BELARUS AND HUNGARY MAY 2012

Introduction

After the publication of an article in Dutch Birding Magazine (nr.31-03) the *macroura* subspecies of Ural Owl was indicated as a potential split (Carpathian Ural Owl). In the autumn 2011 I started to investigate the possibility to do a short trip to Hungary or Slovakia to see this potential split. I started by contacting Gábor Orbán of www.ecotours.hu (beware of very similar named companies!). Gábor told me it was possible to see Ural Owl in autumn, but also that it was usually much easier to find in spring when birds are nesting.

His company also organizes tours to Belarus, where I still needed Azure Tit. Most tours to Belarus are usually 8-10 days and take place in spring of which only a few days are spend in the area where Azure Tits occur. Although Belarus has undoubtedly very nice areas with very nice birds, I didn't have time to do a 8-day trip to Belarus for 'just' Azure Tit and seeing a lot of birds I have seen before. Because of the proximity of Hungary to Belarus I therefore examined the possibility to combine Hungary and Belarus to see Azure Tit and *macroura* Ural Owl in a short (2x3 days) private trip.

After a lot of searching on the internet, I found out Austrian Airlines had a good connection between Budapest and Minsk, with the nice airport of Vienna acting as an efficient hub. Gábor also had a few days between tours in Belarus available to do a private trip in Belarus and arranged a guide in Hungary to see Ural Owl.

The intinerary was quite complex with 6 flights and 3 different accommodations in 7 days but worked out fine. Both targets were found on the first days in the field, leaving time to do some general birding.

I used the following itinerary:

Sa 5	train to Schiphol afternoon flight KL1977 (KLM) from Schiphol (14.35) to Budapest (16.35) taxi-transfer to hotel Budapest (1 night)
Su 6	taxi-transfer from hotel to airport Budapest
	flight OS718 (Austrian) from Budapest (07.00) to Vienna (07.45)
	flight OS687 (Austrian) from Vienna (09.50) to Minsk (12.40)
	transfer to Pripyat-area, hotel Turov (2 nights), evening birding (Azure Tit)
Mo 7	full day Pripyat-area (Azure Tit)
Tu 8	afternoon visit forest-area east of Turov, in the evening drive back to Minsk
We 9	flight OS690 (Austrian) from Minsk (05.10) to Vienna (06.05)
	flight OS713 (Austrian) from Vienna (09.45) to Budapest (10.35)
	tranfer to Bükk-hills, guesthouse Tard (2 nights), afternoon/evening birding (Ural Owl)
Th 10	full day Bükk-hills
Fr 11	morning birding south of Tard, afternoon drive back to Budapest
	flight KL1978 (KLM) from Budapest (17.35) to Schiphol (19.45) and taxi home

Belarus

For Belarus you need a visa and this can only applied with an invitation letter from a local (Belarusian) company. Gábor did a great job by providing this, as well as transport, food, accommodation and guiding for the whole trip. The application for my visa (in Holland) was rather straightforward despite the many (irrelevant) questions in old communist style. I expected the entry to Belarus to be problematic (maps, camera, optics, etc.) but this was not the case except for the fact I was first sent back by an border-official to buy an apparently compulsory health insurance for Belarus (2 euro for the 3 days). I met Gábor and his wife and driver outside the airport terminal and we started the 3,5 hour drive to Turov, along the Prypyat-river in southern Belarus, close to the Ukrainian border. The same evening we went to a site where all tour companies apparently go to see Azure Tit. We quickly found a singing male Azure Tit here, much to my relief, after missing this bird in the Ural Mountains in Russia in June 2009.

After a nice meal and good night of sleep in the only private hotel in Turov we returned to this site the next day and found another (nesting) pair of Azure Tit which we could see as long as we wanted. In the evening we went to a lek of Great Snipes and saw about 6 birds, something I had never seen before. I somehow expected to be the only birdwatcher in the whole of Belarus but was amazed to see how many birdwatching groups were around. Belarus is at the moment certainly an emerging birdwatching destination, and for good reason.

On the last day in Belarus there was a lot of rain in the morning that aborted any attempt to birdwatch. The morning was spent to catch up some sleep and making notes, leaving little time for birdwatching in the afternoon. Before I was picked up by a private taxi that took me back to the Minsk airport, we visited an old forest east of Turov in the afternoon. Except for a lot of annoying mosquitos we only saw some of the commoner birds including a nice singing Red-breasted Flycatcher.

