



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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HUNGARY

Date - May 2025

Duration - 5 Days

Destinations

Budapest - Kiskunság National Park - Kecskemét - Pákozd - Lake Tisza - Hortobágy National Park

Trip Overview

The main purpose of my visit was to research a number of sites that I could possibly combine with neighbouring Romania, either in terms of a dedicated mammal tour or something slightly more general involving a wider variety of wildlife. Although just five days would hardly qualify as an exhaustive study, I departed with the feeling that the latter would very much have to be the case, as the significantly larger area of Romania provides both more diversity and a greater density of mammal species. Indeed, no major mammals occur in Hungary that cannot also be encountered in Romania and I would suggest that most species are far easier to observe across the border, at least partly due to the extreme hunting mentality that pervades much of Hungary. Wooden hunting towers appear on the edge of almost every patch of forest, much of which is severely fragmented, and many species are hunted all year round, including golden jackal, red fox and wild boar, which are slaughtered in huge numbers on merciless driven hunts, where the terrified animals are chased towards the waiting guns. You can shoot roe deer almost throughout the year as well and, unsurprisingly enough, all of these creatures are either extremely difficult to observe or at least to observe well. Even devoting around eighteen hours a day to the cause, I would fail to spot a single golden jackal or red fox during my visit and practically all of my roe deer sightings were at distance and usually brief, with the animals fleeing as soon as they became aware of my presence. More or less everything was skittish and although I was able to track down a small herd of wild boar deep in the forest at night with a thermal imager, they were gone literally the second I turned my spotlight on.





Most of my time was spent in or around Kiskunság National Park, which is split into several sections across a large sprawling area, and I also visited Hortobágy National Park, which is equally fragmented and can only be accessed at three locations without a guide. I based myself at a small lodge within Kiskunság and quickly realised that I would have to spend several hours there each day in order to perhaps observe a single mammal, which just did not make any sense given the limited time available. Indeed, I believe I missed just one red squirrel throughout my entire stay and although the lodge was clearly a productive birding location, with several impressive hides overlooking attractive pools, the highlight of my stay was a grass snake, *natrix natrix*, as well as a European pond turtle, *emys orbicularis*. It was that kind of tour in a way, as I devoted much of my time to a variety of other wildlife in the absence of the expected mammals. In addition to the green toad, *bufotes viridis*, encountered on a neighbouring property, I attempted to photograph a dazzling





array of equally resplendent birds, including European rollers and European bee-eaters, which were nesting in the sandy soil, more or less alongside the European ground squirrels. I knew in advance that the bird life at both Kiskunság and Hortobágy was pretty spectacular and had hoped to find at least one of the four owls that occur in the region i.e. Eurasian scops, little, long-eared and tawny. Unfortunately, it was again that type of trip and I was not destined to see an owl in the same way that I would miss Eurasian red squirrel at a great spot for it back in Budapest. Sometimes things just happen this way, but there are always equally inspiring consolations and I love the fact that every village has its own small population of white storks, many of which nest on the special platforms positioned on electricity poles along the main streets. The owners of the lodge I used are also involved in conservation and have to date erected over 400 nest boxes in the local forest. I was delighted to make a small donation to the cause and although Romania and Poland clearly remain the premier mammal destinations in Europe, the birding sites in Hungary no doubt rival those across the continent, as do the breathtaking fields of wild flowers on display at this time of year. Budapest is of course one of the great European cities, both in terms of its extraordinary and often tumultuous history and its equally stupendous architecture. After an absence of many years, I returned to several of the Gothic and Renaissance masterpieces first viewed as a young man and would without doubt recommend a visit to Hungary for Budapest alone, just not perhaps for the mammals.

Mammal Sightings

Order Artiodactyla - Family Cervidae (Deer - 2)

1. European Roe Deer - *Capreolus capreolus*

Observed at every location, although usually at distance and often only briefly, almost certainly due to intense hunting pressure.



2. Red Deer - *Cervus elaphus*

A few individuals in one area east of Kiskunság National Park.

Order Artiodactyla - Family Bovidae (Cattle, Goats, Sheep, Antelope and Goat Antelopes - 1)

3. Water Buffalo - *Bubalus bubalis*

Domesticated animals introduced at two of the reserves I visited, although both are fenced and neither herd could be considered truly wild.

