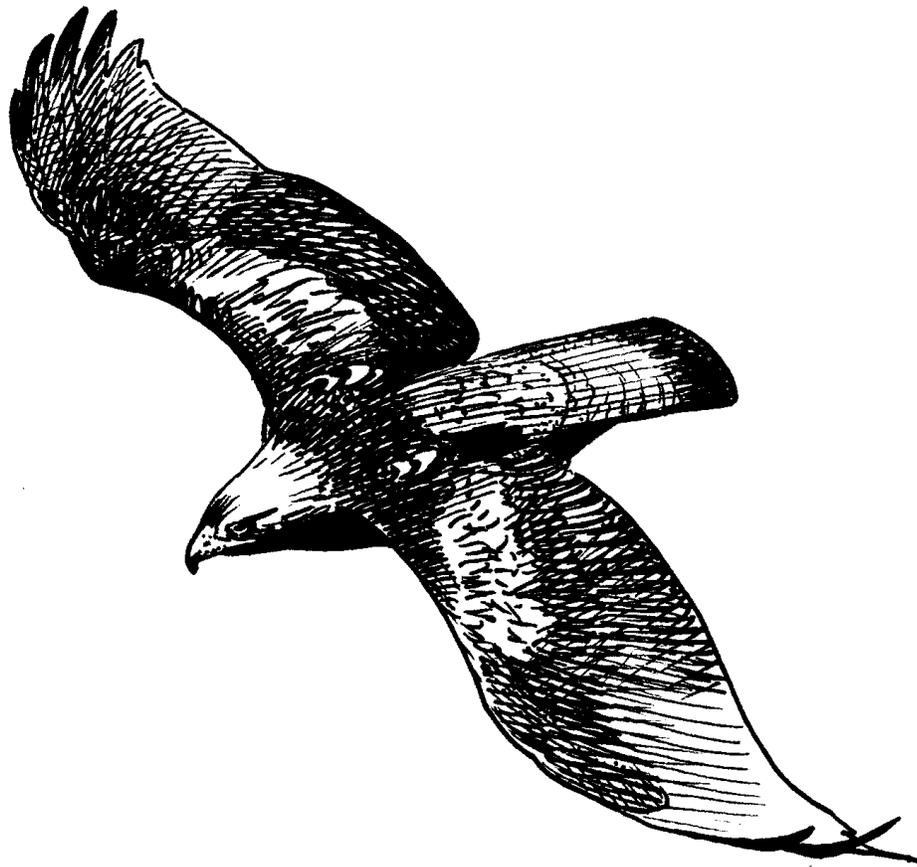


# *Honeyguide*

**WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS**

36 Thunder Lane Thorpe St Andrew Norwich NR7 0PX  
Telephone and Fax 01603 300552 Evenings and weekends



**Discover Slovakia**  
**18 – 25 May 2002**

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**18 – 25 May 2002**

*Participants flying from Heathrow: the Richmond & Twickenham RSPB Members' Group*

Susie Storm-Turner  
Bill Kilby  
Raymond Harrison  
David Broadley  
Kathy Buosi  
Robert Monk  
Stephen Harrington  
Jane Rowse  
Clare Jeffery  
Rosalie Grayson

*Participants flying from Stansted*

Michael Savory, Norfolk  
Elizabeth Savory  
Timothy Aldiss

Commiserations to Penny Aldiss who had to pull out of the holiday shortly before departure.

*Leader from Slovakia*  
Pavol Kanuch

*Leader from UK*  
Steve Henson

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 £350 left with Pavol is part of the £25,700 raised by Honeyguide in this way since 1991. There's a thank you letter from him at the report's end.

Report written by Steve Henson

*Illustrations by Bill Kilby. Cover illustration of imperial eagle by Rob Hume.*

## **Itinerary & highlights**

### **Day 1 Saturday, 18/5/02**

Morning: flew from London Heathrow airport on 0740hrs Czech Airlines flight to Prague, arriving around 1030hrs local time.

Mid-day (1225hrs) onward flight to Kosice, arriving 1355hrs. Met up with Pavol, Josef and Frank, our driver.

Afternoon: transfer to the Kosice basin.

Later, a brief stop near Vysna Mysl'a, southeast of Kosice for sousliks and on to beech forest near Byster, east of Kosice, for Ural owl.

Early evening: transferred to Hotel Energetik at Zemplinska sirava.

Dinner and overnight at Hotel Energetik.

**Highlights of the day were the raptors and other species as a whole, Ural owl, the male blue-headed wagtail, Josef's amazing binoculars, Rosalie's timely check-in at Heathrow (a close shave!), arriving in Prague on time (despite yesterday's air traffic control problems in the UK) and witnessing the customs officers in action at Kosice airport!**

### **Day 2 Sunday, 19/5/02**

Location: Slanske Hills.

Morning: a stop near Vechec to watch for raptors, followed by a walk through tall forest at Vlci potok (Wolf's stream) & Ciertaze near Juskova Vol'a, for Ural owl, woodpeckers, flycatchers and forest flowers.

Lunchtime: quarry for eagle owl followed by picnic in Pavol and Monika's garden in the village of Juskova Vol'a.

Afternoon: meadows, scrub and forest near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills.

Dinner at Salas Medvedia hora and overnight at Hotel Energetik.

**Highlights of the day were eagle owl, white-backed woodpecker, red-breasted flycatcher, the raptors, woodpeckers and flycatchers in general and the close-ups of lesser horseshoe bats at Pavol and Monika's house in Juskova Vol'a. Last, but not least, the delicious cakes provided by Monika!**

### **Day 3 Monday, 20/5/02**

Morning: travelled about 40km south towards the border with Hungary. Walk in the Latorica River valley near Besa followed by brief stops for bee-eater at a sandpit between Leles and Kopona and a wetland near the village of Backa.

Lunchtime: Slovak Tokaj wine *degustation* at the Tokaj wine cellars in Mala Trna north of Slovenske Nove Mesto, followed by picnic lunch in the Laborec River valley.

Mid afternoon: Senne wetland.

Evening: dinner and overnight at the Hotel Energetik.

**Highlights of the day were the grebes, little bittern, black stork, ferruginous duck, black kite, a male marsh harrier in spectacular display flight, bee-eaters, river warbler, the penduline tit and its nest, the river valley wet woodland near Besa and the small wetland near Backa. Pavol opted for his late afternoon snooze whilst searching for corncrakes and Mike voted for the whole day!**

### **Day 4 Tuesday, 21/5/02**

Travelled westwards into the Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area southwest of Kosice and on to our second holiday base at Penzion Limba in the Lower Tatras mountains.

Morning: after travelling about 100km, arrived in Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area.

Brief excursion to nearby working quarry at Host'ovce on the border with Hungary to look for rock thrush followed by walk through abandoned vineyards below Turniansky hrad (castle), north of Turna

nad Bodvou, to the nature reserve for endemic Turna Goldendrop *Onosma tornensis*, rock bunting and green lizard.

Lunchtime: lunch at Zadiel followed by optional walks into Zadielska gorge or a steep climb onto the plateau above, for botanising, butterflies and birds.

Afternoon: continuation of transfer with brief roadside stops for meadows and to listen for corncrake. Brief potter by the roadside *en route* for plants in the Slovak Paradise National Park north of Dobsina.

Evening: arrived at Penzion Limba followed by a barbecued dinner.

**Highlights of the day were imperial eagle, peregrine, rock thrush, excellent views of a nightingale, rock bunting, the walk up to the plateau above Zadielska gorge and the flowers including those by the roadside in Slovak Paradise National Park.**

#### **Day 5 Wednesday, 22/5/02**

Morning: meadow stop near Tatranska Lomnica to admire globeflowers and other flora. Following a brief look for black woodpecker, a forest walk at Kezgarske Zl'aby in the High Tatras mountains, Tatra National Park for hazelhen, three-toed woodpecker, newts and forest flowers. Picnic lunch.

Afternoon: north to Pieniny National Park for a rafting trip down the Dunajec River along the border with Poland.

Late afternoon: brief meadow stop near Lesnica for orchids.

Evening: dinner at Polovnicka izba.

**Highlights of the day were the party of eight hobbies, the 'cute' red squirrel at our picnic site, the newts, military orchid, the orchids and flowers in general, the alpine meadows, ice-cream, rafting down the Dunajec River and the evening meal. Liz voted for 'Slovakia' as a whole.**

#### **Day 6 Thursday, 23/5/02**

Morning: short drive south to Tri Domceky for the climb by chair lift and on foot to Chopok, high in the Lower Tatras National Park, for alpine accentor, water pipit, chamois and alpine marmot.

Lunchtime: picnic near Jasna, north of the ski-lift.

Afternoon: visit to the magnificent wooden church of Svaty Kriz followed by a look at great grey shrikes nearby.

Late afternoon: two areas of forest near Hotel Limba for Tengmalm's owl, black woodpecker, crested tit and crossbill.