Hungary

After a long night at the Minsk airport I arrived the next day in Budapest. A local guide (Atilla) picked me up from the airport and after a drive of about 1,5 hour we arrived at his local guesthouse in Tard, just south of the Bükk National Park. The same afternoon he showed me a nest of a Ural Owl which held a recently fledged young and an adult. This nest was close to a road and the bird was used to humans which made it less aggressive than usual. We had prolonged and great views of the owl and saw the dusky facial disk well, typical of the subspecies *macroura*.

The next day we did a long walk (15 km) in the Bükk National Park and saw a lot of the characteristic birds of the area like Red-breasted- and Collared Flycatcher, Wood Warblers, Hawfinch, 8 species of Woodpecker, Rock Bunting, etc. The nicest sighting was however a Badger in broad daylight, my first one ever I saw alive and well.

On the last morning we first had a walk around the grounds of the guesthouse where we saw Gardenand Common Dormouse in nestboxes. Before I flew back to Amsterdam we spend the rest of the morning in the puzta-area called 'little Hortobagy', south of the highway M3 (Debrecen-Budapest). Here we searched for Crested Lark and Reed Bunting (both new subspecies for me) and also saw birds like Saker Falcon, Ferruginous Duck, etc. One of the last bird I saw in Hungary was a Lesser Spotted Eagle soaring low over the guesthouse in Tard. A nice way to end this successful tour.

Birds seen (BY=Belarus, HU=Hungary)

