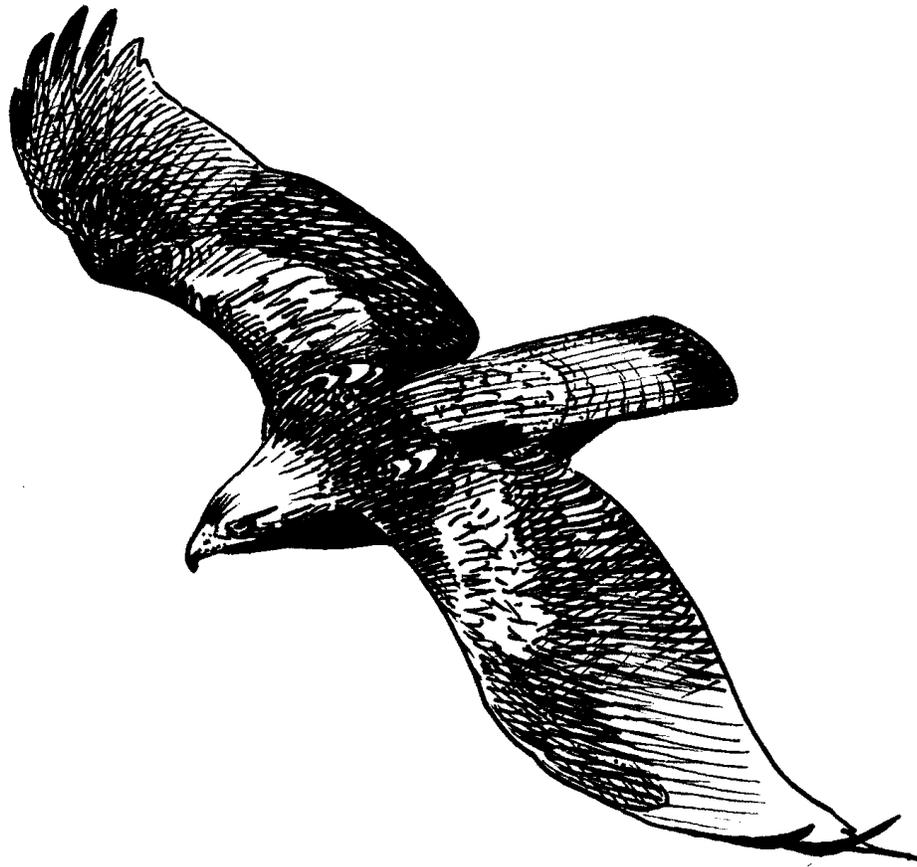


Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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



Discover Slovakia
26 May – 2 June 2001

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The group

John Almond	Northumberland
Prilly Heffer Polly Heffer	Dorset
Terry Gambie	Cambridge
Ruth Matthews	Faversham, Kent
Angela Steed	Colchester
Angela Henson	near Norwich

Leader from UK
Steve Henson

Leader from Slovakia
Pavol Kanuch

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 £175 left with Pavol is part of the £22,180 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.

At the request of SOVS, the Slovakian BirdLife International partner, information on several birds of prey species is omitted from this report due to recent illegal persecution.

Illustrations by Rob Hume. Cover: imperial eagle.

Itinerary & highlights

Day 1 Saturday, 26/5/01

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

Afternoon: onward flight to Kosice, arriving around 1430hrs. Transfer to arable farmland area in the Kosice basin to look for imperial eagle, saker and sousliks. Later, on to an area of beech forest near the village of Hrasovik, east of Kosice, for Ural owl.

Early evening: transferred to Hotel Energetik at Zemplinska sirava, with a brief stop *en route* to look for eagle owl at a quarry near Dargov in the Slanske Hills.

Dinner and overnight at Hotel Energetik.

Highlights of the day were imperial eagle, saker, the incubating Ural owl seen through the 'strategically placed' mirror (!), Josef's 'patented' Ural owl nestbox and the roadside walnut trees.

Day 2 Sunday, 27/5/01

Location: Slanske Hills.

Morning: brief stop near Cabov overlooking Walker's Valley to watch for raptors, followed by walk through Walker's Valley along the river.

Picnic lunch in Pavol and Monika's garden, in the village of Juskova Vol'a.

Afternoon: walk through tall forest at Vlci potok (Wolf's stream) & Ciertaze near Juskova Vol'a, for Ural owl, woodpeckers, flycatchers and forest flowers.

Early evening: brief stop along the Ondava river near Podcivca *en route* to Hotel Energetik for thrush nightingale and river warbler. Dinner and overnight at Hotel Energetik.

Highlights of the day were black stork, the adult and newly fledged black woodpecker, excellent views of green woodpecker and the woodpecker 'experience' in general, as well as lunch and close-ups of lesser horseshoe bats at Pavol and Monika's house in Juskova Vol'a. Back at Hotel Energetik, Ruth enjoyed a vivid rainbow and its reflections over Zemplinska sirava.

Day 3 Monday, 28/5/01

Morning: travelled about 80km south towards the border with Hungary. Walk through a worked quarry site near Kasvar in the Zemplinske Hills, a limestone area. Brief stop in the nearby Tarbucka hills at bee-eater colony and a look for tawny pipit and barred warbler.

Lunchtime: Slovak Tokaj wine degustation at the Tokaj wine cellars in Slovenske Nove Mesto.

Afternoon: photo-stop in Inacovce to admire white storks at their nests, followed by Senne wetland.

Evening: dinner and overnight at the Hotel Energetik.

Highlights of the day were short-toed eagle, bee-eaters, green lizard, grass snake, burning bush in flower and the bees and meadows in the Tarbucka hills. At Senne wetland, bitterns, collared pratincole, whiskered tern, penduline tits at the nest, golden orioles and a surprise flock of garrulous rose-coloured starlings. Last but certainly not least was the Slovak Tokaj wine tasting!

Day 4 Tuesday, 29/5/01

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: Kosice, including the Eastern Slovakian Museum.

Late morning & afternoon: Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area.

Late morning: stop below Turniansky hrad (castle), north of Turna nad Bodvou, to look on the nature reserve for endemic Turna Goldendrop *Onosma tornensis*, rock bunting and green lizard.

Lunchtime: brief excursion to a nearby working quarry at Host'ovce on the border with Hungary to look for rock thrush.

Afternoon: optional walks into Zadielska gorge or a steep climb onto the plateau above, for botanising, butterflies and birds.

Evening: arrived at Penzion Limba followed by dinner locally, at Bystricka izba.

Other than hoopoe, highlights that included the Eastern Slovakian Museum in Kosice and the Slovak karst were mainly non-avian, the latter featuring in particular the gorge and the walk to the 'lookout' point, the karst flora, alpine clematis, a male green lizard and fire salamander. Eva, our guide on the karst, was voted a *Homo sapiens* highlight!

Day 5 Wednesday, 30/5/01

Morning: meadow stop near Tatranska Lomnica to admire globeflowers and other flora, followed by a forest walk at Kezmarske Zl'aby in the High Tatras mountains, Tatra National Park.

Lunchtime: picnic in the long grass at Belianske Luky.

Afternoon: Pieniny National Park - rafting trip down the Dunajec river along the border with Poland.

Late afternoon: brief meadow stop near Lesnica for orchids.

