon 1
Swift
Swallow
House Martin
Black Redstart 4+
Blackbird 4
Song Thrush 2
Blackcap 1 singing
Chiffchaff 1 singing
Blue Tit 1
Great Tit
Magpie 2
Jackdaw 2
Chaffinch
Greenfinch 2

Mammals

English & scientific names follow *Mammals of Britain and Europe* (MacDonald & Barrett 1993).

Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)

1, near Tri Domceky, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

European Souslik (*Spermophilus [Citellus] citellus*)

Several watched through the 'scope on the 'souslik meadow', near Turniansky hrad (castle), 31/5.

Alpine Marmot (*Marmota marmota*)

2, Chopok, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Wolf (*Canis lupus*)

Droppings (old to recent), Bukovské hills, 28/5 and in forest above the Demänovská ice-caves, 2/6.

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

1 crossing a freshly mown field near the reservoir northwest of Liptovská Mikuláš, 1/6.

Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*)

1 seen, Prosiecka Valley, 1/6 and fresh droppings in forest above the Demänovská ice-caves, 2/6.

Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*)**Roe Deer** (*Capreolus capreolus*)**Chamois** (*Rupicapra rupicapra*)

3-4, Chopok, Nizke Tatry mountains, 2/6.

Amphibians & Reptiles

English & scientific names follow *A field guide to the reptiles and amphibians of Britain and Europe* (Arnold & Burton 1978)

Green toad (*Bufo viridis*)**Yellow-bellied toad** (*Bombina variegata*)

Bukovské hills, 28/5.

Green lizard (*Lacerta viridis*)

Adult male, at the goldendrop site, south of Turniansky hrad (castle), 31/5.

Aesculapian Snake (*Elaphe longissima*)

1, Slovak Karst grassland, south of Silica, 31/5.

Butterflies

English & scientific names follow *The Mitchell Beazley pocket guide to Butterflies* (Whalley 1981)

Small White (*Artogeia rapae*)**Green-veined White** (*Artogeia napi*)**Dappled White** (*Euchloe simplonia*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Orange tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*)**Painted Lady** (*Cynthia cardui*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Peacock butterfly (*Inachis io*)

Seen 2/6.

Queen of Spain Fritillary (*Issoria lathonia*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Twin-spot Fritillary (*Brenthis hecate*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Clossiana euphrosyne*)**Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** (*Clossiana selene*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Woodland Ringlet (*Erebia medusa*)

Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*)**Dusky Meadow Brown** (*Hyponephele lycaon*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Large Heath (*Coenonympha tullia*)**Small Heath** (*Coenonympha pamphilus*)**Chestnut Heath** (*Coenonympha glycerion*)

Slovak Karst grassland, south of Silica, 31/5.

Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)

Bukovské hills, 28/5.

Black Hairstreak (*Strymonidia pruni*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Violet Copper (*Lycaena helle*)

Tarbuska hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5.

Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*)

Tarbuska hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5; Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Scarce Copper (*Heodes virgaureae*)

Purple-shot Copper (*Heodes alciphron*)

Tarbuska hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5.

Lesser Fiery Copper (*Thersamonia thersamon*)

Purple-edged Copper (*Palaeochrysopterus hippothoe*)

Senné fishponds, 30/5.

Little [Small] Blue (*Cupido minimus*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Osiris Blue (*Cupido osiris*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Green-underside Blue (*Glaucopsyche alexis*)

Tarbuska hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5.

Baton Blue (*Pseudophilotes baton*)

Silver-studded Blue (*Plebejus argus*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Reverdin's Blue (*Lycaeides argyrognomon*)

[Mazarine Blue] (*Cyaniris semiargus*)

Possible - Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Chapman's Blue (*Agrodiaetus thersites*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Moths

Six-spot Burnet (*Zygaena filipendulae*)

Hummingbird Hawk-moth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Dragonflies

Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*)

Walker's Valley, 30/5.

Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax imperator*)

Tarbuska hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 29/5.

Some miscellaneous invertebrates

A violet slug

A violet dung beetle

Rhino beetle

Black and red shield bug *Graphosoma italicum*

Paper wasp

Crab spider sp

Roman snail

Flowers (contributed by Jo Simons)

Sunday 28 May - Bukovske Hills, East Slovakian/Polish border

Asarabacca *Asarum europaeum*
Common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*
Monk's rhubarb *Rumex alpinus*
Rock campion *Silene rupestris*
Caltha palustris
Meadow buttercup
Creeping buttercup
Perennial honesty *Lunaria rediviva*
Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*
Dusky cranebill *Geranium phaeum*
Coralroot (Bittercress) *Cardamine bulbifera*
Pansy, deep violet, described by guide as something which sounded like *Viola danziga*
Willow gentian *Gentiana asclepiadea* (not in flower)
Woodruff
Comfrey
Pyramidal bugle
Ground ivy
Spotted dead nettle
Sanicle
Alpine leek
Wood sorrel
Whorled Solomon's seal *Polygonatum verticillatum*
Fragrant orchid
Spiked rampion *Phyteuma spicatum*
Chickweed wintergreen
Bearberry
False white helleborine
Aconite-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus aconitifolius*
Wild strawberry
May lily
Yellow archangel
Feverfew
Martagon lily (not in flower)