	BY	HU	
Great Crested Grebe			
Podiceps cristatus cristatus		X	
Cormorant			
Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis	X	X	
Bittern			
Botaurus stellaris stellaris	X		
Great Egret			
Casmerodius albus albus	X		
Grey Heron			
Ardea cinerea cinerea	X	X	
Purple Heron			
Ardea purpurea purpurea		X	
White Stork			
Ciconia ciconia ciconia	X	X	
Black Stork			
Ciconia nigra	X	X	
Mallard		† 	
Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos	X	X	
Gadwall			
Anas strepera strepera	X		
Shoveler	11		
Anas clypeata	X		
Garganey	71		
Anas querquedula	X	X	
Pochard	71	71	
Aythya ferina	X	X	
Ferruginous Duck	71	2.1	
Aythya nyroca		X	About 30 were seen at fishponds between Gelej
			and the highway M3.
Tufted Duck			
Aythya fuligula		X	
Lesser Spotted Eagle			
Aquila pomarina		X	
Marsh Harrier			
Circus aeruginosus aeruginosus	X	X	
Montagu's Harrier			
Circus pygargus	X		
Buzzard			
Buteo buteo buteo		X	
Goshawk			
Accipiter gentilis gentilis	X		
Sparrowhawk			
Accipiter nisus nisus		X	
Kestrel			
Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus	X	X	
Saker Falcon		<u> </u>	
Falco cherrug cherrug		X	One adult was seen sitting in a pylon near Gelej.
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Crex crex	X		About 8 heard near Turov.
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Pheasant			
Phasianus colchicus ssp.		X	Introduced species.
Moorhen			Interest species.
Gallinula chloropus chloropus	X	X	
Coot			
Fulica atra atra	X	X	
Avocet			
Recurvirostra avosetta		X	
Little Ringed Plover			
Charadrius dubius curonicus		X	
Ringed Plover			
Charadrius hiaticula hiaticula / tundrae	X		Probably migrating <i>tundrae</i> .
Golden Plover			Treeway migrating with the
Pluvialis apricaria	X		
Lapwing			
Vanellus vanellus	X	X	
Wood Sandpiper			
Tringa glareola	X	X	
Common Sandpiper		<u> </u>	
Actitis hypoleucos	X	X	
Redshank			
Tringa totanus totanus	X	X	
Spotted Redshank			
Tringa erythropus	X		Several in full breeding plumage.
Black-tailed Godwit			
Limosa limosa limosa	X		
Great Snipe			
Gallinago media	X		About 6 in the evening on a lek near Turov.
Common Snipe			
Gallinago gallinago	X		
Ruff			
Philomachus pugnax	X		
Black-headed Gull			
Chroicocephalus ridibundus ridibundus	X	X	
Common Gull			
Larus canus canus		X	
Herring Gull			
Larus argentatus argentatus	X		
Common Tern			
Sterna hirundo hirundo	X	X	
Little Tern			
Sternula albifrons albifrons	X		One inland near Turov.
Black Tern			
Chlidonias niger niger	X	X	
White-winged Tern			
Chlidonias leucopterus	X		Common near Turov.
Whiskered Tern			
Chlidonias hybrida hybrida	X		About 20 near Turov
Wood Pigeon			
Columba palumbus palumbus	X	X	
Stock Dove			
Columba oenas oenas		X	
Collared Dove			
Streptopelia decaocto decaocto	X	X	
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Dendrocopus major major X Major in Belarus and pinetorum in Hungary. Syrian Woodpecker X Several seen in the countryside near Tard. Middle Spotted Woodpecker X One seen in the Bükk-hills. White-backed Woodpecker X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Dendrocopus leucotus leucotus X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Early spring is a better time to see this often elusive bird. X Wryneck Jynx torquilla torquilla X Skylark X Alauda arvensis arvensis X Alauda arvensis cantarella X Crested Lark X Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezőkeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin X Riparia riparia riparia riparia X Barn Swallow X Hirundo rustica rustica X House Martin X Delichon urbicum urbicum X X X House hartin X Delecheaded Wagtail	· -		X	One seen well in the Bükk-hills.
Dendrocopus major major X Major in Belarus and pinetorum in Hungary. Syrian Woodpecker X Several seen in the countryside near Tard. Middle Spotted Woodpecker X One seen in the Bükk-hills. White-backed Woodpecker X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Dendrocopus leucotus leucotus X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Early spring is a better time to see this often elusive bird. X Wryneck Jynx torquilla torquilla X Skylark X Alauda arvensis arvensis X Alauda arvensis cantarella X Crested Lark X Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezőkeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin X Riparia riparia riparia riparia X Barn Swallow X Hirundo rustica rustica X House Martin X Delichon urbicum urbicum X X X House hartin X Delecheaded Wagtail	Great Spotted Woodpecker			
Dendrocopus major pinetorum X Syrian Woodpecker X Dendrocopus syriacus syriacus X Middle Spotted Woodpecker X Dendrocopus medius medius X White-backed Woodpecker X Dendrocopus leucotus leucotus X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Early spring is a better time to see this often elusive bird. Wryneck X Jynx torquilla torquilla X Skylark X Alauda arvensis arvensis X Alauda arvensis cantarella X The subspecies hungarica (if valid) in central Hungary has become very rare nowadays. Crested Lark X Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin X Riparia riparia riparia X Hirundo rustica rustica X House Martin X Delichon urbicum urbicum X X X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further		X		<i>Major</i> in Belarus and <i>pinetorum</i> in Hungary.
Syrian Woodpecker Dendrocopus syriacus syriacus Middle Spotted Woodpecker Dendrocopus medius medius White-backed Woodpecker Dendrocopus leucotus leucotus X Several seen in the Bükk-hills. X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Early spring is a better time to see this often elusive bird. Wryneck Jynx torquilla torquilla Skylark Alauda arvensis arvensis Alauda arvensis cantarella Crested Lark Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin Riparia riparia riparia Riparia riparia riparia Riparia riparia rustica House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X Several seen in the countryside near Tard. X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Early spring is a better time to see this often elusive bird. X Arvensis in Belarus and cantarella in Hungary. Arvensis in Belarus and cantarella on Hungary. X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin Riparia riparia riparia X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X Several seen in the countryside near Tard.			X	
X Several seen in the countryside near Tard.				
Middle Spotted Woodpecker Dendrocopus medius medius White-backed Woodpecker Dendrocopus leucotus leucotus X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Early spring is a better time to see this often elusive bird. Wryneck Jynx torquilla torquilla X Skylark Alauda arvensis arvensis Alauda arvensis cantarella X The subspecies hungarica (if valid) in central Hungary has become very rare nowadays. Crested Lark Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin Riparia riparia riparia X Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica rustica X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail			X	Several seen in the countryside near Tard.
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White-backed Woodpecker Dendrocopus leucotus leucotus X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Early spring is a better time to see this often elusive bird. Wryneck Jynx torquilla torquilla Skylark Alauda arvensis arvensis X Arvensis in Belarus and cantarella in Hungary. Alauda arvensis cantarella X The subspecies hungarica (if valid) in central Hungary has become very rare nowadays. Crested Lark Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin Riparia riparia riparia X Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica rustica X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail			X	One seen in the Bükk-hills.
Dendrocopus leucotus leucotus X Several heard and glimpsed in the Bükk-hills. Early spring is a better time to see this often elusive bird. Wryneck Jynx torquilla torquilla Skylark Alauda arvensis arvensis X Arvensis in Belarus and cantarella in Hungary. The subspecies hungarica (if valid) in central Hungary has become very rare nowadays. Crested Lark Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin Riparia riparia riparia X X Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica rustica X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X Grey-headed Wagtail				
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Alauda arvensis cantarella X The subspecies hungarica (if valid) in central Hungary has become very rare nowadays. Crested Lark Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin Riparia riparia riparia X Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica rustica X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail	Skylark			
Crested Lark Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin Riparia riparia riparia Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica rustica X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X S Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail	Alauda arvensis arvensis	X		Arvensis in Belarus and cantarella in Hungary.
Crested Lark Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin Riparia riparia riparia X Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica rustica X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X X Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail	Alauda arvensis cantarella		X	The subspecies <i>hungarica</i> (if valid) in central
Galerida cristata tenuirostris X We found several near the village of Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. Sand Martin X X Riparia riparia riparia X X Barn Swallow X X Hirundo rustica rustica X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail X X Motacilla alba X X Blue-headed Wagtail X X Grey-headed Wagtail X X				Hungary has become very rare nowadays.
Sand Martin Riparia riparia I X Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica rustica X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail Mexokeresztes (!) and further south. A new subspecies for me. X X X X X X X X X X X X X	Crested Lark			
Riparia riparia riparia X Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica rustica X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail	Galerida cristata tenuirostris		X	Mezókeresztes (!) and further south. A new
Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica rustica X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail	Sand Martin			
Hirundo rustica rustica X X House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail		X		
House Martin Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail				
Delichon urbicum urbicum X X White Wagtail X X Motacilla alba X X Blue-headed Wagtail X X Motacilla flava flava X X Grey-headed Wagtail X X		X	X	
White Wagtail Motacilla alba X X Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail	House Martin			
Motacilla albaXXBlue-headed WagtailXXMotacilla flava flavaXXGrey-headed WagtailXX	Delichon urbicum urbicum	X	X	
Blue-headed Wagtail Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail	White Wagtail			
Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail X X X		X	X	
Motacilla flava flava Grey-headed Wagtail X X X	Blue-headed Wagtail			
Grey-headed Wagtail	_	X	X	
		X		Surely migrant birds.