Evening: dinner at Bystricka izba.

Highlights of the day were hobby, three-toed woodpecker, wood warbler, firecrest, alpine newt, white helleborine, the meadows, the picnic in the long grass at Belianske Luky, the High Tatras forest walk and rafting down the Dunajec river along the border with Poland (the boatman's stories and waistcoat were excellent!).

Day 6 Thursday, 31/5/01

Morning: short drive south to Tri Domceky for a climb by chair lift and on foot to Chopok, high in the Lower Tatras National Park. Picnic lunch afterwards near Jasna, north of the ski-lift.

Afternoon: visit to the magnificent wooden church of Svaty Kriz followed by cheese tasting at Ziar.

Evening: dinner at Bystricka izba.

Highlights of the day were singing ring ouzel, common redstart, alpine accentor, Pavol and Steve's telescope 'coincidence' with alpine marmot and chamois, marmot cubs at play, white pasque flower, the ski-lift (or rather, not falling *off* the ski-lift!), the views from the high slopes of Chopok and the wooden church of Svaty Kriz.

Day 7 Friday, 1/6/01

Morning: brief stop overlooking the reservoir northwest of Liptovska Mikulas, and stops nearby for scarlet rosefinch, corncrake, icterine warbler and great grey shrike.

Lunchtime: visit to the Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec.

Afternoon: walk from the high meadows of the Chocske hills south into Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley.

Evening: traditional dinner at Koliba.

Highlights of the day were corncrake and the 'seduction' of the corncrake by the CD-player, icterine warbler, hovering great grey shrike, scarlet rosefinch, Clusius's gentian and, despite the rain, the stunning Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley. Back at Penzion Limba, Ruth enjoyed a TV programme about black grouse!

Day 8 Saturday, 2/6/01

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

Brief potter by the roadside *en route* for plants in the Slovak Paradise National Park north of Dobsina, followed by a visit to the manor house Kastiel Betliar.

Early afternoon: transferred to airport for 1425hrs flight to Prague, arriving 1555hrs.

Avian highlights of the week were white stork, the diversity and sheer number of raptors, collared pratincole, the young black woodpecker, the woodpecker ‘experience’ on Sunday (intimate views of black, plus great spotted, middle spotted and white-backed in quick succession!), great views of singing passerines (icterine warbler, red-breasted flycatcher, firecrest and scarlet rosefinch), penduline tits at the nest and a flock of rose-coloured starlings.

Non-avian highlights and special wildlife ‘moments’ were numerous and included the family of alpine marmots, Senne wetland, the alpine meadows and their globeflowers, the High Tatras forest walk with Marion, rafting along the Dunajec river and the overall variety and diversity of wildlife.

The food and drink, particularly on Wednesday and Friday evening, wine tasting and lunch in Pavol and Monika’s garden put the icing on the cake!

Daily diary

Saturday 26/5/01 – east bound

Early Saturday morning: a small group of *Honeyguiders* were gathered at a busy Heathrow Airport terminal 2 for the first leg of their eastward journey to Slovakia. With Ruth missing from the group, it was an anxious wait until we finally caught up with her on board the plane only a few minutes before departure! The Czech Airlines flight was soon in the air so it was time to relax and, in what seemed like no time at all (an hour and a half), we were touching down on the western outskirts of Prague.

After stocking up on snacks and drinks, there was not long to wait for our slightly delayed mid-day onward flight to Kosice. Pavol, our co-leader and the minibus driver for the first-leg were waiting to welcome us and, after loading up the trailer, we were soon heading off to our first rendezvous in the arable farmland of the Kosice basin. After meeting up with Josef, our guide for the afternoon, it wasn't long before we were watching a breeding pair of imperial eagles high above their nest site; a reminder that we had arrived in eastern Slovakia! Moving only a short distance to an open grassland area, we enjoyed good views of European sousliks, while a further short 'hop' took us back into arable farmland where we saw saker.

It was time to move on again, this time to an area of beech forest to the east of Kosice; two lesser spotted eagles and a bee-eater were seen *en route*. A short walk brought us below a large nestbox placed high in a tree, in which a female Ural owl sat tightly incubating eggs; her pale plumage and striking straw-coloured bill being conveniently viewed via a strategically placed mirror in the roof of the nestbox! On the way back to the minibus we admired some of the flowering plants on the forest floor which included May lily, sanicle and Bird's-nest Orchid, before bidding Josef farewell and heading eastwards to our hotel. On the way we made a brief stop at a quarry in the Slanske hills to look for eagle owl, before finally reaching the Hotel Energetik, overlooking the vast reservoir, Zemplinska sirava.

Sunday 27/5/01 – the Slanske hills

After breakfast and some early morning forays into the hotel grounds, we loaded up the minibus with optical gear, butterfly nets and field guides and headed off to the Slanske Hills west of Michalovce, with Ruth opting for a day at the hotel to recuperate from her cold. The sun shone as we made our first stop near Cabov overlooking Walker's Valley, a superb vantage point from which to scan the skies for soaring raptors. Our timing was spot-on but we had to wait some time before first buzzards, then goshawk, kestrel and black stork came into view.

Shortly afterwards, we were down in the narrow valley ourselves, for a walk through pasture and scrub, following the river with its thick fringe of trees. In the bright, sunny conditions beautiful demoiselle damselflies and butterflies vied for our attention, particularly the many blues, fritillaries and dazzling large coppers. Yellow-bellied toads were found in a shaded muddy stream, one of a good range of 'herptiles' recorded during the holiday. Notable among the birds were excellent views of singing river warblers, singing marsh warbler, brief views of difficult-to-see barred warblers, plus golden oriole and hawfinch.

Eventually reaching the other end of the valley and the minibus, we drove a short distance to the village of Juskova Vol'a where, much to our surprise, we were invited into Pavol and Monika's garden next to their newly built house to eat our picnic lunch! Both Syrian and green woodpecker showed well as we relaxed after our walk. After lunch we climbed a ladder into the loft space of an older, traditional house adjacent to the newly built one, for a privileged, close encounter with a cluster of roosting lesser horseshoe bats (taking care not to disturb them). Thrilled to have seen the bats, we set off again for another walk through cooler, tall growth forest dominated by beech in the nearby Vlci potok (Wolf's stream) and Ciertaze areas, to search for woodpeckers and other forest species. In an area of sloping forest with tall mature trees, we heard calling black woodpeckers and grabbed tantalizing glimpses. These views were frustrating but, moving on a little further, we came across a fully but recently-fledged black woodpecker busily attempting to master the art of climbing

up tree trunks! It fluttered ever closer to us and before long an adult female also came onto the scene, giving excellent, satisfying views. Eventually the young bird launched itself across a gap in the trees only to make a crash-landing on the ground a few metres in front of us where Pavol was able to 'capture' it! After a brief, close-up 'examination' we replaced the bird in cover to await the arrival of its nearby parent as we moved off to another area.