Evening: dinner at Koliba bystrina.

**Highlights of the day were the Tengmalm's owl at the nesthole, black woodpecker, alpine accentors in the mist, great grey shrikes, nutcracker, the albino trout and the walk in the clouds on Chopok.**

#### **Day 7 Friday, 24/5/02**

Morning: stop overlooking the reservoir northwest of Liptovska Mikulas for scarlet rosefinch, followed by the meadows near Izipovce for corncrake, butterflies and flowers.

A walk through the Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley north onto the high meadows in the Chocske Hills.

Lunchtime: picnic on the high alpine meadows north of Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley.

Afternoon: visit to the Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec. Stops to listen for corncrake and a brief stop on the return journey in the village of Liptovska Matiasovce, including a look inside the church.

Evening: traditional Slovak dinner at Chata Koliesko, next to the chair lift at Tri Domceky.

**Highlights of the day were the sausages at breakfast, an unexpected redstart at the Oravska folk museum, scarlet rosefinch, yellow wood violet, the walk through the gorge in Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley and emerging onto the high alpine meadows above. Last but not least, the evening meal and huge, cuddly Newfoundland dog at Chata Koliesko.**

**Day 8 Saturday, 25/5/02**

Morning: early departure from Penzion Limba after breakfast, bound for Kosice.

Early morning stop in the historic town of Levoca with optional visits to the church and town hall.

Late morning: stroll around the centre of Kosice. Shopping, ice-cream, coffee and beer, or further birding nearby in the park Petrovov sad!

Early afternoon: transferred to airport for 1425hrs flight to Prague.

**Avian highlights of the week were little bittern, saker, Tengmalm's owl, Ural owl and eagle owl, black woodpecker and, notwithstanding the low cloud, alpine accentor.**

**Non-avian highlights were the newts, wild flowers, the meadows in the Slanske Hills on Sunday and the Tokaj wine cellars and *degustation*. Tim's highlight was his 'education' in all things wildlife, whilst Mike and Liz voted simply for Slovakia – who could argue against that?**

## Daily diary

### Saturday 18/5/02 – east bound

An anxious arrival early on Saturday morning at Heathrow airport, terminal 2. Would the airport chaos and extended delays of yesterday - caused by air traffic control computer software problems - be repeated today? No, the problem had by this time been sorted and the backlog of delayed flights dissipated. Nine members of the Richmond & Twickenham RSPB Members' Group and I checked in with ease for our eastbound flight to Prague. But wait! Shouldn't there be ten members in the group? More anxious moments as we waited for Rosalie to reappear having rushed home by taxi to collect her flight tickets. With minutes to spare before the desk closed, Rosalie at last reappeared and so our holiday could begin.

The Czech Airlines flight was soon in the air, so it was time to relax and, in what seemed like no time at all we were touching down on the western outskirts of Prague. With a couple of hours to kill before our onward flight, some of the group made themselves comfortable in one of the bars whilst I looked out for the remaining three *Honeyguiders* who had been in Prague since Thursday. Eventually, Tim, Mike and Liz from Norfolk found us, having spotted all the binoculars, 'scopes and tripods! By now there was not long to wait for our mid-day onward flight to Košice.

Touching down in the very warm, pleasant sunshine, Pavol, Josef our guide for the afternoon and Frank the minibus driver were waiting to welcome us. After exchanging money, a few of the group became held up behind a group of Slovakian passengers whose baggage was being fervently searched by customs officials. Black redstarts and a fine white wagtail were welcome diversions as the rest of us waited, but as soon as we could we were heading off towards the Kosice basin. It wasn't long before we were watching imperial eagle, a reminder that we had arrived in eastern Slovakia! Around and about were a few white storks feeding in a newly mown meadow, a confiding male blue-headed wagtail called from the top of the corn, whilst quail, barred and marsh warblers were heard and from the bus, Tim spotted the only grey partridge of the trip. Moving a short distance to another area, the focus this time was a female saker. Nearby were kestrel, red-backed shrike, linnets, house and tree sparrows.

Leaving the area, we headed back towards Kosice, stopping by the roadside *en route* to look at sousliks. As we scanned, a female red-footed falcon came into view flying low and fast, staying in the area for several minutes. It was time to move on again, this time to an area of beech forest east of Kosice. A short walk brought us to a large nestbox placed high in a tree, in which a juvenile Ural owl was conveniently viewed via a strategically placed mirror in the roof of the nestbox! Within seconds, the huge bulk of the female loomed into view in a nearby tree. The owl skirted around us for several minutes enabling excellent views through the 'scope. On the way back to the bus we admired some of the flowering plants on the forest floor which included May lily and bird's-nest orchid, before bidding Josef farewell and heading eastwards to our first base, the Hotel Energetik, overlooking the vast reservoir Zemplinska sirava.



### Sunday 19/5/02 – the Slanske hills

After a dawn chorus that included a golden oriole and black redstarts, followed by some early morning birding forays into the hotel grounds and then breakfast, we loaded up the minibus and headed off to the Slanske Hills west of Vranov nad Topľou. *En route* a magnificent imperial eagle came into view, bringing the journey to an abrupt halt as we savoured superb, close views as it circled on the morning's developing thermals. Our first main stop was at a vantage point near Vechec on the edge of the Slanske hills to watch for raptors soaring in the warm sunshine. We were not to be disappointed, with buzzard, honey buzzard, sparrowhawk, two or three hobbies and two lesser spotted eagles putting in an appearance and giving good views.

From there we made our way to the slopes of the Slanske hills near the village of Juskova Vol'a, for a walk through the forest. A Ural owl was seen by some of the group and we made frequent stops to listen for woodpeckers. A white-backed woodpecker was heard but could not be enticed into view and generally, birds were thin on the ground as the morning progressed. There were several plants of interest to admire as we walked, including asarabacca, bird's-nest orchid, patches of dwarf elder and large yellow foxglove, Goldilocks buttercup, May lily and pyramidal bugle, as well as a few vividly-coloured Carpathian blue slugs, endemic to the region. A stunning male red-breasted flycatcher gave close-up views but, although we had heard several, collared flycatchers were proving more difficult to pin down. After much neck straining and changing position, a superb singing male was eventually located in the canopy thanks to some sharp spotting by Kathy.

After the forest it was time for lunch, but not before visiting a quarry behind Juskova Vol'a where we had good if distant views of an adult female eagle owl. Dropping back down into the village, the *Honeyguiders* were once again invited to eat lunch in Pavol and Monika's delightful garden next to their newly built home. A green woodpecker was seen and a wryneck called nearby as we relaxed after the morning's walk. We also sampled the wonderful cakes provided by Monika and were introduced to their new baby boy, Matej. After lunch we climbed a ladder into the loft space of Pavol and Monika's older, traditional house (next to the new one) for a privileged, close encounter with over 40 roosting lesser horseshoe bats (taking care not to disturb them).

Now well into the afternoon, we headed south to a new area near Backov, on the edge of the Slanske hills. An open area of scattered scrub and meadows contrasted with the high forest of the morning and as is usually the case, there were more birds and these were easier to see! Some of the group saw the only hoopoe of the holiday whilst the scrub held several red-backed shrikes and barred warblers and hawfinches seemed to appear from all directions, with up to nine seen. A brief excursion into an adjacent area of forest yielded good views of wood warblers and no less than four orchid species including white helleborine and lesser butterfly orchid. Later, we came across a singing woodlark and a white-backed woodpecker which responded dramatically to Pavol's CD recording of the call, giving good views both in flight and whilst perched. If this wasn't enough, out in the open scrub we also saw lesser spotted woodpecker and most had good views of a middle spotted woodpecker. Butterflies, including several fritillaries, flitted over the grassland in the warm sun, whilst wood whites and Duke of Burgundy were seen drinking from a rut along the shadier track at the entrance to the site.



### **Monday 20/5/02 – the river valley lowlands and Senne wetland (a very special wetland!)**

Monday was humid and hazy as we travelled south towards the Latorica and Laborec river valley lowlands near the Hungarian border, meeting up *en route* with Milos, our guide for the morning. First in a series of stops was an area of wet, floodplain woodland and scrub in the Latorica River valley near Besa, where we immediately saw a distant lesser spotted eagle followed by two black storks. There was plenty of interesting avian activity with first penduline tit at the nest and then singing river warbler, whilst overhead there was a black kite, honey buzzard, male red-footed falcon and male marsh harriers indulging in spectacular aerial displays. A female sand lizard was seen well whilst a fox made a quick exit into the vegetation. Bee-eaters called overhead, hidden in the haze, a quail called in the distance, whilst some of the group did manage to glimpse a 'reeling' grasshopper warbler, concealed for the most part within tall, lush vegetation.

