



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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VIENNA

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Duration - 5 Days

Destinations

Vienna - Lainzer Tiergarten - Gerasdorf - Orth an der Donau - Donau-Auen National Park

Trip Overview

I am often asked why I do not include more culture on my tours and my instant and rather obvious response is that I much prefer the wild places and wild creatures of this earth to heaving cities and vast crowds. This is particularly the case now, but when I was younger my trips did usually combine wildlife and culture and I do not feel the need to revisit many of the cities or tourist attractions that I am already familiar with. Indeed, in order to see as much as possible on a very limited budget, I would often join lengthy overland tours and these generally involved far more cultural than wildlife highlights. Some of my tours do still include an element of sightseeing, particularly if I have not visited a region before or perhaps for a very long time, but I do not always feel the need to include these details on my trip reports and I very rarely plan standard combination type holidays for my guests. I prefer to concentrate on wild areas and conservation based travel, as anyone can arrange a trip to see the Taj Mahal or the pyramids at Giza, but



it takes a lot more thought and knowledge to organise a genuinely unique wildlife experience. This love of wilderness and remote places grows ever stronger, but I do make some exceptions, particularly regarding the old cities of Europe, which I have always been drawn to and still enjoy exploring in moderation. I would never plan a typical city style break now, not in terms of just sightseeing for a few days, but I will add a favourite European city to a wildlife tour or perhaps combine my wild passion with a day or two in a town or city that still inspires me. Last year, for example, I included a couple of days in historic Krakow during my Poland wildlife tour and this year I decided to go a stage further and illustrate just how easy it can be to combine wildlife and cultural interests at some destinations. If you know where to look, there are any number of likely cities to choose from across a continent that is known for its rich history and heritage, if not always its wildlife viewing. I eventually settled on Vienna, not least because it is one of my favourite cities and I have been captivated by it ever since I saw 'The Third Man' as a boy and could not believe that such an exotic destination could possibly exist. From its shadowy doorways and secret underground passageways, to the extraordinary score that even now makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, everything about it excited my young impressionable mind and over the years I have greatly enjoyed retracing the inimitable footsteps of Harry Lime and so many other Viennese luminaries. I will return to this film noir masterpiece when I introduce a few of the film locations, as well as some of the outstanding architecture, music and art that continues to instruct and enthrall in this great city. However, for all its undoubted cultural highlights, for me, everything comes back to the wildlife and I ultimately chose Vienna because it provides so many unique opportunities to watch animals, not just on the outskirts, but right in the very heart of the city. For a start, approximately 50% of Vienna is covered in green spaces of one description or another, including 2,000 parks, making it one of the greenest cities in the world and by far the greenest in mainland Europe.



Commuters rushing to work can watch beavers swimming in the rivers, the Danube of course and others, while the European souslik, a type of ground squirrel, thrives in the suburbs and the common hamster occurs at a variety of inner city locations, including cemeteries and hospital grounds. The Vienna Central Cemetery, the second largest cemetery in Europe, is as much a safari destination as a final resting place and Lainzer Tiergarten, a 6,000 acre walled nature reserve, is an incredible natural resource if you can look beyond the captive fallow deer and mouflon near the Lainzer Tor entrance. To the west lies the Vienna Woods and to the east Donau-Auen National Park, which I would visit, and at all points in between, there are opportunities to watch wildlife in a variety of contrasting urban environments. I started, as everyone should, with the European or common hamster, although, it has to be stressed, there is absolutely nothing common about this magnificent rodent, just ask David Attenborough, who profiled this cutest of all mammals in his recent BBC documentary series 'Seven Worlds, One Planet'. In fact, the Seven Worlds team filmed their hamsters in the same cemetery that I photographed mine and it is very possible that we recorded the same animals, although they have reached celebrity status in some parts of Vienna and there are consequently plenty to choose from. I actually observed these completely endearing creatures at two separate locations, both in the Meidling district of Vienna, which is divided into 23 districts, all of which have their own name and number. The city centre or Innere Stadt as it is called, is the historic beating heart of the city and is appropriately numbered one and from here the numbers work outwards. District thirteen or the Hietzing district for example, lies to the west and includes the famous Schonbrunn Palace and Lainzer Tiergarten, while Simmering, or district eleven, can be found to the south and features the Central Cemetery. At twelve, Meidling is nestled between the two numerically, if not geographically, and is home to two of the best hamster viewing destinations in the city, Meidling Cemetery and the Kaiser Franz Josef Hospital. As did the BBC, I decided that it would make sense to start at the cemetery, principally because hamsters are often spotted on the graves, munching, somewhat indelicately, on the fresh flowers placed by grieving relatives. Within less than ten minutes I had spotted the first of several hamsters, all of which desperately attempt to be stealthy, as they move from one grave to another, and all of which fail just as spectacularly. These fat and highly distinctive scrambling balls of fur could actually not be a great deal more conspicuous and if you are looking for an easy mammal to photograph after perhaps years of searching for golden cats or Eurasian lynx, I would humbly suggest that you make your way to Vienna. Mammal watching does not get a great deal easier than this and the only real problem is to ensure that you are respectful of the graves and those people visiting loved ones. That said, when you consider the appalling damage caused to the environment by the cut flower industry across the world, I cannot really think of a better use for the billions of flowers that are so inexcusably wasted on the dead, whose job it should be to feed the living and certainly not the other way round. At least the hamsters are recycling the pretty flowers left to wilt and die, flowers that have wasted so much land and water to