There were several plants of interest to admire as we walked, including coral-root bitter-cress, patches of dwarf elder and large yellow foxglove, May lily and pyramidal bugle. Reaching a felled area and a gap in the forest we again stopped to listen and look for woodpeckers. Before long a great spotted arrived, followed after a few minutes by a middle spotted and finally a white-backed. All gave good views of the distinguishing features of their pied plumage and all three flew across the clearing in quick succession; a fantastic woodpecker 'experience'! Changing direction, we headed through a heavily shaded area of widely spaced beech and a sparse understorey. A singing male red-breasted flycatcher gave prolonged, close views whereas lower down the slope, a nestbox recently occupied by a sitting Ural owl proved empty and finally, as we came to the edge of the forest, Pavol glimpsed a grey-headed woodpecker.

Exhausted but happy, we once again reached the minibus for a return drive back to Hotel Energetik and dinner. There was still time for one last stop along the Ondava river near Podcivca to listen for singing thrush nightingale and river warbler. There were lots of mosquitoes and, although there was no sign of either 'target' species, we did see hawfinch and calling nearby, a lesser spotted woodpecker became our eighth woodpecker species of the day!

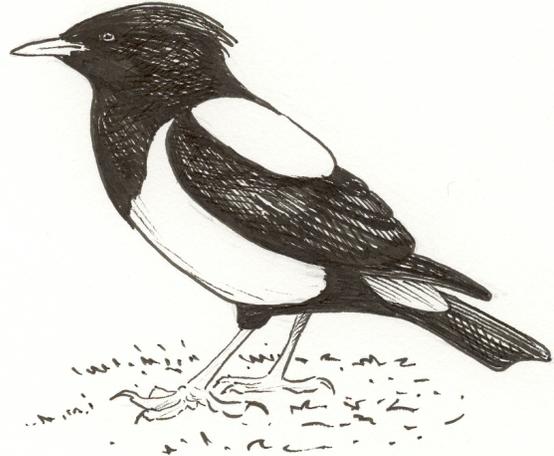
Monday 28/5/01 – the Hungarian border and Senne wetland (a very special wetland!)

Monday was overcast as we travelled about 80km south towards the Hungarian border. Our destination was a worked quarry near Kasvar, in the Zemplinske hills close to the border with Hungary. We set off with Milos, our guide for the morning, our progress slowed to 'pottering' pace by the many flowering plants in this limestone region. A wheatear was found above a large quarry as we stooped to admire among others, bedstraw broomrape, burning bush, dropwort, fairy flax, honeywort, meadow clary, rockrose, salad burnet, Siberian bellflower and viper's-bugloss. Telescopes were soon brought into action as Milos spotted a short-toed eagle on the ground some distance away. Once all were happy with initial views, we moved off to get closer, Polly almost stepping on a large grass snake on the way! By now the bird was in the air, before disappearing behind a mound of gravel. While we lingered hoping for further views, a nightjar began churring from nearby scrub, an agitated little ringed plover with young skirted around us and a striking green lizard ventured out onto the hot open ground, at one point becoming camera shy and taking refuge under John's boots! A honey buzzard, rising on the morning's developing thermals, gave good views before we retraced our steps to the quarry. Once there it was time to set up the 'scopes again to view two well-grown yet 'inanimate' young eagle owls on the nest some way off under the opposite face of the quarry.

Before lunch, we had time for a brief stop in the nearby Tarbucka hills at a bee-eater colony and to look for tawny pipit and barred warbler. Bee-eaters were soon in evidence, the best views being of birds perched at their burrow entrances in a small cliff face. Two barred warblers gave atypically good, prolonged views whereas tawny pipit, despite the best efforts of Milos and Pavol, couldn't be found.

The day had really warmed up and it was time to head off for the Slovak Tokaj wine degustation at the wine cellars in Slovenske Nove Mesto. Feeling ill and well below par, I slept in the minibus for the duration, but glowing reports were given by all on returning after lunch and the session was logged as one of the day's highlights! We were soon on the move again, this time back in a northeasterly direction towards the internationally renowned Senne wetland, stopping briefly *en route* in Inacovce, to admire and photograph white storks at the nest.

With its open lagoons, shallow pools, dykes, reedswamp, wet grassland and scrub, Senne was once again superb. Against the constant backdrop of calling fire-bellied toads, birds were everywhere and at times it was difficult to know what to look at next! Purple and night herons were plentiful and great white egrets outnumbered little egrets. Among the many highlights were black-necked grebes, some swimming with young on their backs, booming and flying bitterns, spoonbill, garganey, black and whiskered terns, great reed warbler and a pair of penduline tits at the nest. Unexpectedly, a pratincole was found resting among a group of birds on one of the drier lagoons. The bird flew off before we'd had a good look, hawking insects high in the distance. Fortunately it returned, giving much better views which revealed the reddish-brown underwing coverts and white trailing edge to its wing, features showing it to be a collared pratincole, one of only a handful of records for Slovakia. A Savi's warbler was heard 'reeling' and two little crakes called from dense reedswamp, almost at our feet. Even as daylight waned and we made our way from the site there was more excitement, with brief glimpses of a red-necked grebe and a flock of noisy rose-coloured starlings descending to feed for a few minutes in a patch of tall willows, before leaving just as suddenly. Finally, a little owl sat on a telegraph post near the gatehouse as we left the site.



Tuesday 29/5/01 – on the move: west to the Slovak karst and Tatra mountains

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 (Nizke Tatry) in central Slovakia. Our first destination was to be the Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area southwest of Kosice with Eva our guide and Stan now driving the bus, but low cloud and heavy rain meant a hasty change of plans. We opted to visit Kosice today instead of on Saturday morning, with Eva and most of the group first taking in a visit to the natural history section of the Eastern Slovakian Museum.

After a couple of hours we met up again to resume our journey, heading into the Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area. Our first stop north of Turna nad Bodvou was on the hill below the Turniansky hrad (castle) at a nature reserve site supporting Turna goldendrop (a Slovakian endemic); the reserve consisting of steeply sloping, dry limestone grassland with patches of scrub. A well-concealed marsh warbler sung from the undergrowth and a marsh tit fed young alongside the track as we walked up onto the hillside. Without too much difficulty we soon located two species of goldendrop including the endemic *Onosma tornensis* as well as, among others, field cow-wheat, field eryngo, houseleek, meadow clary, white mullein, pasque flower, yellow woundwort, an alpine yarrow species and several grasses. A stunning male green lizard showed off its bright blue head while a male rock bunting was less confiding, being seen by only a few of the group.

Prior to lunch, we took a brief diversion to a nearby working quarry at Host'ovce on the border with Hungary to look for rock thrush. Viewing the quarry with telescopes from some considerable distance, we scanned the quarry face and slopes above. After a few minutes, attention focussed on an inanimate 'lump' that Pavol thought was the thrush and I thought was a rock! A lively and humorous discussion ensued... "did it move?" "No, it's still in the same position!" "Is it a bird?" "Is it a rock?" "Is it a shadow?" Several more minutes passed without the slightest flicker of movement before weight of opinion finally swung towards rock! Great fun and anyway, we did see wheatear and stonechat, as well as a white stork foraging nearby at the edge of a field.