Next was a brief stop at a small sandpit; home to a colony of bee-eaters. Several of these gorgeous birds were present, feeding aerially or perched outside their nest burrows, providing stunning views through the 'scopes. Another black stork, this one much closer, drifted over and there were several sand martins plus a corn bunting and a hare. It was time to head off for our Slovak Tokaj wine *degustation* at the wine cellars in Mala Trna near Slovenske Nove Mesto, but not before spending a very productive 15 minutes at a small wetland near the village of Backa. Red-necked grebes with young, pochard, night heron and a statuesque little bittern were all in view at close range, plus a small

number of whiskered terns and a single black tern. A roadside pond produced a wading black stork as we left the area.

We were all somewhat hungry after sampling a range of thoroughly enjoyable Tokaj wines (with some purchased for further, in-depth analysis back in the UK!), so a quick picnic stop along the Laborec River valley, *en route* to Senne wetland, was in order. Although the roadside was a little uninspiring, there were several birds of interest, including lesser spotted eagle and hawfinch, whilst another quail, icterine warbler and golden oriole were heard. Replete, we headed for Senne, enjoying good views of a quail as it flew in front of the bus.

After meeting up with Stefan our guide, we arrived at the site gatehouse at precisely the pre-arranged time only to find it locked up with the security guard nowhere to be seen. Leaving the bus behind for a while, we walked onto the site, quickly locating a penduline tit at the nest before soon meeting the guard and his accompanying vicious looking dog walking in the opposite direction! At the wetland, birds were everywhere and at times it was difficult to know what to look at next! [What is interesting is that the character of each of the fishponds at Senne changes from year to year as water levels are manipulated as part of the fishery management. Where one year there is bare mud and feeding waders, the next it might hold deeper water, attracting an entirely different suite of birds]. Night herons were plentiful, a number of purple herons were seen over the reedbed areas and there was a notable party of 13 feeding spoonbills, whilst 30 or more white storks were gathered on adjacent, newly mown meadows. A bittern boomed but none were seen this time. Waders were evident on the muddy areas, including Temminck's stint, little stint, curlew sandpiper, wood sandpiper, black-tailed godwit, ruff and greenshank. Several of the fishponds had deeper water supporting breeding red-necked grebes, parties of black-necked grebes including one of 14, plus feeding assemblages of hawking whiskered terns, black terns and little gulls. Wigeon, teal, garganey, shoveler and pochard were all present but the highlight in this family had to be the pair of superb ferruginous ducks. An Eastern hedgehog crossed the track in front of us (so nice to see a live one!) as we made our way slowly off the site and earlier, we had unexpected encounters with both stoat and roe deer.

With birthdays today and tomorrow respectively, Robert and Bill were given VIP 'treatment' at the evening meal, with cards and a song and we all shared with them a very tasty cake that Pavol had generously arranged.

### **Tuesday 21/5/02 – on the move: west to the Slovak karst and Tatra mountains**

Today marked the second part of our holiday as we left eastern Slovakia, travelling west to a new base in the mountains of the Low Tatras (Nizke Tatry) in central Slovakia. On the way, a stop for petrol in Kosice presented the slightly odd site of foraging rooks, jackdaws, fieldfares and a black redstart juxtaposed with the tarmac and concrete of the station forecourt and the backdrop of high-rise flats beyond the expanse of municipal grass!

Our first destination was the Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area southwest of Kosice along the border with Hungary. First stop was at a working quarry right on the border to look for a male rock thrush in territory, at the same time meeting up with Juraj our guide on the Karst for the next couple of hours or so. Viewing the quarry with telescopes from some considerable distance, we scanned the quarry face and slopes above. After a short time during which Tim amused us by straddling the border in true tourist tradition and chatting away with the border guard, the bird put in a couple of brief appearances above the quarry. From such a distance it was difficult to pick out much plumage detail but soon after it was relocated at much closer range, lower down in better light, so in the end the views were moderately good.

From here we travelled the short distance back to the hill below the Turniansky hrad (castle) where we walked up along the track through the old vineyards to the nature reserve where, on the way, we enjoyed excellent close-up views of a Syrian woodpecker. This site, which consists of steeply sloping dry limestone grassland with patches of scrub, supports the Turna goldendrop, endemic to the Slovak Karst region. The hot dry spring meant that many of the plants at this exceedingly dry site had flowered in advance and so the slopes were dotted with numerous flower stalks and drying seed heads

of Jurinea (a thistle) and bearded viper's-grass (a yellow Composite similar to a goatsbeard). Several of the wonderfully hairy Turna goldendrop plants were in flower as well as field cow-wheat, bloody crane's-bill and yellow woundwort. A male green lizard did its best to hide from us amongst the vegetation whereas a male rock bunting was considerably easier to see as it sang from its scrubby songpost. We also saw three spoonbills on the wetland in the valley below, plus long-tailed tits, hawfinch and a peregrine, but to cap it all was another magnificent imperial eagle at close range, circling against the backdrop of the limestone hills. A few of the group had very good views of a nightingale as we dropped back down the hill again towards the minibus.

From the goldendrop site, we moved only a short distance to the spectacular, steep-sided Zadielska gorge to eat lunch. Afterwards, we split into two groups with Pavol leading the more energetic among us, *i.e.* Clare and Tim, up onto the plateau above, whilst the rest of us opted for an easier walk through the shady gorge alongside the stream. By now rain was quite heavy, with low cloud shrouding the sides of the gorge; bird activity was fairly infrequent but even so, we did encounter grey wagtail, dipper and marsh tit as well as a pair of peregrines. Later in the afternoon we left the Karst region behind, resuming our journey towards the mountains of central Slovakia. Stops were made *en route* to admire the meadows and listen for corncrake, with a longer stretch of the legs at a flower-rich spot in the Slovak Paradise National Park, north of Dobsina. This latter stop produced aconite-leaved buttercup, alpine clematis, great masterwort (an *Astrantia*), great meadow-rue, whorled Solomon's-seal and yellow melancholy thistle among many others.



### **Wednesday 22/5/02 – the High Tatras and river rafting along the Polish border**

Our first day in central Slovakia brought cloudless skies and sunshine. A superb, singing male firecrest was well seen outside Hotel Limba prior to setting off towards the forests and alpine meadows of Tatra National Park, picking up Marian, our guide for the morning, *en route*. As we drove into the mountains we stopped near Tatranska Lomnica to admire one of the many meadows with its globeflowers, plus bistort, lady's-mantle, broad-

leaved marsh-orchids and water avens among others, as well as several woodland ringlet butterflies. A goshawk also passed over and a black woodpecker was heard calling some way off in the adjacent forest.

A brief stop to look for black woodpecker drew a blank, although we did enjoy reasonable views of a firecrest. We set off on a walk near Kezgarske Zl'aby through first mixed and later, as we reached the steeper slopes, coniferous forest. There were many plants of interest on the forest floor including alpine clematis, asarabacca, bitter vetchling, dusky crane's-bill, Leopardsbane, May lily, oxlip, whorled Solomon's-seal and the impressively tall great yellow gentian. The forest floor was wet in places, with water-filled ruts along the tracks. Marian soon located two amphibian inhabitants of the ruts in the shape of both alpine and Montandon's newts, the latter species being limited in range to the Carpathian and Tatras mountains. As is often the case in forest, birds were difficult to see, although we did hear several wood warblers and a crested tit. A further steep climb through pine forest by some of the group brought only tantalizing glimpses of a hazelhen on the forest floor, a red squirrel and a three-toed woodpecker was heard calling. Amusingly, another very handsome red squirrel assumed the classic 'cute squirrel' pose at the base of a tree as we ate our picnic lunch before heading north to Pieniny National Park and the border with Poland.

Our destination was Cerveny Klastor on the Dunajec river. A lesser spotted eagle and a hobby were seen whilst we waited to embark upon a superb rafting trip along the river. The sunshine was pleasant and we were entertained by the boatmen's stories as they guided us towards Lesnica some 10km downstream, through mainly gentle currents. After a few kilometres the wider riverine landscape became more enclosed as we entered a long meandering gorge, spectacular limestone outcrops towering above us. A nutcracker flew across the wooded slopes and a honey buzzard soared overhead,

whilst a party of eight hobbies were hawking insects high above the gorge. White and grey wagtails were plentiful along the river, whilst a yellow-legged gull scavenged a dead pike and among the birds singing from the wooded slopes around us were red-breasted flycatchers. Alpine asters were growing on some of the limestone outcrops. After over an hour and forty minutes we reached Lesnica, where the river runs on into Poland; our relaxing trip came to an end all too soon and it was back to dry land for a walk through part of the national park back to the minibus.

Heading south again towards the Tatras mountains and Penzion Limba there was still time to take in another alpine meadow notable for its orchids where we found several spikes of the impressive military orchid and, thanks to Robert's alertness, several diminutive frog orchids. Surprisingly, a party of seven calling bee-eaters flew over the meadow, heading north in the evening sun, perhaps towards Poland. A shortcut back towards the main highway took us through some scenic, rolling Slovakian countryside and traditional villages with their wooden houses, neat woodstacks and meadows with orchids, rounded off with lesser spotted eagles to the north and south of Toporec. Wonderful!