grow, for such little purpose. Perhaps, if you consider the natural scheme of things, I should have visited the hospital before the cemetery, but I reversed the more logical course of events largely because the hamsters can be harder to see in the hospital grounds, which, reasonably enough, are generally busier than a graveyard. Although this did prove to be the case and there were far fewer hamsters visible, I did still enjoy some nice sightings and spent maybe four hours with these inanely sweet rodents across the two sites. I would have devoted longer to the cause, but for EasyJet, who cancelled my flight out of London just as I was about to board on the grounds of bad weather, maybe three hours after a storm had passed and without a cloud in the sky. Several of their flights were cancelled around the same time and for the same reason, while other EasyJet flights departed at the same time, from the same airport and in the same weather that my plane apparently could not fly in. I really do try to never use this abysmal airline, regardless of how cheap they pretend to be, and the earliest replacement flight they could offer me was in four days, so basically the day before I had to return. I rather unsurprisingly declined their feeble offer and moved elsewhere, but it still basically meant that I lost almost a full day



in Vienna and had to either abandon a few of the destinations that I had hoped to visit or at least cut them short. This did not have a massive effect on the wildlife elements of my brief visit, particularly as my son James would not be with me for the first time in several years and I had decided already that I would do very little spotlighting as a result. Instead, I planned to devote most of my evenings to a little culture and refinement, by way of a certain Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and several members of the Strauss dynasty. The lost day at least did not cause any additional inconvenience in terms of a hire car, as the public transport in Vienna puts my own capital city to shame and there is no need to drive. With a superb combination of buses, trams and trains, both underground and overground, it is incredibly easy to get more or less anywhere and all of the services are clean, unbelievably cheap and, most importantly of all, reliable. In fact, my only bad experience in Vienna involved a taxi journey, when I was running behind on the way to Lainzer Tiergarten and jumped in on impulse. As the saying goes, I did repent at leisure after acting in haste, as the taxi driver dropped me miles from anywhere at a neighbouring reserve and I had to walk almost three hours to get to the entrance gate that I had been trying to reach. This was a great shame, as Lainzer Tiergarten is a wonderful natural sanctuary dating back to 1561, when of course it was a private hunting reserve, and my only visit was reduced to just one hike directly through the park from west to east. No dogs or bikes are permitted in order to protect the wildlife and the reserve closes at night for the same reason, usually at dusk. The



entire area is surrounded by 22 kilometres of stone wall and 80% of more than 6,000 acres is covered in forest. In addition to red and fallow deer, wild boar, mouflon and many other smaller mammals, almost 100 different species of bird have been recorded in these pretty woods and the reserve is also home to a herd of aurochs-like heck cattle, which are being used for selective breeding purposes in some areas of Europe to produce breeds that at least resemble the extinct aurochs. In other words, Lainzer Tiergarten is a priceless little gem in the middle of the city and my only caveat would be that some of the species must be culled each year, as they are unable to disperse due to the walls and there is a complete absence of major predators to control population sizes. Given my late arrival and the resulting limited options in terms of how much ground I could cover, the only fallow deer and mouflon I saw were in enclosures, but I did come across a couple of European hares, as well as a herd of wild boar. This was actually a superb encounter, as the boar are by no means tame here and I thought that I had spotted a lone animal deep in the forest. It was so far away, that I was not initially sure that it was even a boar and decided to wait at the next clearing, just in case whatever I had seen might cross. With hindsight, it was a fantastic decision, as within a few minutes a large adult female emerged from the woods with no less than nine young in tow. I was on my own at this point and was able to watch the sow foraging with her family in the open meadow until, inevitably I guess in a public space, a couple appeared and the woman left her partner and moved towards the boar for a closer look, which of course was the end of the sighting for us all. This type of avoidable and intensely frustrating situation is really the main downside of wildlife viewing in an urban environment, as there are always likely to be other people involved, many of whom are not going to have a great deal of knowledge or experience around animals. It was still thrilling to see a family of wild boar this close, particularly given how badly this animal is being persecuted across Europe, where literally millions are being slaughtered in a misguided attempt to stop the spread of African Swine Fever. As I wrote in my 2018 Poland trip report, although boar can carry swine fever, few die of it in contrast to domestic pigs and they actually play a very limited role in the transmission of the disease, which is largely spread by infected meat or the export of infected animals. According to scientists, biosecurity is the only certain solution, but it is easier and less expensive to

