

Hungary. A small mammal trip.

1st- 8th September 2011

By Phil Telfer

Photos from Steve Davis

and Kenny Ross

This was a trip run by Naturetrek and led by Roy Taylor, focusing mainly on smaller mammals and whatever other wildlife we came across including a nice range of birds, butterflies and reptiles. Hungary is a hotspot for bat species in Europe and evenings were spent mist-netting or visiting swarming caves while we also set traps for mice, shrews and voles etc. During the day we were allowed access to various house and church attics to look at a range of roosting bat species. The week was split between two centres, firstly we spent three nights in the north east around Aggtelek national park, followed by four nights in the Bukk Hills, within easy reach of the Hortobagy Plains.

The week scored an incredible nineteen species of bat all expertly handled by our local guide Sandor Boldogh who was able to immediately identify and describe the features of all the different species. During one night alone we managed to catch ten different species within a couple of hours.

We got off to great start as within sight of the airport terminal there is a thriving colony of European Sousliks which proved really tricky to get photos of.



European Souslik

On our first evening excursion we walked into the woodlands close to our hotel in the village of Josvafo and the net was set by a cave entrance in a clearing in the woods. There was also

a small cottage in the clearing which held a nice surprise for us. In a small cupboard off the kitchen area an Edible Dormouse had made a nest and produced a litter inside a glass vase and we were also able to spot the adults clambering around on the roof and trees outside. While we were enjoying a coffee inside the cottage there was a call from outside and a juvenile wild boar chose to walk up within a couple of metres to investigate us.



Edible Dormouse

The following morning we checked on a line of 50 odd nest boxes set in an old orchard close to the Slovakian border in the hope of discovering a Forest Dormouse. No luck with that but we did find a Hazel Dormouse with 4 young and a few colourful Tree frogs.

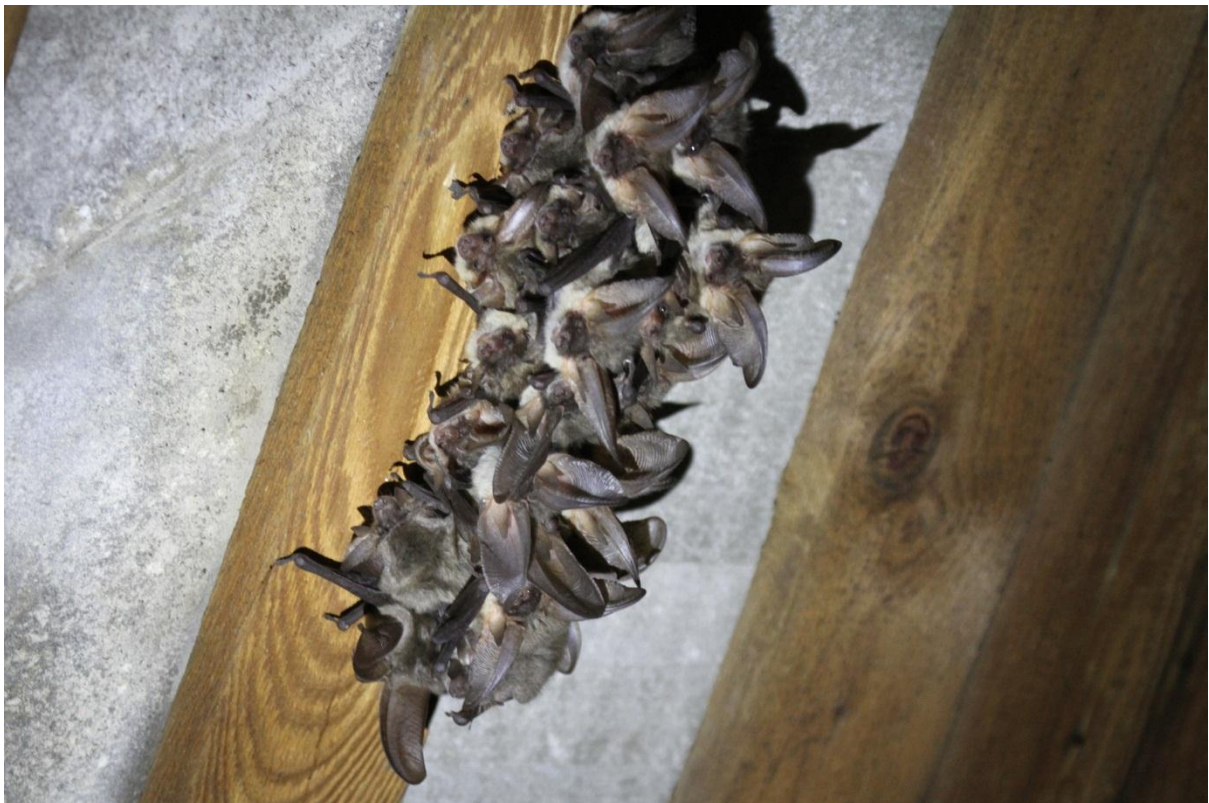
Most mornings we were up early to check on the traps which generally had a really good success rate and the anticipation built up while Sandor remembered where he had placed them all the previous evening. Captures included, Water vole, Common vole, Striped field mouse and then down at the stream below the hotel we had caught one of the two possible Water shrew species. None of us were sure which it was until Sandor showed us the subtle differences and confirmed that it was the much hoped for Miller's water shrew. We all felt it would be really difficult to identify this species from a quick glimpse in the field and the only sure way would be to capture one.