Returning northward again, we ate lunch nearby in the spectacular, steep-sided Zadielska gorge. Afterwards, most of us took the steep, physically exerting climb onto the plateau high above us, while Prilly, Polly and Ruth opted to stay in the gorge for a more gentle walk along the river. Again, we focussed on botanising in this rich and important limestone area. Taking advantage of Eva's expertise, we notched up a lengthy list of notable plants including alpine aster, alpine clematis, barberry, bladder milk-vetch, blue gromwell, Carthusian pink, the white, frilly-edged *Dianthus praecox* ssp. *hungarica*, dodder, lesser honeywort, lily-of-the-valley, Hungarian Buckler Mustard, Jurinea and Klastersky's Whitlow-grass, another Slovakian endemic. Shrubs included juniper, downy oak, manna ash, Midland hawthorn, wayfaring tree and whitebeam. Up on the very top a hoopoe was glimpsed and a black stork soared over the gorge. Also on the wing were swallowtail, scarce swallowtail and adonis blue butterflies, while down in the gorge below us Prilly, Polly and Ruth found a fire salamander! Late in the afternoon we hurriedly descended back towards the minibus as a thunderstorm rumbled in the distance. We didn't quite escape the ensuing downpour completely but were able to dry out in comfort in the minibus as we left the karst behind, heading towards Penzion Limba, our base for the next few days.

Wednesday 30/5/01 – the High Tatras and river rafting along the Polish border

Our first day in central Slovakia brought cloudless skies and sunshine, although the breeze was cool. An action packed day lay ahead as we set off after an early breakfast 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 globe-flowers, plus bistort, lady's-mantle, broad-leaved marsh-orchids and water avens among others, as well as several woodland ringlet butterflies.

At Kezmarske Zl'aby we set off on a walk through first mixed and later, as we reached steeper slopes, coniferous forest, meeting a few of the local foresters on the way. Particularly in the lower parts, there were many plants of interest on the forest floor, necessitating several stops! Species included alpine clematis, asarabacca, dusky crane's-bill and May lily, with herb-Paris, marsh-marigold, wood-sorrel and yellow archangel reminiscent of an English ancient woodland. The forest floor was wet in places, with water-filled ruts along the tracks as a result of logging activities. Marion 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 quite difficult to see, but we did all enjoy excellent views of wood warbler, firecrest and crested tit. A further steep climb through pine forest brought a black-phase red squirrel, plus tantalizing glimpses of a hazelhen flushed from the forest floor and a three-toed woodpecker seen by Pavol.

At lunchtime we rested for a brief picnic in the long grass at Belianske Luky where we saw whinchat and a singing scarlet rosefinch in nondescript brown plumage, before heading north to Pieniny National Park and the border with Poland. Our destination was Cerveny Klaster, where we embarked upon an almost serene rafting trip along the Dunajec river. The sunshine was pleasant and we were entertained by the boatmen's stories as they guided us towards Lesnica some 15km downstream, through gentle currents and what was, in places, unseasonably low water levels. After a few kilometres the wider riverine landscape became more enclosed as we entered a long gorge, spectacular limestone outcrops towering above us. First two and then a party of five hobbies appeared above the gorge. Reaching 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 in the early evening towards the Tatras mountains and Penzion Limba there was still time to take in another alpine meadow notable for its orchids, including broad-leaved marsh-orchid, common twayblade and white helleborine, plus lady's-mantle and crosswort.

Thursday 31/5/01 – The Lower Tatras National Park, a spectacular church and cheeses

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 ridge. With cloudy skies, warm clothing was the order of the day as we were launched off the ground into the cool air. The ride lasted for several minutes and was eerily silent, enabling us to hear male ring ouzels singing from the tops of the Norway spruce which clothes the lower slopes. Coming 'down to earth' again at the terminal on the slopes of Chopok, high above the treeline, few birds were evident except for singing water pipits. Other than these, almost the first bird to be seen was a singing male common redstart in low cover next to the terminal building; very unusual to find this species at this high altitude.

Not long afterwards as we began our walk uphill, a redpoll, another species not expected at such a high altitude, called repeatedly as it flew high overhead. The well-worn path wound its way uphill and we eventually stopped at a vantage point overlooking a number of ridges and a valley way below us. A pair of alpine accentors soon came close, giving excellent views, while Pavol and I were soon training our telescopes on a mammal below us in the valley. Assuming we had spotted the *same* individual, we were all greatly amused to find in fact that we had simultaneously spotted two different species – chamois and alpine marmot. Amazing timing! Blending perfectly into the rocky background, the chamois was hard to find through the 'scope but eventually everyone had good if distant views. There were five marmots far below us and these, despite their much smaller size, were easier to see. Two were cubs and these were playfully chasing each other under the watchful eye of the adults. Possibly a second chamois and second pair of alpine accentors were also seen before it was time to descend down the mountainside. Despite some occasional patches of promising leaf growth, flowering plants proved to be few and far between, which was a little disappointing, but delicate least primrose, snowbells and white pasque flower made up for the lack of quantity.

There was low cloud by lunchtime with a touch of rain, but this did not deter us from our picnic near Jasna, north of the ski-lift. An open area of improved meadow surrounded by forest looked a good viewpoint from which to see any birds in the area. Nutcracker was a possibility that did not show but we set up the telescopes and had good views of crossbills, several ring ouzels, siskins and two hawfinches.

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, rounding off the day with a local cheeses tasting session at Ziar. Finally, after another superb evening meal at Bystricka izba, the waiter surprised Angela and I with a cake for our tenth wedding anniversary! Half was duly 'sampled' and the other half saved to eat with the Friday afternoon cup of tea!

Friday 1/6/01 – wet weather in the Chocske Hills

The morning began cool with rain threatening as we drove the short distance towards the Chocske Hills, making a brief stop overlooking the reservoir northwest of Liptovska Mikulas. Other than a black tern, there was little else of note so we moved to another point along the edge of the reservoir. South of Liptovska Sielnica we needed only a brief search before locating three brightly-coloured singing male scarlet rosefinches in willow scrub at the edge of the reservoir.

Rain had set in as we drove a short distance into the hills near Izipovce where, undeterred, we walked along an interesting narrow stream valley surrounded by lush, damp meadows and scrub. A marsh warbler, singing incessantly from a patch of thick scrub, proved difficult to see while from the thick meadow sward a corncrake rasped out its call, the



first we'd heard all week. Playing a recording of its call on Pavol's portable CD player proved sufficient to 'seduce' it out into the open, as it reluctantly crossed the track just metres in front of us as we watched in silence. Disappearing into the vegetation again, the bird was not to be fooled a second time and although it continued to call repeatedly, it would not cross the track! Heading back towards the reservoir again, we stopped for a sparrowhawk and a superb great grey shrike perched on telegraph wires, which frequently hovered over the grassland in its search for prey. Back near the reservoir Peter, today's guide, heard a singing icterine warbler in nearby willow scrub which, with difficulty, we managed to see reasonably well through the 'scopes and as an added bonus, three hobbies flew past us at close range.

Last night's weather forecast suggested drier weather later in the day, so we opted to visit the Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec first, for a relaxing cultural interlude, leaving the Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley until later in the afternoon. Situated alongside a fast flowing mountain river, the museum comprised a cluster of vernacular buildings of a variety of sizes, brought here from various parts of Slovakia, set out with the traditional furnishings and household belongings relevant to their former occupants. 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' there were several tree pipits and siskins, single spotted flycatcher and treecreeper and a singing scarlet rosefinch.