encourage bloodthirsty hunters to shoot boar than to ask farmers to invest in the necessary fundamental infrastructure and to follow some basic guidelines regarding hygiene and the movement of livestock. Swine fever has never even reached Germany, but that did not stop their enthusiastic hunters wiping out almost 837,000 wild boar during the 2017/18 hunting season, 'just in case'. So for me it was a real treat to spend time with these iconic European mammals and if the walled forest of Lainzer Tiergarten remains one of my favourite wild destinations in this historic old city, the Vienna Central Cemetery is certainly another. It is perhaps surprising that the home of the dead can be of such interest to the living, but this is no ordinary graveyard, it is the second largest in Europe and one of the most famous. As you would expect in a city celebrated for its superlative music, many of the greatest composers of their age are laid to rest here, although curiously, while the grave of Antonio Salieri can be found here, his pupil Mozart was buried in an unmarked grave at St. Marx Cemetery in the Landstrasse district towards the city centre. In addition to the composers Beethoven, Brahms and Schubert, several members of the Strauss family are interred here, including Johann Strauss I, forever synonymous with his rousing 'Radetzky March' and his even more illustrious son Johann Strauss II, whose 'The Blue Danube' permeates the very consciousness of all Vienna. As much as I admire the work of these artists, my admiration for them was in life rather than death and far more significantly, now at least, their final resting place is home to an appealing variety of wildlife and possibly the finest authentic urban safari in all of Europe. Just by strolling around quietly one evening and without making any particular effort, I was able to observe



eighteen roe deer, including mothers with fawns, seven red squirrels, five European hares, three white-breasted hedgehogs and two peregrine falcons. Although I arrived slightly too late to have much chance of encountering any, the common hamster also occurs here, as well as red fox and several small carnivores. I was probably unlucky not to see a fox and almost certainly would have if I had taken a spotlight. However, the cemetery does not remain open after dark and I did not consider that it was appropriate to start using a spotlight at such a sensitive location. As it was, I was nowhere near any of the exits as it got dark and by the time I reached the gate I arrived at, it was shut and I was locked in. Now I really needed a spotlight and could only think of James laughing at me for managing to get myself trapped in a graveyard after dark with bats swooping overhead. As he would no doubt point out, it was entirely typical behaviour when I become engrossed and even now I was using the light on my phone to try and photograph hedgehogs. For future reference, if you do tarry, one gate remains unlocked, but if you happen to be on the other side of the cemetery, it is a long walk, literally through the dead of night. One other piece of advice, please do not book a tour with a local company, as there is absolutely no need and you will find yourself traipsing about with twelve other people, including the guide, and will almost certainly scare away more animals than you would see on your own. Furthermore, each guest is charged €96 for the privilege, so more than €1,150 in total, for a crowded two-hour walk in a cemetery that is free to enter...nice work if you can get it. Donau is the German word for Danube and, as the name suggests, Donaupark is situated within close proximity of one of Europe's most famous waterways. It is usually a good spot for European hare and red squirrel, but I was not there at the best time of day for the former and missed out on the latter as well for whatever reason. Instead I went looking for a European green toad, as a small pond area has been created as a likely breeding habitat and my efforts were rewarded with a close view of two of these distinctive amphibians. While I was in the park I also visited the Danube Tower, which, at 252 metres, is the tallest structure in all of Austria. The viewing platform is around 100 metres lower