#### **Thursday 23/5/02 – Alpine accentors in the mist, a spectacular church and an unexpected owl**

This morning we drove south into the heart of the Lower Tatras National Park to the chairlift terminal at Tri Domceky, for the climb onto the high northern slopes of the Chopok (2024m) ridge. A superb male ring ouzel sang from a Norway spruce, giving excellent views as we waited. With low cloud, warm clothing including hats and gloves was the order of the day as we launched off the ground into the cool air above the spruce clothing the lower slopes below. Coming 'down to earth' again at the terminal on the slopes high above the treeline, we were enveloped in the thick mist of the low cloud but, despite this, opted to continue up the mountainside along the well-worn path. Water pipits could be heard singing close by but despite their proximity the cloud rendered them impossible to see and several dunnocks were also singing from the scrub near the ski terminal.

We made our way to the vantage point overlooking a number of ridges and a valley way below, but of course today we couldn't see more than a few metres in front of us. An alpine accentor was heard singing from one of the nearby rocky outcrops so out came Pavol's CD player, bringing an instant and dramatic response as three birds circled around us, calling as they did so. Further bursts of song from the CD player brought them within a few metres of us, on the ground, enabling good views through the telescopes which needed to be gripped firmly in the strong wind! Happy to get such views despite the cloud, we returned downslope. Flowering plants were few and far between although delicate least primroses was quite numerous, with snowbells and white pasque flower also helping to make up for the lack of quantity.

Back on lower ground, we thawed out in the sun with a welcome cup of coffee and our picnic lunch near Jasna, north of the ski-lift, in an open area of improved meadow surrounded by forest. Despite many pairs of eyes on the lookout, few birds were in evidence except for a grey wagtail singing from a Norway spruce and a few siskins, although Tim's day was 'made' by seeing the albino trout in the fishpond outside the hotel. From Jasna we made the short trip to see the magnificent Evangelical Lutheran church at Svaty Kriz, one of the best examples of a wooden church in Europe. Red-backed shrikes and barred warbler were present in the nearby scrub, with three great grey shrikes, tree pipit and stonechat in an adjacent area of wet grassland and scattered pines. By now the afternoon was hotting up in the bright sunshine, bringing out a swallowtail butterfly and encouraging several raptors into the skies, including hobby, goshawk, sparrowhawk, buzzard and lesser spotted eagle.

Returning to the Demanovska Valley near Hotel Limba, we followed Peter (our guide today and tomorrow) up a very steep forested hill where we trained our telescopes on a hole in the trunk of one of the pines – an old black



woodpecker's nest. Peter and Pavol approached the base of the tree, gently tapping the trunk to see if anyone was 'at home'. Minutes passed, nothing happened. Then, a much longer stick tapped higher up the trunk did the trick when suddenly a magnificent Tengmalm's owl appeared at the nesthole entrance, glaring defiantly at Peter and Pavol below it and then across at the rest of us! There it remained for several minutes giving excellent views before disappearing just as suddenly. Incredibly, a black woodpecker's nest was in use about 50 metres away and, after a burst of recorded call on the CD player, in came a black woodpecker from across the valley. It reacted dramatically to the call, flying to and fro and over us, climbing the pines at very close range, giving superb views. Excitedly, we made our way downhill back to the minibus, with some of the group opting to return to the hotel whilst the others went off to look for crested tit in the forest near the restaurants. In no time at all, a crested tit was located, followed by a second just a short distance away, both providing excellent, prolonged views. To round things off nicely, a pair of crossbills also appeared, again giving good, satisfying views. If this wasn't enough, a nutcracker flew over the forest opposite Hotel Limba in the evening as we gathered to go off to the restaurant for our meal.

### **Friday 24/5/02 – the Chocske Hills**

An icterine warbler gave frustrating views as it sang from a row of tall poplars in the urban setting of Liptovska Mikulas as we collected Peter at the beginning of a lovely sunny day. We drove westwards towards the nearby Chocske Hills, north of the reservoir Liptovska Mikulas. Stopping at the edge of the reservoir south of Liptovska Sielnica we needed only a brief search before locating a brightly-coloured, singing male scarlet rosefinch in willow scrub. Another was located nearby, then another, plus a pair of marsh warblers. From here, we drove the short distance into the hills near Izipovce, walking along an interesting narrow stream valley surrounded by lush, damp meadows and scrub. Our 'target' in this area was corncrake but, despite Pavol's persistence and hard work, it was not to be. Nevertheless, a fine male whinchat and a yellow-bellied toad, as well as singing marsh warbler and calling quail provided considerable interest in this area of scenic, hilly farmland.

As we set off along the stream in the sunshine, the Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley looked very inviting. Kathy, Mike and Steve (Ha) opted to stay with Frank who would be driving to meet us with the bus on the alpine meadows above. One of the first birds to be seen was a juvenile dipper, calling incessantly and giving good views. Passing into the first of the narrow gorges, a common wall lizard scuttled quickly into cover and a very large common frog 'froze' whilst David duly photographed it. Birds were difficult to locate in the wooded valley and other than a kestrel and a nutcracker most of them, including several wood warblers and a red-breasted flycatcher, were heard rather than seen. The walk itself more than compensated for the dearth of visible birds with lots of butterflies and flowering plants to slow our progress. A cluster of green-veined whites and a comma were busy taking in salts from rocks in the stream, whilst chequered skipper, orange tip, brimstone, wood white, speckled wood and Duke of Burgundy were seen nearby. Butterbur was abundant along the stream lower down in the valley floor with frequent bird's-nest orchid, common twayblade and lesser butterfly orchid on the shadier, wooded valley sides. The bare rock faces of the gorges harboured alpine aster and the inconspicuous edelweiss, with yellow wood violet in the shadiest parts, the latter admired during one of the ladder climbs! Other species included Clusius's gentian and as we came out onto the wide alpine meadows above the valley, there were masses of kidney vetch as well as broad-leaved marsh orchids and swathes of cotton-grass neatly demarcating areas of very wet bog. Birds were more visible in these wider spaces, with three whinchats, several meadow pipits and a quail calling in the distance. A black woodpecker was glimpsed at the top of the valley where the forest gives way to meadow and at least three ring ouzels were in the same area.

After a very welcome picnic lunch amid the alpine meadows above Prosiecka Valley, with cattle bells tinkling in the distance, we headed for the Oravska folk museum east of



Zuberec for a relaxing cultural interlude. Situated alongside a fast flowing mountain river, the museum comprises a variety of vernacular wooden buildings brought here from various parts of the Oravska region, set out with the traditional furnishings and household belongings relevant to their former occupants. The highlight among the buildings is probably the fifteenth century Catholic church, with its superbly ornate painted panels that survived the pillaging of local Protestants. Country pottery in the Slovakian vernacular style was on sale, with several pieces purchased and destined for new homes in the UK! On the bird 'front' were black redstart, bullfinch, siskin, with grey and white wagtails along the river but the big surprise for Pavol was a singing male redstart. Stops were made *en route* to the museum and afterwards to listen for corncrakes but again, there was no sign of them. We also took time to admire the scenery and stopped at the quiet village of Liptovska Matiasovce where we looked inside the church.

In the evening we enjoyed an absolutely tremendous traditional Slovak dinner at Chata Koliesko, next to the chair lift at Tri Domceky, complete with its huge, cuddly Newfoundland dog that we'd first spotted yesterday. We toasted the success of the holiday and the wildlife we had so enjoyed seeing, thanking Pavol for making it all possible and I presented the *Honeyguide* holiday donation towards the work of the Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia (SOVS) at Senne wetland.

### **Saturday 25/5/02 – return to Prague**

After an early breakfast, we loaded our bags into the minibus once again in the cool of the morning and headed off from Penzion Limba for the last time. It was time to leave behind the mountains of the Lower Tatras and head for Kosice and our flight back to Prague.

Heading east, we passed through the open Spis countryside to the historic walled town of Levoca where we split into smaller groups for a look around the main square. Some were happy to stroll whilst others took in a little culture with visits to the Roman Catholic church, home to many pieces of religious art and an impressive sixteenth-century altar, reputedly the tallest of its kind anywhere! Next to the church was the town hall with museum and outside, the wrought iron Klieťka hanby ('cage of disgrace'), erected by Protestants around 1600 as a pillory for women!

On the road again, we passed the impressive and imposing castle ruin Spissky hrad, burnt to the ground in 1781, before heading south at Presov along the rather bland and 'uneventful' dual carriageway towards Kosice. Once there we again split into groups, some heading to the main street to stroll or search for presents, enjoying the lively festival of traditional music and dance taking place there. One group headed off to a nearby local park to cram in a last birding session, enjoying good views of an icterine warbler plus golden oriole, a calling wryneck and a Syrian woodpecker's nest.