After lunch, we retraced our route back to the Chocske Hills and began a walk from the high meadows south into Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley, the reverse of the walk done during the 2000 holiday recce. As usual, the best estimates of the weather forecasters were wrong, as cool wet weather continued. There was a whinchat and several meadow pipits on the wide, windy alpine meadows above the top of the valley, with several ring ouzels at the edge of the coniferous forest beyond. Reaching the trail leading down through the valley, we came across clusters of superb Clusius's gentians in flower. By now, birds were few and far between but we were content to walk and enjoy the spectacular scenery as we descended into the gorge. A particularly heavy downpour forced us to run for the cover of a very convenient and well-placed wooden shelter where we were well protected against a sudden hailstorm. Once the rain had eased we continued, stopping for some time to look up on the vertical walls of a side gorge for wallcreeper. We drew a blank with this elusive montane gem and although there was a general dearth of birds, there was no lack of interesting plants to catch our attention, including a number of alpine species such as alpine aster, alpine bells, alpine clematis and edelweiss. Also noted were common columbine, common twayblade, *Dianthus praecox* ssp. *hungarica* with its white, 'frilly-edged' flowers, pasque flower, great meadow-rue, lady's-mantle, lesser butterfly orchid, yellow wood violet and butterbur. Negotiating a couple of tricky rocky areas and ladder descents, we eventually reached the bottom of the gorge and the stream, where we saw two dippers. Soon afterwards we were back at the minibus for a welcome cup of tea and the rest of the anniversary cake!

In the evening we enjoyed an absolutely tremendous traditional dinner at Koliba, finding the restaurant at the first attempt! We toasted the success of the holiday and the wildlife we had so enjoyed seeing and thanked Pavol for making it all possible with a card designed by Angela (featuring the quarry and 'imaginary' rock thrush!). I presented the *Honeyguide* holiday donation towards the work of the Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia (SOVS) at Senne wetland and Angela handed out 'awards' to everyone in the group in the form of home-made paper medals!

Saturday 2/6/01 – 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.

The weather cleared as we travelled east, lending itself to viewing the lovely countryside, with stops *en route* for photos of the High Tatras and some brief botanising at the roadside in the Slovak Paradise National Park north of Dobsina. Our main excursion for the morning was a guided tour of

the impressive manor house Kastiel Betliar, north of Rožnava, its grounds also yielding up Syrian woodpecker, raven, nuthatch, spotted flycatcher and serin. At the lower altitudes, lesser spotted eagles were in evidence, with two on the outskirts of Poprad and two near Jablonov nad Turnou during a petrol/ice-cream stop, giving excellent views as they soared in the sunshine with a black stork.

Our week in Slovakia was nearing an end as we headed for the airport. We said farewell to Pavol and Stan and reluctantly checked in for our early afternoon return flight to Prague. Before long we were touching down again. A new school term beckoned, so John flew back to the UK with Angela and I, while the rest of the group were intent on squeezing a few last drops from a memorable holiday with a one and in some cases, two-night stay in the fine city of Prague.

What a fantastic week it had been, with many memories to treasure. Many thanks to Pavol for the packed but rewarding itinerary and to Pavol and Monika for showing us their lovely home in Juskova Vol'a. Thanks to Pavol and Prilly for arranging the wedding anniversary cake. Thanks to Stan and his colleague for driving and to our guides Josef, Milos, Stefan, Eva, Marian and Peter, who all helped enrich our stay.

I'd like to thank John, Prilly, Polly, Terry, Ruth and Angela S for being great company. Angela S helped greatly with the plant list. Finally special thanks to Angela, my wife, for her good humour, companionship and help throughout the holiday, particularly appreciated on the days when I felt ill and 'under the weather'.

Systematic lists

Birds

Little Grebe

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Great Crested Grebe

Zemplinska sirava, 27/5; Senne wetland, 28/5; on the wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 29/5 and on Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 1/6

Red-necked Grebe

1 seen briefly by a few of the group, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Black-necked Grebe

Several pairs, some with young, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Cormorant

Senne wetland, 28/5 and at Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 1/6.

Bittern

c.3 seen and others heard booming, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Little Bittern

1 heard calling, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Night Heron

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Little Egret

Senne wetland, 28/5 and 1, Zemplinska sirava, 29/5.

Great White Egret

Outnumbering little egret, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Grey Heron

Seen on 27/5; at Senne wetland, 28/5 and at Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 1/6.

Purple Heron

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Black Stork

1 soaring high over Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5; 1 over Zadielska Gorge, Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area (PLA), 29/5; 1, 30/5 and 1 near Jablonov nad Turnou, *en route* to Kosice, 2/6.

White Stork

Seen daily, including foraging individuals (often in newly ploughed fields) and birds at the nest, with several at nests in the village of Inacovce (*en route* to Senne wetland) on 28/5.

Spoonbill

1, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Mute Swan

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Gadwall

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Mallard

Seen at Senne wetland, 28/5; on the Dunajec river, Pieniny National Park, 30/5 and on Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 1/6.

Garganey

c.10, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Shoveler

2, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Pochard

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Tufted Duck

Senne wetland, 28/5 and at the Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 1/6.

Honey Buzzard

2, quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills, 28/5 and 1 near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir, 1/6.

Marsh Harrier

Seen 26/5; daily 28/5-30/5 and on 2/6. Many at Senne wetland, 28/5.

Goshawk

A male displaying high over Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Sparrowhawk

1, Zadielska plateau, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5 and 2 near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir, 1/6.

Buzzard

Seen daily.

Lesser Spotted Eagle

2 near Nizna Mysl'a, southeast of Kosice, 26/5; 2 hunting over open grassland on the outskirts of Poprad, 2/6 and 2 near Jablonov nad Turnou, *en route* to Kosice, 2/6.

Imperial Eagle

Seen on five occasions in eastern Slovakia but site details are withheld at the request of SOVS

Golden Eagle

Seen on two occasions in eastern Slovakia but site details are withheld at the request of SOVS

Short-toed Eagle

1, quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills, 28/5.

Kestrel

Seen daily including 1 mobbing an imperial eagle.

Red-footed Falcon

A female disturbed from the top of a roadside bush in lowland arable farmland, *en route* to Senne wetland, 28/5.

Hobby

2 and a party of 5 over the Dunajec river gorge, Pieniny National Park, 30/5 and a party of 3 near the Liptovska Mara reservoir, south of Liptovska Sielnica, 1/6.

Saker

A pair seen in eastern Slovakia, but site details are withheld at the request of SOVS

Hazelhen

1 flushed and glimpsed by Pavol and Steve, forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5.

Quail

Heard daily, 26/5-28/5 and on 1/6.

Pheasant

Seen on 26/5, 27/5, 28/5 & 29/5.

Water Rail

Several heard, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Little Crake

2 heard at very close range, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Corncrake

1 seen well, in meadows near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir, 1/6.

Moorhen

2 and others heard, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Coot

Senne wetland, 28/5; on the wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 29/5 and on Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 1/6.

Avocet

Senne wetland, 30/5.

Collared Pratincole

1, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Little Ringed Plover

An adult with young on dry, open ground near Hotel Energetik, 27/5 and an adult with young at a quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills, 28/5.

Ringed Plover

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Grey Plover

1 heard over Senne wetland, 28/5.

Lapwing

3, near Cana, 30 km southeast of Kosice, 26/5; Senne wetland, 28/5; singles on 29/5 & 30/5 and in farmland *en route* to Kosice, 2/6.