than that, but the cityscape across the Danube is still impressive and if I turned approximately 180 degrees, I could see the area I would be visiting next, as it was time to move into the suburbs in search of another small and endearing rodent. To be fair, I am using the term search in its loosest possible sense, as you have to search for the European souslik, or the European ground squirrel as I have always known it, in about the same way that you have to search for a car in a car park, certainly at the destination I would be visiting. The outdoor bathing area at Gerasdorf is probably one of the best locations to find an animal that can be difficult to observe elsewhere, as vast swathes of their habitat has been destroyed in recent years and they are in serious decline across much of their range. The opposite is the case at Gerasdorf and within just a minute or two of making yourself comfortable at one particular site, the inquisitive ground squirrels are emerging from their burrows and approaching to see if you have anything to eat. They are undoubtedly fed by some visitors and even if you do not have food, they will come to check just in case, breaking cover and standing on their hind legs in characteristic stance as they watch for predators. I guess that in the cute stakes the hamsters probably just edge it, but there is very little between these wonderful rodents and I spent a couple of delightful hours watching and photographing their



engaging behaviour and communal interaction. The ground squirrel colonies were a few kilometres from the train station and on the walk I had the fairly unusual sight of a red deer with two fawns. These were the first red deer of my short trip, although I expected to see more at my final wildlife destination, Donau-Auen National Park. Roughly translating as Danube floodplains, Donau-Auen protects some of the last remaining wetlands in mainland Europe and runs along the Danube until it reaches the border with neighbouring Slovakia. I intended to hike a lengthy section of the reserve from west to east, including some additional circular and side trails, and would finish with a boat ride on one of the small, shallow tributaries of this legendary river. This was the only activity that I had devoted a full day to, the last in fact of my tour, and I reached my starting point at the town of Orth an der Donau just after sunrise. Whilst the entire day was highly enjoyable in glorious surroundings, parts of the main hike were popular with walkers and dog owners, which was always going to make it difficult to see much wildlife. However, the side trails, through an idyllic combination of open meadow, light woodland and riparian forest, were far less disturbed and consequently more productive, with several views of both red and roe deer, as well as numerous woodpeckers and other birds. Unfortunately, these were the only mammals encountered during a day in which I covered approximately 30 kilometres on foot and a few more on a boat tour that sadly had to be classified as disappointing, despite the glorious scenery and the very welcome opportunity to take a well earned break. A brief view of a kingfisher was all that I had to show for more than two hours on the water, when beaver, otter and wild boar had all been feasible in the evening sunlight. It was amusing to reflect how much more challenging it was to find animals in a national park than an inner city cemetery, but of course, that is usually the case in a genuinely wild environment and I still had the opportunity to search for beaver as the light faded. On this occasion I did have my spotlight with me and my only slight dilemma was how long I searched for, as I needed to catch the night train back to Vienna and was due to fly home the next morning. As it happened, I actually



spotted a beaver on the shoreline of the Danube before I had even removed my spotlight and was able to watch it stripping vegetation for several minutes before it swam off into the dusk. The light had not been good enough for anything more than a few reference shots, but as it disappeared completely, I was able to find a second beaver with my spotlight. It actually found me to be fair, as it was ambling along the towpath directly towards me and only stopped when I caught it in my beam. At first I thought that it might tarry long enough for a quick shot, but its surprise quickly gave way to alarm and it disappeared into the woods and out of sight. This would be my last glimpse of a mammal in Vienna and if nine species, plus some bats and an unidentified vole, does not appear to be that impressive in just over four days, I could easily have guaranteed more if that had been my main purpose, including rabbits and foxes and more of the ungulates at Lainzer Tiergarten, but in wild conditions beyond their pens. However, it was never my intention to arrange a full wildlife tour and I more wanted to concentrate on the quality of sightings, which were outstanding considering the urban locations, and to highlight exactly what could be achieved as part of a short city break. Much of my time was consequently devoted to Vienna's rich cultural heritage, particularly during the evening, and although these activities were somewhat abbreviated thanks to the ineptness of EasyJet, I did still make a point of visiting as many historic attractions and cultural events as my modified schedule would permit. Although many people will not deem it as such, largely because film has never been considered a true artistic medium, for me 'The Third Man' is comparable to any of the art displayed in this historic metropolis and I actually believe that cinema was the great art form of the 20th century. Certainly Carol Reed's 1949 noir thriller, with a screenplay by no less than Graham Greene, is among the best British films of all time, with undoubtedly the most memorable opening line...