Our week in Slovakia was nearing an end as we headed out of Kosice towards the airport. In the bright sunshine we reluctantly checked in for our early afternoon return flight to Prague and before boarding said farewell to Pavol and Frank. Before long we were touching down again. It was time for more farewells as Robert, Tim, Mike and Liz headed off for their short stay in the fine city of Prague, whilst the rest of us continued our return journey to London where grey, overcast skies and cooler temperatures awaited.

What a fantastic week it had been, full of exciting wildlife moments and with many memories to treasure. Many thanks to Pavol for the packed but rewarding itinerary and to Pavol and Monika for sharing with us their lovely home in Juskova Vol'a – and welcome to their new son Matej. Many thanks to Frank for driving safely and so well throughout the week and to our guides Josef, Milos, Stefan, Juraj, Marian and Peter, who helped to enrich our stay.

Finally, I'd like to thank Pavol, Bill, Clare, David, Jane, Kathy, Ray, Robert, Rosalie, Steve, Susie, Tim, Mike and Liz for being such great company.

In producing this report I'd again like to thank Pavol for his help, patiently answering my pedantic questions and providing place names where I had gaps. Thanks to Bill for providing such charming

pencil drawings that will, I'm certain, bring back those wildlife moments and thanks to my wife Angela for scanning the images, making my task considerably easier.

## Systematic lists

### Birds

#### Little Grebe

2+, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Great Crested Grebe

3-8+, Zemplinska sirava, 18/5-21/5; Senne wetland, 20/5 and on the wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 21/5.

#### Red-necked Grebe

A pair with two young, small wetland near Backa and 6, including birds at the nest, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Black-necked Grebe

A pair, plus parties of 8 & 14, with a further 3 birds on the nest, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Cormorant

1, Zemplinska sirava and at Senne wetland, including a breeding colony, 20/5.

#### Bittern

One heard booming, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Little Bittern

1, small wetland near Backa, 20/5.

#### Night Heron

1, Zemplinska sirava, 19/5; 2, small wetland near Backa and many at Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Little Egret

1, Zemplinska sirava, 18/5 & 19/5; 1 seen from the bus and at Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Great White Egret

1, Zemplinska sirava, 19/5; 1 overhead near Besa in the Latorica River valley and several at Senne wetland, 20/5; 1, Ondava River, Horovce, 21/5.

#### Grey Heron

Seen daily, 18/5-21/5 including several at Senne wetland, 20/5 and 1 near Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 24/5.

#### Purple Heron

6+, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Black Stork

2 overhead near Besa in the Latorica River valley; 1 over the bee-eater colony between Leles and Kopona; 1, at a small roadside wetland near Backa and 2 others seen from the bus in the same area, 20/5.

#### White Stork

Seen daily, 18/5-24/5; including foraging individuals (often in newly mown or ploughed fields) and birds at village nests. 30+ gathered on newly mown meadows, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Spoonbill

13+, Senne wetland, 20/5 and 3 on the wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 21/5.

#### Mute Swan

Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Wigeon

c.10, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Gadwall

Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Teal

3+, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Mallard

Seen daily, 19/5-24/5.

#### Garganey

9+, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Shoveler

4+, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Pochard

c.10, small wetland near Backa and several, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Ferruginous Duck

2, Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Tufted Duck

Senne wetland, 20/5.

#### Honey Buzzard

2, Vehec and 1 near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5; 1, near Besa in the Latorica River valley, 20/5 and 1, Dunajec River gorge, Pieniny National Park, 22/5.

**Black Kite**

1 near Besa in the Latorica River valley, 20/5.

**Marsh Harrier**

Seen in the lowlands daily, 18/5-20/5. Spectacular male display flight near Besa in the Latorica River valley and many at Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Goshawk**

1 over forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley and a male, seen from the 'Globeflower meadow', Tatranska Lomnica, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5; 1 high over the church at Svaty Kriz, 23/5.

**Sparrowhawk**

1, Vehech, 19/5; 1 over forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley and 1 near the church at Svaty Kriz, 23/5.

**Buzzard**

Seen daily.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle**

A very distant individual to the north of Viniansky hrad (the castle ruin west of Hotel Energetik) and 2, Vehech, 19/5. Three singles, Budkovce; near Besa in the Latorica River valley and near Drahnov in the Laborec River valley, 20/5. Singles over Cerveny Klaster and to both the north and south of Toporec, 22/5; 1, near the church at Svaty Kriz, 23/5.

**Imperial Eagle**

Seen on three occasions but site details withheld at the request of SOVS.

**Golden Eagle**

Seen at a single site but details withheld at the request of SOVS.

**Kestrel**

Seen daily, 18/5-24/5.

**Red-footed Falcon**

A female flew over the 'souslik meadow' near Vysna Mysl'a, southeast of Kosice, 18/5 and a male, near Besa in the Latorica River valley, 20/5.

**Hobby**

2-3, Vehech, 19/5; 1, near Vojany, 20/5; 1 over the Dunajec River at Cerveny Klaster and a party of 8 over the river gorge, Pieniny National Park, 22/5; 1 near the church at Svaty Kriz and 1 near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5.

**Saker**

Seen at a single site but details withheld at the request of SOVS.

**Peregrine**

1 over the goldendrop site, Slovak Karst PLA south of Turniansky hrad and a pair, Zadielska Gorge, Slovak Karst PLA, 21/5; 1 over the Hotel Limba area, 22/5 & 23/5.

**Hazelhen (Hazel Grouse)**

1 seen briefly by Marian and David on the forest walk near Kezgarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5.

**Partridge (Grey Partridge)**

1 seen by Tim in farmland near Cana, southeast of Kosice, 18/5.

**Quail**

2, (possibly 3) heard calling in farmland near Cana southeast of Kosice, 18/5; singles heard near Besa in the Latorica River valley and near Drahnov in the Laborec River valley and 1 seen well from the bus near Stretavka, 20/5. 2 heard in meadows near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir; 1 heard on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley and 1 heard *en route* to the Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec, 24/5.

**Pheasant**

Seen daily, 18/5-22/5.

**Corncrake**

1 heard calling in the evening by Pavol and Steve (He) near the restaurant at Medvedia hora, Zemplinska sirava, 19/5.

**Moorhen**

Singles, small wetland near Backa and Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Coot**

A few present on wetlands near Backa and at Senne wetland, 20/5 and on the wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 21/5.

**Little Ringed Plover**

1, along the shore of Zemplinska sirava near Hotel Energetik, 20/5.

**Ringed Plover**

Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Lapwing**

Seen on 18/5 and daily, 20/5-24/5, including several at Senne wetland on 20/5.

**Little Stint**

4, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Temminck's Stint**

1, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Curlew Sandpiper**

3, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Dunlin**

Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Ruff**

Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Snipe**

2, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Black-tailed Godwit**

3+, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Redshank**

3, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Greenshank**

2, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Wood Sandpiper**

4+, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Common Sandpiper**

1, Senne wetland, 20/5 and 1 calling along the stream adjacent to Hotel Limba in the early hours of 25/5.

**Little Gull**

47+ included a gathering of 30 hawking insects over one of the large fishponds, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Black-headed Gull**

Seen daily, 19/5-24/5.

**Yellow-legged Gull**

Senne wetland, 20/5; 1, Zemplinska sirava, 21/5; 1 eating a dead pike, Dunajec River, Pieniny National Park, 22/5 and seen near the church at Svaty Kriz, 23/5.

**Whiskered Tern**

c.50, Zemplinska sirava; several at the small wetland near Backa and numerous at Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Black Tern**

1, small wetland near Backa and 21+, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Feral Pigeon**

Small numbers seen most days.

**Stock Dove**

Small numbers in farmland, 18/5 and 20/5-21/5; 3, forest walk, Slanske Hills and 1 near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Woodpigeon**

Small numbers seen daily, 18/5-24/5.

**Collared Dove**

Seen daily, 18/5-22/5 and on 24/5.

**Turtle Dove**

Small numbers seen daily, 18/5-20/5 and 22/5-23/5.

**Cuckoo**

Seen or heard daily, 18/5-24/5.

**Eagle Owl**

An adult female at a quarry behind the village of Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Ural Owl**

A female in the vicinity of an occupied nestbox, in beech forest near Byster, east of Kosice, 18/5. A large chick on the nest was viewed via a strategically placed mirror in the roof of the nestbox! 1, Ciertaze forest area, Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Tengmalm's Owl**

1 at the nesthole (an old Black Woodpecker's nest) in forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5.

**Swift**

Small numbers seen daily, 18/5-20/5 and 22/5-25/5.

**Bee-eater**

1 heard overhead near Besa in the Latorica River valley and a small breeding colony between Leles and Kopona, 20/5; 7 over the high 'orchid meadow' near Lesnica, 22/5.

**Hoopoe**

1, near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Wryneck**

Singles heard calling near Pavol's garden, Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 19/5; around Hotel Energetik, Zemplinska sirava, 20/5 and in the park Petrovov sad, Kosice, 25/5.