Little Stint

3, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Dunlin

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Ruff

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Black-tailed Godwit

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Redshank

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Wood Sandpiper

1, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Common Sandpiper

1 with a chick, Zadielska Gorge, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5 and 1, Dunajec river gorge, Pieniny National Park, 30/5.

Little Gull

3+, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Black-headed Gull

Seen daily, 26/5-29/5 and 31/5-1/6.

Yellow-legged Gull

1, Zemplinska sirava, 27/5; Senne fishponds, 28/5; 2 seen on 29/5 and small numbers at Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 1/6.

Common Tern

A few, Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 1/6.

Whiskered Tern

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Black Tern

3+, Senne wetland, 28/5 and 1, Liptovska Mara reservoir, west of Liptovska Mikulas, 1/6.

Feral Pigeon

Small numbers seen most days.

Stock Dove

Small numbers seen in farmland, 26/5, 27/5 & 30/5.

Woodpigeon

Small numbers, 26/5, 28/5, 29/5, 31/5 & 1/6.

Collared Dove

Seen daily, 26/5-1/6.

Turtle Dove

Small numbers seen daily, 27/5-29/5 and 31/5-1/6.

Cuckoo

Seen or heard daily.

Eagle Owl

2 well-grown young at the nest, quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills, 28/5.

Ural Owl

A female, incubating eggs in a nestbox, in beech forest near the village of Hrasovik, east of Kosice, 26/5. This is a late date. The bird was not disturbed, being viewed via a strategically placed mirror in the roof of the nestbox!

Little Owl

1 at dusk near the gatehouse, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Nightjar

1 heard 'churring' in broad daylight, quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills, 28/5.

Swift

Small numbers seen daily, 26/5-1/6.

Kingfisher

1, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Bee-eater

1 near Nizna Mysl'a, southeast of Kosice, 26/5; small breeding colony, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 28/5.

Hoopoe

1 heard calling, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 28/5 and 1, Zadielska plateau, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5.

Grey-headed Woodpecker

1 glimpsed by Pavol at the edge of the Ciertaze forest area near Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Green Woodpecker

1 on 26/5 and 1 seen feeding in a garden in the village of Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Black Woodpecker

An adult with 1 recently fledged chick, Vlci potok (Wolf's stream) forest area, Slanske Hills, 27/5; 1, forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5; 1, Penzion Limba, 31/5 and 1 heard calling near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, 1/6.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Heard on 26/5; seen and heard in forest, Slanske Hills, 27/5 and near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5.

Syrian Woodpecker

1, in Pavol and Monika's garden in the village of Juskova Vol'a, Slanske Hills, 27/5; 1, Senne wetland, 28/5 and 1 in the grounds of Kastiel Betliar, 2/6.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker

1, Hotel Energetik and 1, Ciertaze forest area, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

White-backed Woodpecker

1, Ciertaze forest area, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

1 heard calling, Ondava river near Podcicva, 27/5.

Three-toed Woodpecker

1 seen briefly by Pavol and heard, forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5.

Crested Lark

1, Slovenske Nove Mesto, 28/5.

Woodlark

1, quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills 28/5.

Skylark

Seen daily, 26/5-29/5 & 31/5-2/6.

Sand Martin

Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 28/5.

Swallow

Seen daily.

House Martin

Seen daily. Breeding colony on Hotel Energetik.

Tree Pipit

2, Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills 27/5; near the church at Svaty Kriz, 31/5 and several near the Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6.

Meadow Pipit

Seen near Lesnica, 30/5 and several on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Water Pipit

Several, Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 31/5.

Blue-headed Wagtail

Seen daily, 26/5-28/5 and on 30/5.

Grey Wagtail

Seen daily, 26/5-27/5 & 29/5-1/6.

White Wagtail

Seen daily, 26/5-29/5 & 31/5-2/6.

Dipper

1, Zadielska Gorge, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5 and 2, Prosiecka Valley, Chocske Hills, 1/6.

Wren

Seen or heard, 27/5, 29/5 & 30/5.

Dunnock

Heard on 30/5 & 31/5 and seen, 1/6.

Alpine Accentor

2-4, Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 31/5.

Robin

Seen or heard, 27/5 and daily, 29/5-1/6. Singing on the lower slopes of Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 31/5.

Nightingale

Heard daily around Hotel Energetik, 26/5-29/5 and others elsewhere on the same dates; 1 heard singing at the petrol station stop near Jablonov nad Turnou, *en route* to Kosice, 2/6.

Black Redstart

Seen daily, 27/5-2/6.

Redstart

A male, in full song, in dwarf pines adjacent to the ski-lift on the slopes of Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 31/5. Redstart is unusual at such a high altitude.

Whinchat

1, Belianske Luky, 30/5 and 1 on the high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Stonechat

Seen daily, 27/5-29/5, including birds around Hotel Energetik and 1 at the rock thrush quarry, Host'ovce, 29/5.

Wheatear

1+, quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills, 28/5 and 1 at the rock thrush quarry at Host'ovce on 29/5.

Ring Ouzel

Singing from the tops of Norway spruce on the lower slopes of Chopok and several, Jasna, north of the ski-lift at Tri Domceky, Lower Tatras National Park, 31/5; several, high meadows north of Prosiecka Valley, 1/6.

Blackbird

Seen daily, 26/5-1/6.

Fieldfare

Seen on 26/5, 28/5 and daily, 30/5-2/6, including birds at Košice airport.

Song Thrush

Seen daily, 26/5-27/5 & 29/5-1/6.

Mistle thrush

Singles on 26/5 & 1/6.

Grasshopper Warbler

1 heard singing ('reeling?'), Senne wetland, 28/5.

River Warbler

2 seen well, Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Savi's Warbler

Heard singing ('reeling?'), Senne wetland, 28/5.

Sedge Warbler

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Marsh Warbler

Singles heard singing, Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5; in gardens near the goldendrop site, Slovak Karst south of Turniansky hrad, 29/5 and in a narrow stream valley at the cornerake site near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir, 1/6.

Great Reed Warbler

Several seen well and others heard, Senne wetland, 28/5 and 1 heard singing from the wetland south of Turniansky hrad, 29/5.

Icterine Warbler

1 in song, in willow scrub near the Liptovska Mara reservoir, south of Liptovska Sielnica, 1/6.

Barred Warbler

Seen briefly and others heard, Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5 and 2 seen well, Tarbucka hills, east of Streda nad Bodrogom, 28/5.

Lesser Whitethroat

Seen and heard daily, 27/5-30/5 and on 1/6.

Whitethroat

Seen and heard daily, 26/5-28/5; and on 30/5 & 1/6.

Garden Warbler

Seen or heard on 27/5 & 30/5.

Blackcap

Seen or heard in song daily, 27/5-1/6.

Wood Warbler

2 on the forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5.

Chiffchaff

Seen or heard daily, 26/5-1/6.

Willow Warbler

Seen or heard daily, 29/5-1/6.

Goldcrest

Heard daily, 30/5-1/6.

Firecrest

1, forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5.

Spotted flycatcher

1 seen on 27/5; 1, Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6; 1 outside Penzion Limba, 2/6 and 1 in the grounds of Kastiel Betliar, 2/6.