'I never knew the old Vienna before the war, with its Strauss music, its glamour and easy charm...'

The direction, lighting, score and cinematography are all ground breaking in different ways and then there is Orson Welles, appearing as a ghost from the shadows to steal the movie. The dialogue added at the end of the famous Ferris wheel scene was of his own invention...

'You know what the fellow said...in Italy, for 30 years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, they had five hundred years of democracy and peace...and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.'

Of the many film locations that you are still able to visit, I would certainly recommend the Central Cemetery, where Harry Lime was supposedly laid to rest at the beginning of the film, the sewer system, although some of these atmospheric scenes were shot at

Shepperton Studios in Surrey, and the doorway where Harry Lime, in the guise of Orson Welles, makes his dramatic and spine tingling first appearance. You should also make a point of riding the Wiener Riesenrad or Vienna Giant Wheel, the aforementioned Ferris wheel that dates back to 1897 and is still in use at the Prater, apparently the oldest amusement park in the world. For those interested in learning more, there is an informative museum in the Wieden district, which also holds concerts featuring the zither music from the film, and an official walking tour if you do not want to search for the various movie landmarks on your own. Although overshadowed by the sheer screen presence of the hugely charismatic and immensely talented Orson Welles, technically Joseph Cotton was the leading man and of course Cotton had also co-starred in Welles's own cinematic masterpiece *Citizen Kane*. A superb



supporting cast includes the distinguished Trevor Howard, who I felt an instant affinity with as soon as I learned that his contracts all included a clause that he was excused work whenever a cricket test match was being played, Wilfrid Hyde-White and Bernard Lee, who would go on to portray the head of the Secret Intelligence Service M in several James Bond films. However, all of this talent and perhaps even Orson Welles aside, the real star of 'The Third Man' was Anton Karas, a Viennese zither player who composed probably the most memorable soundtrack in cinematic history. Rather obviously excluding musicals, I cannot recall another film where the music plays quite such a significant role throughout, masterfully linking every scene and rising to a crescendo when Harry Lime artfully appears. Remarkably, director Carol Reed discovered Karas by utter chance playing in a tavern and asked him to write the score more or less immediately, as Reed was desperate to depict a post war Vienna without a single waltz in earshot and had been struggling to find a suitable alternative. As much as I admire Reed, who knew a thing or two about music and would go on to win the Best Director Academy Award for 'Oliver!', and the undoubted genius of his choice, I could barely contemplate visiting Vienna without attending a concert or two and this trip was no exception. Much like my passion for wildlife, my love of classical music

was instilled in me by my father, who introduced me to an eclectic range of music from Georgie Fame and Johnny Cash to Gilbert and Sullivan and Johann Strauss II. Dad does not have an in-depth knowledge of music and mostly enjoys light opera and operettas, but listening to those vinyl records as a young boy struck a chord, so to speak, and I have enjoyed a variety of music ever since, despite the fact that I dance like a waxwork with epilepsy. Considered by many to be the musical capital of Europe, even today Vienna reverberates to the immortal melodies of Schubert, Haydn, Beethoven and Mozart, all of whom lived and worked during the classical golden age between about 1730 and 1830. Mozart lived in the capital from 1781, but 'The candle that burns twice as bright burns half as long' and he died in 1791 at the tragically young age of just 35. Touched by the gods, Mozart's sublime work is more popular now than ever and night after night concerts across Vienna pay testament to his genius. They also pay regular homage to perhaps the city's favourite son, 'The Waltz King' Johann Strauss Jnr, whose father, also Johann Strauss, composed the celebrated 'Radetzky March', among many other works. Although known more for his waltzes and polkas, Strauss Snr. wrote this famous military piece after victory against the then Kingdom of Sardinia at the Battle of Custoza in 1848. Field Marshal Radetzky led the Austrian Empire forces to triumph and when his commanding officers first heard the stirring music written in his honour, they began to clap and stamp their feet in time to the pulsating chorus, a tradition that continues to this day. If this sounds like a tough act for his son to follow, the achievements of Johann Strauss Jnr have surpassed even those of his father and it remains debateable which of the two maestros has composed Austria's most famous piece of music, as 'The Blue Danube' rivals the 'Radetzky March', in terms of the consciousness of the nation. In reality, neither man deserves to be defined by either work, however magnificent, as Johann Strauss Jnr alone wrote over 400 waltzes and polkas, as well as 'Die Fledermaus', or 'The Bat', one of his fifteen completed operettas. At the height of his power, the dance music of Johann Strauss Jnr was being played in royal courts and palatial ballrooms across Europe and even now his waltzes and polkas are performed at hundreds of Viennese balls every year, from the Tritsch-Tratsch and Thunder and Lightning