**Green Woodpecker**

1 in Pavol's garden, Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 19/5 and 1, Dunajec River gorge, Pieniny National Park, 22/5.

**Black Woodpecker**

1 calling in forest next to the 'Globeflower meadow', Tatranska Lomnica, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5; 1 giving superb views in forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5 and 1 at the edge of the forest on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 24/5.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker**

1 heard drumming in beech forest near Byster, east of Kosice, 18/5; 1 in the meadow behind Pavol's garden, Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 19/5; 1, Senne wetland, 20/5; Hotel Energetik, Zemplinska sirava, 20/5 & 21/5 and heard, in forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5.

**Syrian Woodpecker**

1 in the abandoned vineyards next to the goldendrop site south of Turniansky hrad, 21/5. A nest in the park Petrovov sad, Kosice, 25/5.

**Middle Spotted Woodpecker**

1, near Bažkov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**White-backed Woodpecker**

1 heard on the forest walk, Slanske Hills and 1 gave good views, both perched and in flight, near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**

1, near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Three-toed Woodpecker**

1 heard calling by a few of the group on the upper part of the forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5.

**Woodlark**

1 singing from telegraph wires, near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Skylark**

Seen daily, 18/5-24/5.

**Sand Martin**

Several around the sand pit with the bee-eater colony, between Leles and Kopona, 20/5.

**Swallow**

Seen daily.

**House Martin**

Seen daily, 18/5-24/5. Breeding colony on the rear of Hotel Energetik.

**Tree Pipit**

Seen daily, 21/5-24/5.

**Meadow Pipit**

Several on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 24/5.

**Water Pipit**

Several heard in the mist, Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 23/5.

**Blue-headed Wagtail**

Seen daily in the lowlands, 18/5-21/5. Excellent views of a male in arable farmland near Cana, southeast of Kosice, 18/5.

**Grey Wagtail**

Seen daily, 21/5-25/5.

**White Wagtail**

Seen daily, 18/5-24/5.

**Dipper**

1-2, Zadielska Gorge, Slovak Karst PLA, 21/5; 1 on the stream behind Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 22/5 and a juvenile, Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Wren**

Heard on the forest walk, Slanske Hills, 19/5; seen or heard daily, 21/5-25/5.

**Dunnock**

Heard on the forest walk, Slanske Hills, 19/5; seen or heard daily, 22/5-24/5, including several heard singing in the mist, Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 23/5.

**Alpine Accentor**

3 in the mist, seen down to a few feet, Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 23/5.

**Robin**

Seen or heard daily, 18/5-19/5 & 21/5-24/5.

**Nightingale**

Heard around Hotel Energetik, 18/5 & 20/5-21/5; near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5; Mala Trna (village with the wine cellars) and near Besa in the Latorica River valley, 20/5. Good views of one for a few of the group at the abandoned vineyards next to the goldendrop site south of Turniansky hrad, 21/5.

**Black Redstart**

Seen daily.

**Redstart**

1 heard singing, Oravska folk museum, east of Zuberec, 24/5.

**Whinchat**

1 near the vineyards at Vinicky, 20/5; 1 in meadows near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir and 3 on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 24/5.

**Stonechat**

Seen daily, 18/5-24/5.

**Wheatear**

A singing male at the rock thrush quarry, Host'ovce on 21/5.

**Rock Thrush**

A singing male: seen at long range on the scrubby ridge above the quarry face, Host'ovce, 21/5.

**Ring Ouzel**

Superb views of a male singing from high in the Norway spruce at the ski-lift at Tri Domceky, Lower Tatras National Park, 23/5 and 3+, Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Blackbird**

Seen daily.

**Fieldfare**

Seen daily, 18/5-24/5.

**Song Thrush**

Seen daily, 19/5-25/5.

**Mistle Thrush**

Heard, 19/5 and small numbers seen daily, 21/5-24/5.

**Grasshopper Warbler**

2 heard singing ('reeling') with one seen briefly by some of the group near Besa, in the Latorica River valley, 20/5.

**River Warbler**

2 (one seen very well) near Besa in the Latorica River valley, 20/5 and 1 heard near Toporec, 22/5.

**Savi's Warbler**

2 heard 'reeling', Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Sedge Warbler**

2+ near Besa in the Latorica River valley and at Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Marsh Warbler**

Heard singing in farmland near Cana, southeast of Kosice, 18/5; near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5 and near Besa in the Latorica River valley, 20/5. 2 seen, in scrub near Liptovska Mara reservoir, south of Liptovska Sielnica; 1 heard singing in meadows near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir, 1, *en route* to Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec, 24/5 and 1 singing from scrub by the roadside opposite the church, Liptovska Matiasovce, 24/5.

**Reed Warbler**

Several heard, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Great Reed Warbler**

1 heard singing at the small wetland near Backa; one seen well by a few of the group and others glimpsed or heard, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Icterine Warbler**

Singles heard near Besa in the Latorica River valley and near Drahnov in the Laborec River valley, 20/5; 1 in Liptovska Mikulas, 24/5 and good views of 1, in the park Petrovov sad, Kosice, 25/5.

**Barred Warbler**

1 calling, in farmland near Cana, southeast of Kosice, 18/5; 4+ in scrub near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5; heard near Besa in the Latorica River valley, 20/5 and 1 calling from scrub near the church at Svaty Kriz, 23/5.

**Lesser Whitethroat**

Seen or heard daily, 19/5-21/5 & 23/5-25/5.

**Whitethroat**

Seen daily, 19/5-24/5.

**Garden Warbler**

Seen or heard on 19/5, 21/5 & 24/5.

**Blackcap**

Seen or heard in song daily.

**Wood Warbler**

1 heard, in beech forest near Byster, east of Kosice, 18/5; 2 heard, forest walk, Slanske Hills and 2+ (one seen very well) in woodland near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5; 4 heard singing on the forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park and 1 heard singing in the Dunajec River gorge, Pieniny National Park, 22/5; 3+ heard, Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Chiffchaff**

Seen on 19/5 and daily, 21/5-24/5.

**Willow Warbler**

Seen or heard daily, 20/5-24/5.

**Goldcrest**

Seen or heard daily, 21/5-24/5.

**Firecrest**

1, Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 22/5 & 23/5 and 1 during brief forest stop near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5.

**Spotted flycatcher**

Seen daily, 19/5-24/5.

**Red-breasted Flycatcher**

1 seen well and others heard in the Ciertaze forest area, Slanske Hills, 19/5; several singing in the Dunajec River gorge, Pieniny National Park, 22/5; 1 heard singing, Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Collared Flycatcher**

1 seen well on the hill Diel and several others heard on the forest walk, Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Bearded Tit**

1, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Long-tailed tit**

Several in the abandoned vineyards next to the goldendrop site south of Turniansky hrad, 21/5; near Hotel Limba, 23/5 and near the edge of Liptovska Mara reservoir south of Liptovska Sielnica, 24/5.

**Marsh Tit**

1 feeding young, Zadielska Gorge, Slovak Karst PLA, 21/5; feeding young adjacent to the Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5 & 24/5.

**Crested Tit**

1 during brief forest stop and another heard on the forest walk, near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5; 1 heard, Jasna, north of the ski-lift at Tri Domceky, Lower Tatras National Park and 2 seen very well, in forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5.

**Coal Tit**

1 heard on the forest walk, Slanske Hills, 19/5; seen or heard daily, 21/5-24/5.

**Blue tit**

Seen or heard, 19/5-20/5, 22/5 & 24/5.

**Great tit**

Seen and heard daily, 18/5-22/5 & 24/5-25/5.

**Nuthatch**

1 heard, in beech forest near Byster, east of Kosice, 18/5; 1 seen and others heard on the forest walk, Slanske Hills, 19/5; heard on the forest walk, near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5 and 1, in the park Petrovov sad, Kosice, 25/5.

**Treecreeper**

3 fledged young and another heard on the forest walk, Slanske Hills, 19/5; 1, Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 22/5; 1 heard singing during brief forest stop and another heard on the forest walk, near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5.

**Penduline Tit**

1 making frequent visits to the nest, plus 2-3 others seen and heard, near Besa in the Latorica River valley and 4, including one seen at close range at the nest, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Golden Oriole**

Heard calling, early morning, outside Hotel Energetik, Zemplinska sirava, 19/5-21/5; 2-3 heard on the forest walk and 1 at the meadow behind Pavol's garden, Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills and 3+ near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5; 1, near Besa in the Latorica River valley and 1 heard, near Drahnov in the Laborec River valley, 20/5; 1 in the park Petrovov sad, Kosice, 25/5.

**Red-backed Shrike**

Seen daily, 18/5-20/5 & 22/5-24/5, including several near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Great Grey Shrike**

3 on the nature reserve adjacent to the church at Svaty Kriz, 23/5.

**Jay**

Seen on 19/5 and daily, 21/5-24/5.

**Magpie**

Seen daily.