Grey Wagtail			
Motacilla cinerea cinerea		X	
Wren		71	
Troglodytes troglodytes troglodytes		X	
Robin		71	
Erithacus rubecula rubecula		X	
Nightingale		71	
Luscinia megarhynchos megarhynchos		X	
Thrush Nightingale		Λ	
Luscinia luscinia	X		Common in Belarus, mostly heard.
Black Redstart	Λ		Common in Belaius, mostry heard.
	X	X	
Phoenicurus ochruros gibraltariensis Whinchat	Λ	Λ	
	v		
Saxicola rubetra	X		
Song Thrush		v	
Turdus philomelos philomelos		X	
Fieldfare	37		
Turdus pilaris	X		
Blackbird	***	37	
Turdus merula merula	X	X	
Barred Warbler			
Sylvia nisoria nisoria		X	One heard and briefly seen near the Bükk-hills.
Blackcap			
Sylvia atricapilla atricapilla	X	X	
Lesser Whitethroat			
Sylvia curruca curruca		X	
Whitethroat			
Sylvia communis communis	X	X	According to 'Sylvia Warblers' the subspecies in Belarus and Hungary is <i>communis</i> and not <i>volgensis</i> (contra BWP)
Sedge Warbler			voigensis (condu B W1)
Acrocephalus schoenobaenus	X		
Savi's Warbler	71		
Locustella luscinioides luscinioides	X		
Reed Warbler	71		
Acrocephalus scirpaceus scirpaceus		X	
Great Reed Warbler		Λ	
Acrocephalus arundinaceus	X	X	
arundinaceus	Λ	Λ	
Willow Warbler			
	X		A and dula in Dalama and treahiles in Hungamy
Phylloscopus trochilus acredula	Λ	X	Acredula in Belarus and trochilus in Hungary.
Phylloscopus trochilus trochilus		Λ	
Wood Warbler	v	v	
Phylloscopus sibilatrix	X	X	
Chiffchaff	37		Aliations in Delayers and H. L. C. IX
Phylloscopus collybita abietinus	X	37	Abietinus in Belarus and collybita in Hungary.
Phylloscopus collybita collybita		X	
Spotted Flycatcher	***		
Muscipapa striata striata	X		
Red-breasted Flycatcher	***	***	
Ficedula parva parva	X	X	
Collared Flycatcher			
Ficedula albicollis	X	X	