polkas to Roses from the South, Vienna Blood and Tales from the Vienna Woods. It is no coincidence that the golden Johann Strauss Monument in the Stadtpark is the most photographed landmark in all of Vienna and it even appears in 'The Third Man', during the brilliantly informal introduction. I had arranged two concerts during my stay, one at the exquisite orangery of the Schonbrunn Palace and the second at the almost equally sumptuous Kursalon. It would have been difficult to find more appropriate venues to savour the splendour of a Viennese bygone age and each concert included an exhilarating selection of largely Strauss and Mozart pieces. I would have also dearly loved a ticket for a performance at the Vienna State Opera, one of the grandest and most prestigious opera houses on earth, but unfortunately it closes during the summer months of July and August and I instead had to satisfy myself with a brief visit to savour the breathtaking architecture and sheer grandeur of this wonderful old building. For many tourists, the magnificent architecture is an essential element of any visit to Vienna and I tried to include as many highlights as possible during my stay, although, thanks



again in part to EasyJet, my time was severely limited and I have to admit that a few of these attractions were experienced in far more depth on previous trips. To be fair, you would need several weeks to explore Vienna properly and it helps to know just a little about the staggering history of this celebrated capital city before you begin. By way of a brief introduction, you may want to consider Time Travel Vienna, which I visited in case I could recommend it to future guests, certainly those travelling with children. I must admit that this type of attraction is not really my thing and that I went along with a fair amount of trepidation, particularly as my time was so precious and that I was potentially swapping a glorious cultural treasure for a guided tour and some animatronic displays. That said, and although it is certainly a little kitsch, it was also fun and surprisingly informative. Visitors will undoubtedly leave with at least a reasonable understanding of Vienna's colourful past and some knowledge of the principal characters they will encounter traces of



throughout their stay, including the great composers of course and some of the foremost members of the Habsburg Empire or the Hapsburg Empire as it is referred to in English. For those who have not had the benefit of this lively historical romp, and a quarter of a million visitors did during 2018, members of the Habsburg Monarchy ruled Austria for almost 650 years from the final quarter of the 13th century to the end of the First World War in 1918. It was actually the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the reigning Emperor Franz Joseph I, by a Serbian nationalist that triggered the outbreak of the Great War, during which the Central Powers of the German, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires fought side by side. The eventual cessation of hostilities witnessed the dissolution of all three defeated empires and consequently the end of Habsburg rule. Emperor Franz Joseph ruled from 1848 until his death of natural causes in 1916 and much of his long reign was shared with Empress Elisabeth, whom he married in 1854 when she was sixteen. Elisabeth, or Sisi as she was more commonly known, was assassinated in 1898 and although their marriage was not a happy one, many of the imperial buildings that visitors flock to each year are associated with their lives and rule. Franz Joseph was actually born and died in the majestic Schonbrunn Palace, the summer residence of the Habsburg rulers and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The spectacular palace is Vienna's foremost tourist attraction and the vast sumptuous gardens include lavish fountains, a maze, a palm house and an imperial carriage museum, as well as the oldest zoo in the world. The view of the palace and grounds from the Gloriette is best described as breathtaking and the Roman Ruin is actually an elaborate and imaginatively realised folly. The Historic Centre of Vienna is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site and, as one of the most recognisable structures in the entire city, St. Stephen's Cathedral is an ideal starting point for any tour. Originally constructed between 1137 and 1160, it has been much altered and largely rebuilt since, the cathedral is almost 900 years old and is considered to be one of the most significant examples of gothic architecture in all of Austria. Its tallest tower looms above the city at 136 metres and from its perpetual home at Stephansplatz, it is but a short walk to another of Vienna's most important state buildings, the Hofburg, a vast sprawling complex of palaces and gardens and the seat of power for the Habsburg dynasty for half a millennium. Today the Hofburg is the official residence of the President of Austria, but much of this venerable edifice remains accessible to the public, including the Volksgarten, or People's Garden, and the Burggarten, or Court Garden, with its superlative glass Art Nouveau Palm House and grand Mozart memorial, one of literally thousands of statues, monuments and sculptures littered across this timeless city. The Sisi Museum, dedicated of course to the Empress Elisabeth, and the Imperial Apartments, where both Elisabeth and the Emperor Franz Joseph lived and worked, can also be visited, as well as the Spanish Riding School, which is famous for its immaculate dressage routines with mainly white or grey Lipizzaner stallions. Their Morning Exercise sessions between 10am and midday are very popular with both tourists and the Viennese alike, except in July and for much of August, when the horses are taken to their summer stables in Heldenberg for a break. Gala performances occur periodically throughout the year and these are used to display the full classical repertoire of these sublime animals, but again not during those summer weeks. Within another brief walk and officially still part of the Hofburg lies the Albertina, the largest of the former Habsburg imperial residences and now one of the most important museums in the world. In addition to a wealth of paintings, sculptures and photographs, the Albertina houses the largest and most valuable collection of graphics in existence, over one million drawings and prints and 600 years of art history, from Durer, Michelangelo and Raphael to Rubens, Rembrandt, Klimt and Picasso. The Batliner Collection, on permanent loan to the Albertina, is in turn one of the most significant