Red-breasted Flycatcher

1 seen well and others heard in the Ciertaze forest area, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Collared Flycatcher

Heard, Slanske Hills, 27/5 and on forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5.

Bearded Tit

A small group seen at close range, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Long-tailed tit

1 seen on 30/5 and several near the church at Svaty Kriz, 31/5.

Marsh Tit

1 feeding young, in gardens near the goldendrop site, Slovak Karst PLA south of Turniansky hrad, 29/5.

Willow Tit

A family party, Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Crested Tit

3+ on the forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5.

Coal Tit

Seen or heard daily, 30/5-1/6.

Blue tit

Seen and heard, 26/5, 27/5 & 29/5.

Great tit

Seen and heard daily, 26/5-29/5 & 1/6-2/6.

Nuthatch

1 heard, 26/5; heard in forest, Slanske Hills, 27/5 and 1 in the grounds of Kastiel Betliar, 2/6.

Treecreeper

1, Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6.

Penduline Tit

A pair at the nest watched at close range plus others heard calling, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Golden Oriole

1 heard calling outside Hotel Energetik, 27/5; 1, Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5 and 2, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Red-backed Shrike

Seen daily, 27/5-30/5 & 1/6-2/6.

Great Grey Shrike

1, on telegraph wires and hunting over grassland near Izipovce, Chocske Hills, north of Liptovska Mara reservoir, 1/6.

Jay

Seen daily, 27/5, 28/5 & 30/5-1/6.

Magpie

Seen daily.

Nutcracker

1 heard by Pavol on the forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5.

Jackdaw

Seen daily, 26/5-30/5.

Rook

Seen on 26/5 and daily, 28/5-2/6.

Hooded Crow

Seen on 26/5 and daily, 28/5-1/6.

Raven

Seen daily, 29/5-2/6.

Starling

Seen daily.

Rose-coloured Starling

A restless flock of 21, briefly feeding in willows, Senne wetland, 28/5.

House sparrow

Seen daily. Breeding at Hotel Energetik.

Tree sparrow

Seen daily, 26/5-29/5.

Chaffinch

Seen daily, 26/5-27/5 & 29/5-1/6.

Serín

Seen or heard daily, 26/5-27/5 & 29/5-2/6.

Greenfinch

Seen daily, 27/5-29/5 and on 1/6.

Goldfinch

Seen daily, 26/5-1/6.

Siskin

Several, forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5; Jasna, north of the ski-lift at Tri Domceky, Lower Tatras National Park, 31/5 and Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6.

Linnet

2, near Cana, 30 km southeast of Kosice, 26/5; also seen on 28/5 & 1/6.

Redpoll

1 seen flying high, calling, over the slopes of Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 31/5. An unusual record at this high altitude.

Crossbill

15+, Jasna, north of the ski-lift at Tri Domceky, Lower Tatras National Park, 31/5.

Scarlet Rosefinch

A 'brown' male in song, Belianske Luky, 30/5; 3 in willow scrub at the edge of Liptovska Mara reservoir south of Liptovska Sielnica, 1/6, provided excellent views of 'scarlet' males and 1 heard singing, Oravska folk museum east of Zuberec, 1/6.

Bullfinch

Seen daily, 30/5-2/6.

Hawfinch

2, Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5; 1, Ondava river near Podcivca, 27/5; 1 outside Hotel Energetik, 29/5; another, 29/5; 2, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5 and 2, Jasna, north of the ski-lift at Tri Domceky, Lower Tatras National Park, 31/5.

Yellowhammer

Seen or heard daily, 26/5-30/5 and on 1/6.

Rock bunting

A male at the goldendrop site, Slovak Karst PLA, south of Turniansky hrad, 29/5.

Reed bunting

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Corn bunting

Seen daily, 27/5-29/5.

Mammals

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

Lesser Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*)

A roosting group of c.25, Juskova Vol'á, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Brown Hare (*Lepus capensis*)

1 just outside the quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills, 28/5.

Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)

1, Slanske Hills, 27/5; 1, 28/5; 2, Zadielska valley, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5 and 1 black phase, on the forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5.

European Sousek (*Spermophilus [Citellus] citellus*)

Several seen well with the 'scope on a 'sousek meadow' near Cana, 30 km southeast of Kosice, 26/5.

Alpine Marmot (*Marmota marmota*)

5, Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 2/6.

Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)

1 probable, Senne wetland, 28/5.

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

1 in farmland, seen from the minibus *en route* to Kosice, 2/6.

Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)

1 heard barking its alarm call, Ciertaze forest area, Slanske Hills, 27/5 and 1 seen, 29/5.

Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*)

1-2, Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park, 2/6.

Amphibians & Reptiles

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

Fire Salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*)

1, Zadielska Gorge, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5 seen by Prilly, Polly and Ruth.

Alpine Newt (*Triturus alpestris*)

In ephemeral, water-filled forest track ruts; on the forest walk near Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5. 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, 30/5. This species and alpine newt in the same habitat.

Yellow-bellied Toad (*Bombina variegata*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Fire-bellied Toad (*Bombina bombina*)

Heard in the late afternoon and early evening at Senne wetland, 28/5.

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)

Seen on 27/5 & 28/5.

Marsh Frog (*Rana ridibunda*)

Senne wetland, 28/5.

Green lizard (*Lacerta viridis*)

1, quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills, 28/5 and an adult male at the goldendrop site, Slovak Karst PLA south of Turniansky hrad, 29/5.

Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*)

2, Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5 and 1, quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills, 28/5.

Butterflies

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

Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills 27/5.

Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*)

Zadielska plateau, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5.

Scarce Swallowtail (*Iphiclides podalirius*)

Zadielska plateau, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5.

Large White (*Pieris brassicae*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills 27/5.

Green-veined White (*Artogeia napi*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills 27/5 and Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley, Chocske Hills, 1/6.

Orange tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*)

Walker's Valley, 27/5 and Zadielska plateau, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5.

Painted Lady (*Cynthia cardui*)

Seen on 26/5 and in Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Peacock butterfly (*Inachis io*)

Glanville Fritillary (*Melitaea cinxia*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Woodland Ringlet (*Erebia medusa*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5; in the globeflower meadow, Tatranska Lomnica, High Tatras, Tatra National Park, 30/5 and seen elsewhere.

Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills, 27/5.

Adonis Blue (*Lysandra bellargus*)

Zadielska plateau, Slovak Karst PLA, 29/5.

Dragonflies

Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills 27/5.

Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*)

Walker's Valley, Slanske Hills 27/5.