**Nutcracker**

1, in the Dunajec River gorge, Pieniny National Park, 22/5; 1 over the forest in the early evening outside Hotel Limba, 23/5; 4, in the forest area around Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley and 1, Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Jackdaw**

Seen daily.

**Rook**

Seen daily. A bird of the urban environment and adjacent farmland.

**Hooded Crow**

Seen on 18/5; daily, 20/5-22/5 and on 24/5.

**Raven**

Seen daily, 18/5-22/5.

**Starling**

Seen daily.

**House sparrow**

Seen daily. Breeding at Hotel Energetik.

**Tree sparrow**

Seen daily in the lowlands in gardens and farmland, 18/5-21/5. Present around the Hotel Energetik.

**Chaffinch**

Seen daily.

**Serín**

Seen daily, 19/5-24/5.

**Greenfinch**

Seen daily, 19/5-25/5.

**Goldfinch**

Seen daily, 18/5-24/5.

**Siskin**

Seen daily, in areas of alpine coniferous forest and meadows, 21/5-24/5.

**Linnet**

Small numbers seen daily, 18/5-21/5 & 23/5-24/5.

**Crossbill**

A male and female, in forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5.

**Scarlet Rosefinch**

3 stunning males, in scrub at the edge of Liptovska Mara reservoir south of Liptovska Sielnica, 24/5.

**Bullfinch**

Seen daily, 21/5-24/5, including a pair seen frequently outside Hotel Limba, 21/5-23/5 and a pair, Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec, 24/5.

**Hawfinch**

c.9, near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5; 1 near Drahnov in the Laborec River valley, 20/5; singles seen around the grounds of Hotel Energetik, Zemplinska sirava, 20/5 & 21/5; 1 over the goldendrop site, Slovak Karst PLA, south of Turniansky hrad, 21/5 and 1 near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5.

**Yellowhammer**

Seen or heard daily, 19/5-25/5.

**Rock bunting**

A male at the goldendrop site, Slovak Karst PLA, south of Turniansky hrad, 21/5.

**Reed bunting**

1 near Besa in the Latorica River valley and 1, Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Corn bunting**

1, near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5 and 1 near the bee-eater colony between Leles and Kopona, 20/5.

**Mammals**

English & scientific names follow *The Atlas of European Mammals* (Mitchell-Jones *et al.* 1999).

**Eastern Hedgehog** (*Erinaceus concolor*)

1 crossing the track in front of the bus, Senne wetland, 20/5. Road kills noted on 19/5 & 21/5.

**Lesser Horseshoe Bat** (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*)

A roosting group of 42+, Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Brown Hare** (*Lepus europaeus*)

1, near Besa in the Latorica River valley; another seen nearby *en route* and 1, near the bee-eater quarry between Leles and Kopona, 20/5.

**Red Squirrel** (*Sciurus vulgaris*)

1, Hotel Energetik, 19/5 & 20/5; 2, on forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5; 1, Jasna, north of the ski-lift at Tri Domceky, Lower Tatras National Park, 23/5 and 1, *en route* to Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec, 24/5.

**European Souslik** (*Spermophilus citellus*)

Several seen well at close range on a 'souslik meadow' near Vysna Mysl'a, southeast of Kosice, 18/5.

**Red Fox** (*Vulpes vulpes*)

1 near Besa in the Latorica River valley, 20/5 and 1 seen from the bus travelling from Pieniny National Park, 22/5.

**Stoat** (*Mustela erminea*)

1 Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Roe Deer** (*Capreolus capreolus*)

2, forest walk, Slanske Hills, 19/5; 1 Senne wetland, 20/5; 1, near Strba and another seen from the bus elsewhere, 22/5.

## Amphibians & Reptiles

English & scientific names follow *A Field Guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Britain and Europe* (Arnold & Burton 1978)

**Alpine Newt** (*Triturus alpestris*)

In ephemeral, water-filled forest track ruts; on the forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5. This species and Montandon's newt in the same habitat.

**Montandon's Newt** (*Triturus montandoni*)

In ephemeral, water-filled forest track ruts; on the forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5.

**Yellow-bellied Toad** (*Bombina variegata*)

1, in a shallow ditch in the meadows near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir, 24/5.

**Fire-bellied Toad** (*Bombina bombina*)

Heard at Senne wetland, 20/5.

**Common Frog** (*Rana temporaria*)

Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Marsh Frog** (*Rana ridibunda*)

Near Be|a in the Latorica River valley and Senn— wetland, 20/5.

**Sand Lizard** (*Lacerta agilis*)

An adult female, near Besa in the Latorica River valley, 20/5.

**Green lizard** (*Lacerta viridis*)

A juvenile and an adult male at the goldendrop site, Slovak Karst PLA south of Turniansky hrad, 21/5.

**Viviparous Lizard** (*Lacerta vivipara*)

1 on the forest walk, Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Common Wall Lizard** (*Podarcis muralis*)

1 in the steep sides of first stream gorge, Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Grass Snake** (*Natrix natrix*) or **Aesculapian Snake** (*Elaphe longissima*)

A juvenile of one of these two species found at breakfast in the dining room at Hotel Energetik, 20/5! Released into the gardens.

## Butterflies

English & scientific names largely follow *The Mitchell Beazley Pocket Guide to Butterflies* (Whalley 1981)

**Chequered Skipper** (*Carterocephalus palaemon*)

Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Swallowtail** (*Papilio machaon*)

1, in flight over the nature reserve adjacent to the church at Svaty Kriz, 23/5

**Small White** (*Artogeia rapae*)

Meadow behind Pavol's house, Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Green-veined White** (*Artogeia napi*)

Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Orange tip** (*Anthocharis cardamines*)

Slanske Hills, 19/5; forest walk, near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5 and Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5. Also seen at other sites.

**Brimstone** (*Gonepteryx rhamni*)

Meadow behind Pavol's house, Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 19/5; forest walk, near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5; Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Wood White** (*Leptidea sinapis*)

Near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5; in forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5; Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Camberwell Beauty** (*Nymphalis antiopa*)

Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5, seen by Mike and Steve (Ha).

**Comma** (*Polygonia c-album*)

Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Peacock butterfly** (*Inachis io*)

Forest walk, near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5.

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

Near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5.

**Woodland Ringlet** (*Erebia medusa*)

Meadow behind Pavol's house, Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 19/5; in the globeflower meadow, Tatranska Lomnica, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5; near the church at Svaty Kriz, 23/5 and at sites elsewhere.

**Speckled Wood** (*Pararge aegeria*)

Slanske Hills, 19/5; forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5; in forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley, 23/5; Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Duke of Burgundy** (*Hamearis lucina*)

Near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills, 19/5; near the church at Svaty Kriz, 23/5 and Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

## Dragonflies

**Broad-bodied Chaser** (*Libellula depressa*)

A male at a shallow ditch in the meadows near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir, 24/5.

## Some miscellaneous invertebrates

Two species of **Longhorn beetle**

Forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5 and Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

A large, spotted **weevil**

Forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 22/5 and Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 24/5.

**Field Cricket**

**Roman Snail**

In the abandoned vineyards next to the goldendrop site south of Turniansky hrad and in Zadielska Gorge, Slovak Karst PLA, 21/5. Also seen elsewhere.

**Carpathian Blue Slug**

Forest walk, Slanske Hills, 19/5. **Endemic to the Carpathian mountains region.**

## Flowering and other plants

**Saturday, 18 May Beech forest near Byster, east of Kosice** (Ural owl wood)

Asarabacca *Asarum europaeum*

Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*

Coral-root Bitter-cress *Cardamine bulbifera*

Goldilocks Buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus*

Herb-Paris *Paris quadrifolia*

May Lily *Maianthemum bifolium*

Midland Hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*

Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*

Solomon's-seal sp. *Polygonatum*

## **Sunday, 19 May Slanske Hills**

### **Vlci potok (Wolf's stream) & Ciertaze forest area**

Asarabacca *Asarum europaeum*  
Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*  
Coral-root Bitter-cress *Cardamine bulbifera*  
Dwarf Elder *Sambucus ebulus*  
Goldilocks Buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus*  
Greater Celandine *Chelidonium majus*  
Herb-Robert *Geranium robertianum*  
Large Yellow Foxglove *Digitalis ambigua* (= *grandiflora*)  
Pyramidal Bugle sp. *Ajuga pyramidalis* or *genevensis*  
Strawberry sp. *Fragaria*  
Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*  
Woodruff *Galium odoratum*  
Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*

### **Meadow behind Pavol's house, Juskova Vol'a**

Sticky Catchfly *Lychnis viscaria*

### **Forest & scrub near Backov on the edge of the Slanske Hills**

Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*  
Common Twayblade *Listera ovata*  
Lesser Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera bifolia*  
White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*

## **Monday, 20 May**

### **Near Besa in the Latorica River valley**

Carthusian Pink *Dianthus carthusianorum*  
Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*  
Yellow Vetch *Vicia lutea*