Pied Flycatcher	Τ	1	
Ficedula hypoleuca hypoleuca	X		
Bearded Tit	Λ		
Panurus biarmicus russicus		X	
Long-tailed Tit		Λ	
		X	
Aegithalos caudatus europaeus Marsh Tit		Λ	
		v	
Parus palustris stagnatilis		X	
Willow Tit		37	E 1 1 C . M . 1 E 1
Parus montanus salicarius		X	Easily separated from Marsh Tit by voice, here at the southern limit of the distribution of this subspecies.
Crested Tit			
Parus cristatus mitratus // cristatus	X		In Belarus grades into <i>cristatus</i> .
Coal Tit			
Parus ater ater		X	
Blue Tit			
Cyanistes caeruleus caeruleus	X	X	In Belarus several birds were seen in a mixed forest east of Turov. Azure Tits were seen in totally different habitat: on the edge of marshy areas with reeds, scrubs and small(er) trees.
Azure Tit			
Cyanistes cyanus cyanus	X		Two pairs were seen near Turov.
Great Tit			
Parus major major	X	X	
Nuthatch			
Sitta europaea caesia	X	X	
Treecreeper			
Certhia familiaris familiaris	X	X	
Penduline Tit			
Remiz pendulinus pendulinus	X		
Golden Oriole			
Oriolus oriolus	X	X	
Red-backed Shrike			
Lanius collurio	X	X	
Magpie			
Pica pica pica // fennorum	X		In Belarus grades into fennorum.
Pica pica pica		X	
Jay	1		
Garrulus glandarius glandarius	X	X	
Jackdaw	† <u> </u>	<u> </u>	
Corvus monedula soemmerringii	X		
Rook	 **		
Corvus frugilegus frugilegus	X	X	
Hooded Crow	1.	- *	
Corvus cornix cornix	X	X	
Raven	1		
Corvus corax corax	X	X	
Starling Starling	 **		
Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris	X	X	
Golden Oriole	11		
Oriolus oriolus	X	X	
House Sparrow	11	Z. X	
Passer domesticus domesticus	X	X	
1 asset aomesitens aomesitens	11	/1	

Tree Sparrow			
Passer montanus montanus	X	X	
Chaffinch			
Fringilla coelebs coelebs	X	X	
Linnet			
Linaria cannabina cannabina		X	
Goldfinch			
Carduelis carduelis	X	X	
Greenfinch			
Carduelis chloris chloris		X	
Siskin			
Spinus spinus	X		
Serin			
Serinus serinus	X	X	
Hawfinch			
Coccothraustes coccothraustes	X	X	
coccothraustes			
Yellowhammer			
Emberiza citrinella erythrogenys	X		Erythrogenys in Belarus and citrinella in
Emberiza citrinella citrinella		X	Hungary.
Rock Bunting			
Emberiza cia cia		X	A beautiful male was seen in a quarry in the
			Bükk-hills, here at the northern limit of their
			distribution in eastern Europe
Reed Bunting			
Emberiza schoeniclus schoeniclus //	X		Birds in southern Belarus are intergrades
ukrainae			between schoeniclus and ukrainae.
Emberiza schoeniclus stresemanni		X	Several were seen at fishponds between Gelej
			and the highway M3. The slightly thicker bill of
			the subspecies <i>stresemanni</i> is clearly visible in
			the field. A new subspecies for me.
Corn Bunting			
Emberiza calandra		X	

If you would like more information please contact:

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