Some miscellaneous invertebrates

Hornet (*Vespa crabro*)

'Tiger' beetle

Crab spiders

Roman snail

Flowers (compiled by Steve, Angela Steed & Ruth Matthews)

Saturday, 26 May

Farmland near Cana, 30 km southeast of Kosice

Larkspur sp. *Delphinium* at edge of arable field (and later seen at several more lowland sites within the wider countryside)

Beech forest near the village of Hrasovik, east of Kosice (Ural owl wood)

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

May Lily *Maianthemum bifolium*

Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*

Solomon's-seal sp. *Polygonatum*

Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*

Quarry near Dargov, Slanske Hills (looking for eagle owl)

Comfrey sp. *Symphytum*

Sticky Catchfly *Lychnis viscaria*

Sunday, 27 May Slanske Hills

Walker's Valley

Bellflower sp. *Campanula*
Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*
Cypress Spurge *Euphorbia cyparissias*
Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria*
Forget-me-not sp. *Myosotis*
Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*
Hoary Plantain *Plantago media*
Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale*
Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis*
Pyramidal Bugle sp. *Ajuga pyramidalis* or *genevensis*
Silverweed *Potentilla anserina*
Spearwort sp. *Ranunculus*
Strawberry sp. *Fragaria*
Woolly Thistle *Cirsium eriophorum*

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

Coral-root Bitter-cress *Cardamine bulbifera*
Dwarf Elder *Sambucus ebulus*
Herb-Robert *Geranium robertianum*
Large Yellow Foxglove *Digitalis ambigua* (= *grandiflora*)
May Lily *Maianthemum bifolium*
Strawberry sp. *Fragaria*

Monday, 28 May Quarry site near Kasvar, Zemplinske Hills

Bedstraw Broomrape *Orobanche caryophyllacea*
Burning Bush *Dictamnus albus*
Comfrey sp. *Symphytum*
Cypress Spurge *Euphorbia cyparissias*
Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*
Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*
Forget-me-not sp. *Myosotis*
Goatsbeard sp. *Tragopogon*
Grape or Tassel Hyacinth sp. *Muscari*
Honeywort *Cerinth minor* or *glabra* (probably *minor*, Lesser Honeywort)
Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale*
Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis*
Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*
Rockrose sp. *Helianthemum*
Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*
Siberian Bellflower *Campanula* ?
Thyme sp. *Thymus*
Viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare*
Wild Mignonette *Reseda lutea*

Tuesday, 29 May

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

Elecampane sp. *Inula (latifolia?)*
Erect Clematis *Clematis recta*
Field Cow-wheat *Melampyrum arvense*
Field Eryngo *Eryngium campestre*
Flax sp. *Linum*
Goldendrop *Onosma viciani* (branched)
Greater Celandine *Chelidonium majus*
Hair-grass sp. *Koeleria*
Houseleek sp. *Sempervivum*
a Lily *Anthericum ramosum* (Grass Lily?)
Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis*
Meadow-rue sp. *Thalictrum*

Melilot sp. *Melilotus*
 Needle-grass sp. *Stipa* ('feathery')
 Pasque Flower sp. *Pulsatilla*
 a Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* ssp. *grandiflorum*
 Solomon's-seal sp. *Polygonatum*
 Spindle sp. *Euonymus*
 Thyme sp. *Thymus*
 Turna Goldendrop *Onosma tornensis* (unbranched) **Endemic to Slovakia**
 White Mullein *Verbascum lychnitis* (flowers are yellow or white)
 a Yarrow *Achillea pannonica* (an alpine Yarrow species)
 Yellow Woundwort *Stachys recta*

Zadielska gorge & plateau, Slovak Karst Protected Landscape Area

Alpine Aster *Aster alpinus*
 Alpine Clematis *Clematis alpina*
 Barberry *Berberis vulgaris*
 Bladder Milk-vetch *Astragalus vesicarius* ssp. *albidus*
 Blue Gromwell *Buglossoides* [*Lithospermum*] *purpureocaerulea*
 Broom sp. *Cytisus* (*procumbens*?)
 Butterbur sp. *Petasites* (streamside, gorge)
 a Calamint *Calamintha verna* (introduced)
 Carthusian Pink *Dianthus carthusianorum*
 a purple-flowered Clover *Trifolium alpestre*
 Common Carline Thistle *Carlina vulgaris*
 Common Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris* (streamside, gorge)
 Common Juniper *Juniperus communis*
Dianthus praecox ssp. *hungarica* (white, 'frilly-edged' flower)
 Dodder sp. *Cuscuta*
 Downy (or White) Oak *Quercus pubescens*
 Dusky Crane's-bill *Geranium phaeum* (streamside, gorge)
 False Brome sp. *Brachypodium*
 Field Wormwood *Artemisia campestris*
 Forget-me-not sp. *Myosotis* (streamside, gorge)
 Hoary Plantain *Plantago media*
 Hungarian Buckler Mustard *Biscutella austriaca* ssp. *hungarica* (great seeds!)
 Iris sp. *Iris* (*pumula*?)
 Jurinea *Jurinea mollis* ssp. *macrocalathia* **Subspecies endemic to Slovakia**
 Klastersky's Whitlow-grass *Draba klasterskyi* (yellow flowers & not spreading) **Endemic to Slovakia**
 Lesser Honeywort *Cerintho minor*
 Lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*
 Manna (or Flowering) Ash *Fraxinus ornus* (rare & protected in Slovakia)
 Midland Hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*
 Milkwort sp. *Polygala* (*major*?)
 a Mountain Cornflower *Centaurea triumfetti*
 Mountain (or Blue) Lettuce *Lactuca perennis*
 Multi-flowered Buttercup *Ranunculus polyanthemus*
 Pasque Flower sp. *Pulsatilla*
 Perennial Honesty *Lunaria rediviva* (streamside, gorge)
 a Pyramidal Bugle *Ajuga genevensis*
 Pyrenean Crane's-bill *Geranium pyrenaicum*
 a Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* ssp. *grandiflorum*
 a Seablite *Suaeda australis*
 Siberian Bellflower *Campanula* ?
 Spring Pheasant's-eye *Adonis vernalis*
 a yellow Stonecrop sp. *Sedum* (? Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre*)
 Treacle-mustard sp. *Erysimum*
 Wall Germander *Teucrium chamaedrys* (abundant, but not in flower)
 Wayfaring Tree *Viburnum lantana*
 Whitebeam *Sorbus aria*
 a Woodruff *Galium glaucum*

Yellow Broomrape *Orobanche flava*

Wednesday, 30 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*
Ranunculus sp.
Water Avens *Geum rivale*

Kezmarske Zl'aby, High Tatras, Tatra National Park

Alpine Clematis *Clematis alpina*
Asarabacca *Asarum europaeum*
Butterbur sp. *Petasites*
Dusky Crane's-bill *Geranium phaeum*
Herb-Paris *Paris quadrifolia*
Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*
May Lily *Maianthemum bifolium*
Strawberry sp. *Fragaria*
Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*
Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*

Lesnica

Broad-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis*
Common Twayblade *Listera ovata*
Crosswort *Galium cruciata*
Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla mollis*
White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*

Thursday, 31 May Chopok, Lower Tatras National Park

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

Friday, 1 June

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

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

Prosiecka ('Bear') Valley, Chocske Hills

Alpine Aster *Aster alpinus*
Alpine Bells *Cortusa matthiola*
Alpine Clematis *Clematis alpina*
Broad-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis*
Butterbur sp. *Petasites*
Clusius's Gentian *Gentiana clusii*
Common Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*
Common Twayblade *Listera ovata*
Dianthus praecox ssp. *hungarica* (white, 'frilly-edged' flower)
Edelweiss *Leontopodium alpinum*
Great Meadow-rue *Thalictrum aquilegifolium*
Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla mollis*
Lesser Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera bifolia*
Pasque Flower sp. *Pulsatilla*
Spleenwort sp. *Asplenium*

Yellow Wood Violet *Viola biflora*

Saturday, 2 June 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*

Whorled Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum verticillatum*