Ulicske Krive Churchyard

Ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*
Spreading bellflower *Campanula patula*
Oxeye daisy

Monday 29 May - Tarbuscka Hill, near Hungarian border at Zemplin

Gypsophila
Scentless mayweed
Crown vetch
Evening primrose
bellflower identified by Chris and John
Globularia
Tall pink *Dianthus giganteiformis*
Biting stonecrop
Fine-leaved dropwort
Swallowwort
Dianthus that the place was reserved for!!?
Danewort
Alkanet

Cypress spurge
Broomrape sp

Pond stop

Water soldier
Iris pseudocorus
Amphibious bistort
Cornflower

Tuesday 30 May - Slanske Hills, woodland walk

Yellow foxglove *Digitalis grandiflora*
Dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*

Slanske Hills, Walker's valley

Meadow clary *Salvia pratensis*

Wednesday 31 May - Slovak karst

Tuberous pea *Lathyrus tuberosa*
Golden drop *Onosma tornensis*
Field cow-wheat *Melampyrum arvense*
Bladder senna *Coluta arborescens*
Meadow clary *Salvia pratensis*

Paradise mountain stop

catchfly sp
Clematis alpina
Thalictrum aquilegifolium
Great masterwort *Astrantia major*

Thursday 1 June - Chocske Hills, bear valley

Alpine clematis *Clematis alpina*
Coralroot orchid *Corallorhiza trifida*
Alpine aster *Aster alpinus*
Common columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*
Lesser butterfly orchid *Platanthera bifolia*
Clusius's gentian *Gentiana clusii*
Round headed rampion *Phyteuma orbiculare*
Edelweiss *Leontopodium alpinum*
Lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*
Dianthus praecox
Fairy/purging flax
Golden cinquefoil
Perennial daisy
Solomon's seal
Great meadow-rue *Thalictrum aquilegifolium*
Broad leaved marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis*
Lady's mantle *Alchemilla mollis*
Woolly thistle *Cirsium eriophorum*

Friday 2 June - Nitzke Tatry mountains, Chopok

Least primrose *Primula minima*
White pasque flower *Pulsatilla alba*
Snowbell *Soldanella carpatica*
Alpine bellflower *Campanula alpina*

Dear Honeyguiders

Birds don't know political boundaries and, similarly, real nature lovers are concerned about the world's nature wherever they go to explore its beauties. It was also so in late May & early June 2000, the time of a full explosion of natural colours, songs and hums, when Honeyguide made a generous contribution to the SOVS - strengthening the international concern about the Slovak wildlife.

SOVS was found in 1993 so that its history is not comparable with those of RSPB, NABU or other organisations in the BirdLife family. With only 800 members, four local branches, four full-time staff and very limited funds SOVS works for saving birds and their habitats in Slovakia from threats following the human society's development. However, the national funds are still not adequate to the scale of destruction of habitats caused by construction of water dams, logging timber, plugging meadows – often supported also by foreign banks, companies and even governments.

Therefore SOVS, excepting collecting fees & donations from its members and applying for grants from foundations also raises funds from other (in Slovakia less usual, however) sources to become more sustainable in its growth and more powerful in the field. Amongst those, visiting groups of birdwatchers and nature lovers becomes a challenging part of the SOVS' conservation & marketing strategy.

The financial contribution of 'honeyguiders' was aimed to support the conservation of Senne – one of real pearls for birds in the Eastern Europe. Everyone who visited Senne became excited by its high diversity of birds combined with an easy spotting them on ponds, along dikes, at meadows and even in reedbeds. Grebes, herons, spoonbills, ducks, harriers, terns, sandpipers, warblers live here in a romantic harmony with frogs, muskrats, dragonflies and bats.

Unfortunately, in recent years the future of this important site becomes increasingly unclear due to changes in water level & quality, a lack of food for birds, overgrowing of the fishponds & meadows by scrub and other water vegetation but also due to increasing intensity of hunting and other human disturbance. SOVS carries out many activities at Senne to improve breeding & feeding conditions for birds such as coppicing willow scrubs, clearing bird islets, mowing meadows, repairing dike ... and showing the beauty of the site through excursions for children and wider public.

SOVS is very thankful to the 'honeyguiders' for their financial support GBP 300 (SK 20.000) which not only enabled us to carry out the above mentioned work but also helped to open doors to new challenges. Thus, the work done by SOVS at Senne has just recently activated bigger foreign donors to provide us with funds for renting meadows and for managing them in a wildlife-friendly and a sustainable way for 10-15 years.

But there is always something else on tours as this recce besides the financial help. Talking to people about the nature and its struggles we exchange views how to solve particular problems, we make contacts with experts, we recruit new members and, above all, we make new friendships. From that angle the Honeyguide's recce tour 2000 was very helpful to us too for which E-mail, letters, postcards and photos from Jo, Jenny, Rosemary & Mike and Chris & Julie prove the most.

THANK YOU, 'honeyguiders', and look forward to see you in Slovakia again!

Pavol Kanuch
Executive Director of SOVS
October 2000