Order Artiodactyla - Family Suidae (Pigs - 1)

4. Wild Boar - *Sus scrofa*

A herd of five with the thermal imager deep in one of the forested areas at Kiskunság National Park. Unfortunately, they fled as soon as I switched the spotlight on and I was not able to observe well, again almost certainly due to hunting pressure. When you consider that African swine fever has devastated wild boar populations across much of the continent, it seems inconceivable that they are still allowed to hunt them in such numbers here in Hungary.

Order Lagomorpha - Family Leporidae (Rabbits and Hares - 2)

5. European Hare - *Lepus europaeus*

The most commonly observed mammal of the trip, European hares were encountered at every major destination and usually in significant numbers. I devoted a large percentage of my time to these iconic and beautiful creatures, partly because they were frankly the easiest mammal to photograph, but more because they have always been a favourite of mine, perhaps as a result of their significance in the Celtic myth and folklore that I grew up reading.



6. European Rabbit - *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Two individuals on the same evening at one section of Kiskunság, the first of which I made a point of stopping to double check, given the number of hares across the region.



Order Eulipotyphla - Family Erinaceidae (Hedgehogs - 2)

7. Western European Hedgehog - *Erinaceus europaeus*

Although I expected to encounter the northern white-breasted hedgehog, which occurs as far west as Italy and deep into Russia to the east, I had no expectation of finding a western hedgehog, which I was not aware occurred beyond the borders of neighbouring Austria and Slovakia. This particular individual was crossing the road at dusk and, much to my immense frustration, I had an appointment back at my lodge and did not have time to wait for it to uncurl after I had carried it to safety. I was therefore forced to take a few quick reference shots of it curled in typical fashion, but I had seen it clearly, including its underbelly as I scooped it up, and this was definitely the western variety that I am so familiar with in the United Kingdom and mainland western Europe.

8. Northern White-breasted Hedgehog - *Erinaceus roumanicus*

A common Eurasian Steppe species, I experienced eight sightings in all, including five on a single night in one small section of Kiskunság National Park. That said, I only stopped to photograph one and then only briefly, hence the less than perfect image above, partly because I was searching fairly intensely for so many other species, but also perhaps because I encountered more than twenty in a single evening in Dobrogea, Romania, as recently as March.

Order Rodentia - Family Castoridae (Beavers - 1)

9. Eurasian Beaver - *Castor fiber*

Three on a boat trip on Lake Tisza, two of which approached to within a few metres, before diving under with a characteristic slap of the water as soon as they became aware of our presence. Slightly larger than their North American cousins, Eurasian beavers are the largest of all European rodents and were once widespread across much of the continent. However, by the beginning of the 20th century they had been hunted to the brink of extinction and only approximately 1,200 individuals remained in eight fragmented populations. They have since recovered across much of Europe, but in Asia the *castor fiber birulai* subspecies remains extremely rare in Mongolia and China. Unusually, in my experience at least, they are easier to spot in the early morning at Lake Tisza, as opposed to at dusk, and unfortunately the light at that time of day was not great, hence the rather limited photo below.



Order Rodentia - Family Sciuridae (Squirrels - 1)

10. European Ground Squirrel - *Spermophilus citellus*

Four sightings in all, one at Hortobágy National Park and three at Kiskunság National Park, one of which I was able to approach to within about three metres to photograph.



Order Rodentia - Family Cricetidae (Muskrats, Voles, Lemmings and Hamsters - 1)

11. Common Vole - *Microtus arvalis*

Two brief but clear views of one running across a trail at Hortobágy National Park.

Order Rodentia - Family Muridae (Mice, Rats and Gerbils - 2)

12. Long-tailed Field Mouse - *Apodemus sylvaticus*

A single young animal at night, that I initially confused as a Eurasian harvest mouse given its diminutive size, but later identified from my photograph below, with the help of some expert assistance back in the United Kingdom. Given the number of rodents observed with the thermal imager, I no doubt encountered far more of a species more commonly known as a wood mouse in some regions. This, however, was the only one that I took the time to check with the spotlight and actually photograph.

13. Eurasian Harvest Mouse - *Micromys minutus*

Again, only one observed clearly with the spotlight, but probably far more with the thermal imager.

Excluding a number of small rodents and bats observed with the thermal imager.







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