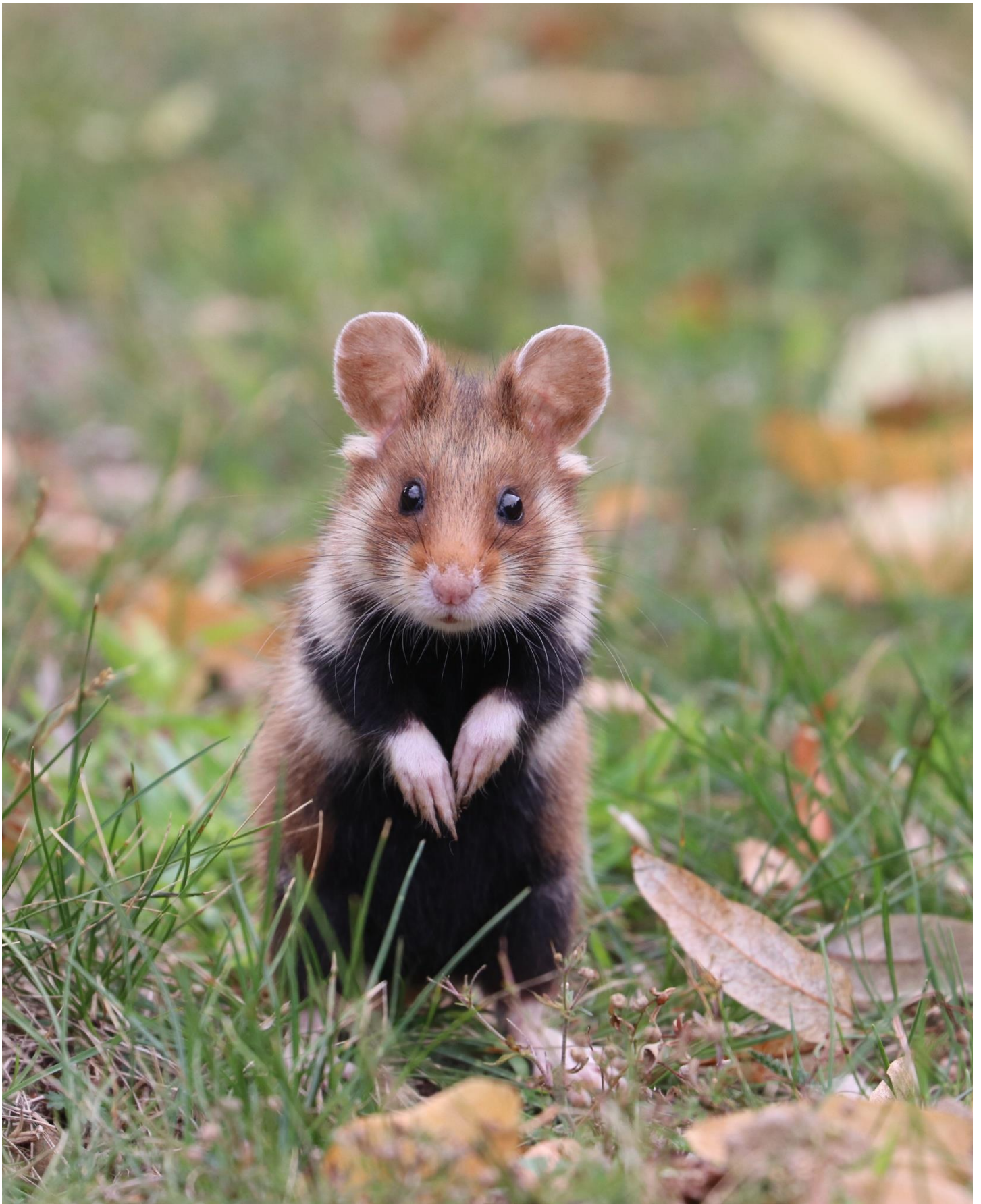
compilations of Modernist art in Europe and includes works by Monet, Cezanne, Gauguin, Magritte, Degas, Munch and again Picasso. However, for all of these great artists and their celebrated work, a simple study of a hare is probably the most famous painting at the Albertina and is certainly the piece that most tourists have in mind when they visit. 'Young Hare', or 'Field Hare' according to the direct translation, was painted in watercolour by the German artist Albrecht Durer in 1502 and is considered to be too delicate and valuable to be exhibited more than twice every five years. The version on permanent display is a reproduction and I would guess that the only other painting in Vienna that comes close in terms of the local psyche is probably 'The Kiss' by the Austrian artist Gustav Klimt, which is also hugely popular. Part of a collection of 24 works by Klimt, 'The Kiss' can be viewed at the Belvedere, a highly ornate baroque palace that rivals both the Schonbrunn Palace and the Hofburg in terms of style and grandeur. The Belvedere is actually two main structures, the upper and lower palaces, linked by a grand terraced garden. The upper palace is home to a permanent exhibition over three floors and is apparently the most visited art museum in the country, while the lower palace and orangery are used for temporary exhibitions. In all the collection includes almost 19,000 artworks and less than a kilometre to the south the Belvedere 21, an entirely contrasting and modern gallery constructed in 1958, is the venue for contemporary Austrian and international art. Many of the sites that I have mentioned, and many more of course that I have not, can be viewed on an almost mandatory horse-drawn carriage tour, which are even offered at the Central Cemetery. As you would hope in a major European city in this day and age, the horses are well cared for and visitors can sit back and enjoy the leisurely experience without worrying that their animals are being mistreated. Tours depart from several of the main squares, including Stephansplatz, Michaelerplatz and Albertinaplatz. While I have included a few of the more renowned attractions, there are over 100 museums in Vienna dedicated to almost every conceivable subject or famous citizen, from natural