Another feature of this trip was stepping carefully across dodgy floorboards in some of the church attics but we were rewarded with many roosting bats including, Greater and lesser horseshoe, greater and lesser mouse-eared, Geoffroy's and grey long-eared bats.



Greater horseshoe bats

Grey long-eared
bats



One of the trip highlights was sitting at a cave entrance one evening watching the emerging Mediterranean horseshoe bats flying all around us, and while this was going on we managed to get the light on an edible dormouse in the trees nearby.



Lesser horseshoe bats

On another evening we went looking for European hamsters on a stubble field towards the Hortobagy, but despite finding several of their burrows we didn't spot the animals themselves. However the field margins were full of Steppe mice.

On the final full day we drove south to Kunmadaras, a disused Russian military base and our arranged meeting with a researcher on lesser molerats. Fortunately he had manage to capture one for us by disturbing the mole hills and then digging out the animal as it comes to fix the damage. This is surely the only way to observe these bizarre animals and for me at least this was a main target species for the trip.



We followed this with a boat trip on lake Tisza which made for a pleasant birdwatching excursion although we didn't manage to spot one of the European beavers which occur there. On the drive back to the hotel that night an Eastern hedgehog crossed in front of the vehicle and disappeared into the undergrowth. After a 10 minute search Sandor managed to find it and brought it out for us all to have a proper look.



Steve, Karen, Kenny and Cat stayed on for a few days in Budapest and one evening they found 4 Eastern hedgehog in the park below the citadel.

So a very relaxing week during which we enjoyed drinking the local wine whilst checking the mist nets for bats and also stopping for our daily treat of delicious Hungarian ice cream. Overall Sandor's skill and enthusiasm, along with a good fun group of people, really made the trip a great success and we managed a fantastic tally of 37 species of mammal. See full list below.

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| 1. European Souslik | 20. Geoffroy's Bat |
| 2. Red Squirrel | 21. Lesser Horseshoe Bat |
| 3. Red Fox | 22. Greater Horseshoe BAT |
| 4. Wild Boar | 23. Mediterranean Horseshoe bat |
| 5. Brown Hare | 24. Whiskered Bat |
| 6. Beech Marten | 25. Serotine Bat |
| 7. Eastern Hedgehog | 26. Noctule Bat |
| 8. Common Shrew | 27. Common Pippistrelle Bat |
| 9. Miller's Water Shrew | 28. Soprano pippistrelle |
| 10. Common Vole | 29. Daubenten |
| 11. Water Vole | 30. Grey Long-eared Bat |
| 12. Wood Mouse | 31. Barbastelle Bat |
| 13. Striped Field Mouse | 32. Greater Mouse-eared Bat |
| 14. Steppe Mouse | 33. Lesser Mouse-eared Bat |
| 15. Edible Dormouse | 34. Schreiber's Bat |
| 16. Hazel Dormouse | 35. Natterer Bat |
| 17. Lesser Molerat | 36. Brown Long-eared Bat |
| 18. Roe Deer | 37. Pond Bat |
| 19. Bechsteins Bat | |