### **Small wetland near Backa**

Cornflower *Centaurea cyanus*

## **Tuesday, 21 May**

### **Goldendrop site, Turniansky hradny vrch, Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area**

Bastard Balm *Melittis melissophyllum*  
a Bearded Viper's-grass sp. *Scorzonera* sp. (abundant, low seed heads scattered over the dry karst)  
Bladder Campion *Silene vulgaris*  
Bloody Crane's-bill *Geranium sanguineum*  
a Broomrape sp. *Orobanche*  
Field Cow-wheat *Melampyrum arvense*  
Field Eryngo *Eryngium campestre*  
Flax sp. *Linum*  
Inflated Milk-vetch *Astragalus vesicarius* ssp. *albidus* **Subspecies endemic to Eastern Slovakia**  
Manna (or Flowering) Ash *Fraxinus ornus* (rare & protected in Slovakia)  
Houseleek sp. *Sempervivum*  
Jurinea *Jurinea mollis* ssp. *macrocalathia* **Subspecies endemic to the Slovak Karst region**  
Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis*  
Meadow-rue sp. *Thalictrum*  
a Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* ssp. *grandiflorum*  
Turna Goldendrop *Onosma tornensis* (unbranched) **Endemic to the Slovak Karst region**  
Yellow Woundwort *Stachys recta*

### **Zadielska gorge, Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area**

Common Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*  
Dusky Crane's-bill *Geranium phaeum*  
Hoary Plantain *Plantago media*  
Mountain (or Blue) Lettuce *Lactuca perennis*  
Perennial Honesty *Lunaria rediviva*

**Slovak Paradise National Park, north of Dobsina** (brief roadside stop)

Aconite-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus aconitifolius*  
Alpine Clematis *Clematis alpina*  
Common Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*  
Great Masterwort (or Mountain Sanicle) *Astrantia major*  
Great Meadow-rue *Thalictrum aquilegifolium*  
Lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*  
a Mountain Cornflower *Centaurea montana* or *triumfetti*  
Rampion sp. *Phyteuma*  
Swallow-wort *Vincetoxicum hirundinaria*  
Whorled Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum verticillatum*  
Yellow Melancholy Thistle *Cirsium eristithales*

**Wednesday, 22 May**

**Globeflower meadow, Tatranska Lomnica, High Tatras, Tatra National Park**

Bistort *Polygonum bistorta*  
Broad-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis*  
Forget-me-not *Myosotis* sp.  
Globeflower *Trollius europaeus*  
Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla mollis*  
Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*  
Water Avens *Geum rivale*

**Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park**

Alpine Clematis *Clematis alpina*  
Asarabacca *Asarum europaeum*  
Bitter Vetchling *Lathyrus montanus*  
Broad-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis*  
Butterbur sp. *Petasites*  
Coltsfoot *Tussilago farfara*  
Coral-root Bitter-cress *Cardamine bulbifera*  
Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*  
Dusky Crane's-bill *Geranium phaeum*  
Goatsbeard Spiraea *Aruncus dioicus*  
a Great Yellow Gentian *Gentiana* sp.  
Lady's-mantle sp. *Alchemilla*  
Leopardsbane sp. *Doronicum* sp.  
Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*  
May Lily *Maianthemum bifolium*  
Oxlip *Primula elatior*  
Pyramidal Bugle sp. *Ajuga pyramidalis* or *genevensis*  
Square-stalked St. John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum*  
Strawberry sp. *Fragaria*  
Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*  
Water Avens *Geum rivale*  
Whorled Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum verticillatum*  
a Wood Horsetail *Equisetum* sp.  
a Wood Melick *Melica* sp.  
Woodruff *Galium odoratum*  
Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*  
Wood Spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*  
Yellow Archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*

**Pieniny National Park**

Alpine Aster *Aster alpinus*  
*Dianthus praecox* ssp. *hungarica* (white, 'frilly-edged' flower)  
Rampion sp. *Phyteuma*  
a tall Saxifrage sp. *Saxifraga* sp.  
Swallow-wort *Vincetoxicum hirundinaria*

**Lesnica**

Broad-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis*  
Common Twayblade *Listera ovata*  
Crosswort *Galium cruciata*  
Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride*  
Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla mollis*  
Military Orchid *Orchis militaris*

**Thursday, 23 May**

**Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park**

Least Primrose *Primula minima*  
a Snowbell *Soldanella carpatica*  
White Pasque Flower *Pulsatilla alba*

**Wet grassland area near the church at Svaty Kriz,**

Broad-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis*  
Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*  
Silverweed *Potentilla anserina*

**Forest near Hotel Limba, Demanovska Valley,**

Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*

**Friday, 24 May**

**Corncrake meadows near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir**

Broad-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis*  
Pink sp. *Dianthus*  
Sainfoin sp. *Onobrychis*

**Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley, Chocske Hills**

Alpine Aster *Aster alpinus*  
Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*  
Broad-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis* (up on the wet alpine meadows above the valley)  
Butterbur sp. *Petasites*  
Clusius's Gentian *Gentiana clusii*  
Common Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*  
Common Twayblade *Listera ovata*  
Cotton-grass sp. *Eriophorum* sp.  
Edelweiss *Leontopodium alpinum*  
Great Meadow-rue *Thalictrum aquilegifolium*  
Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*  
Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla mollis*  
Lesser Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera bifolia*  
Pasque Flower sp. *Pulsatilla*  
Spleenwort sp. *Asplenium*  
Swallow-wort *Vincetoxicum hirundinaria*  
Yellow Wood Violet *Viola biflora*



Dear Honeyguiders,

Perhaps you still keep in your memories the impressions from your trip to Slovakia last May. One of top birding destinations was then the area of Senne including fishponds, nature reserve and meadows.

The area of c. 1,500 hectares is a variety of wetland habitats including open water surface, submerged water vegetation and dense scrub, water channels and oxbows, mesophile and wet meadows, bird islets, etc. All these provide conditions for c. 150 water bird species of which for 25 Senne is the only and/or the most important breeding site in Slovakia and as such was in 2000 designated as the European Important Bird Area (IBA) according to the criteria set up by BirdLife International.

Unfortunately, in last 10 years the look of Senne is changing dramatically. Insufficient capacities of the state to manage the nature reserve, privatisation and restoration of the fishponds, reduction of reed beds and increased hunting on birds, drying out the lowlands and collapsing agriculture lead to changes of water habitats resulting in rapid declines in numbers of both breeding and migrating birds.

Since 1996 the Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia (SOVS) – the Slovak BirdLife Partner undertakes initiatives aiming to recover the importance of Senne for birds and people. In 1999-2002 SOVS revitalised one of former wet meadows through repairing 250 metres long dyke, two sluices and bridge across the dyke which allowed flooding of 120 hectares large meadow named Ostrovik (Islet).

These actions brought massive spring concentrations of migrating water birds to the meadow, namely geese (1,000-3,500), ruffs (up to 25,000), black-tailed godwits (600), lapwings (500), hundreds of garganeys, great dunlins, shovelers, teals and black-headed gulls, tens of great and little white egrets, curlews, whimbrels, avocets etc. Moreover, also rarely occurring stilts, glossy ibis, squacco herons, cranes and cattle egret (the first recorded in Slovakia) occurred and some typical wet meadow birds (garganey, teal, gadwall, lapwing, redshank, black-tailed godwit), after years of their breeding absence, even bred there successfully in 2002.

In 1997-2002 SOVS has organised at Senne up to 20 labour camps for its members and volunteers who worked hardly in the reserve (coppicing successive willow scrub, clearing bird islets, mowing dykes). SOVS has also promoted the site in public through producing a representative colourful booklet, publishing articles in magazines and giving interviews to media, carrying out surveys of globally threatened bird species (Ferruginous Duck, Aquatic Warbler) and populations of migrating water birds, etc.

Finally, in 2001-2002 SOVS has taken lead in drawing a new management plan for the Senne nature reserve. Extensive Analysis of existing breeding and feeding conditions for birds has been made. These have shown the key threats to the reserve are damaged dykes, insufficient water supply & management, keeping an intensive carp fish stock, lack of reed beds and lagoons, insufficient capacities of the State Nature Conservancy to carry out management activities, etc). SOVS, in collaboration with experts from RSPB and BirdLife, has proposed and is currently starting to implement measures such as creation of reed beds, reduction of successive willow scrub, increasing water levels and flow of water, repairing sluices & dykes and promoting the site via Internet.

Such a progress, however, would not be possible without financial contributions provided by various partnering organisations. Every year Slovak and foreign birders come to Senne to find it a fantastic place for exploring birds and many of them contribute with donations, knowledge or hands. SOVS wishes to say MANY THANKS to all, including the Honeyguide's clients, for coming to Senne and for their support which, besides the funds, provides us also with a new enthusiasm for next actions.

Therefore, THANK YOU, 'Honeyguiders', again and look forward to see you in Slovakia in 2003!

Pavol Kanuch  
SOVS Conservation Officer  
August 2002