history to military history and from Sigmund Freud to Ludwig van Beethoven. You can visit Schubert's birthplace, where Mozart, Beethoven and Johann Strauss Jnr all composed some of their masterpieces and even where Haydn and, to come full circle, Schubert died. There are palaces, memorials, monuments and statues on almost every street and in every park and I have barely even mentioned the myriad of sympathetically designed and flawlessly crafted churches, chapels, temples and other religious sites that adorn the city, let alone the bars and restaurants. There are surprises around every corner and hidden treasures where you least expect them, like the Austrian National Library, State Hall, the largest baroque library building in Europe and surely one of the most beautiful libraries anywhere in the world. You can ride a boat on the Danube or a roller coaster at the Prater, which was not my favourite amusement park by any means, but is obligatory if you want to ride the Wiener Riesenrad and pretend to be Harry Lime. In short, Vienna is a magical city and for every major highlight that I have briefly touched upon, there are a dozen precious gems waiting to be explored. Discovering your own highlights is all part of the fun of course and Vienna is by no means the only European city where you can enjoy a combination of enthralling wildlife and enduring culture... or should that be the other way round?



No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Red Deer	Cervus elaphus	Observed at Gerasdorf and Donau-Auen National Park.
2	Roe Deer	Capreolus capreolus	Eighteen at the Vienna Central Cemetery and two separate males at Donau-Auen National Park.
3	Wild Boar	Sus scrofa	Herd of ten at Lainzer Tiergarten.
4	Northern White-breasted Hedgehog	Erinaceus roumanicus	Three at the Vienna Central Cemetery.
5	European Hare	Lepus europaeus	Two at Lainzer Tiergarten and five at the Vienna Central Cemetery.
6	Eurasian Beaver	Castor fiber	Two individuals at dusk at Donau-Auen National Park.
7	European Ground Squirrel	Spermophilus citellus	Several colonies at Gerasdorf.
8	Eurasian Red Squirrel	Sciurus vulgaris	Seven in the Vienna Central Cemetery, but missed elsewhere.
9	Common Hamster	Cricetus cricetus	Routinely observed at two locations.







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