



Alpine Chamois (Subspecies; Tatra Chamois) – High Tatras, Slovakia

Slovakia

AND

Vienna (Austria)

Slovak karst – High Tatras – Vienna

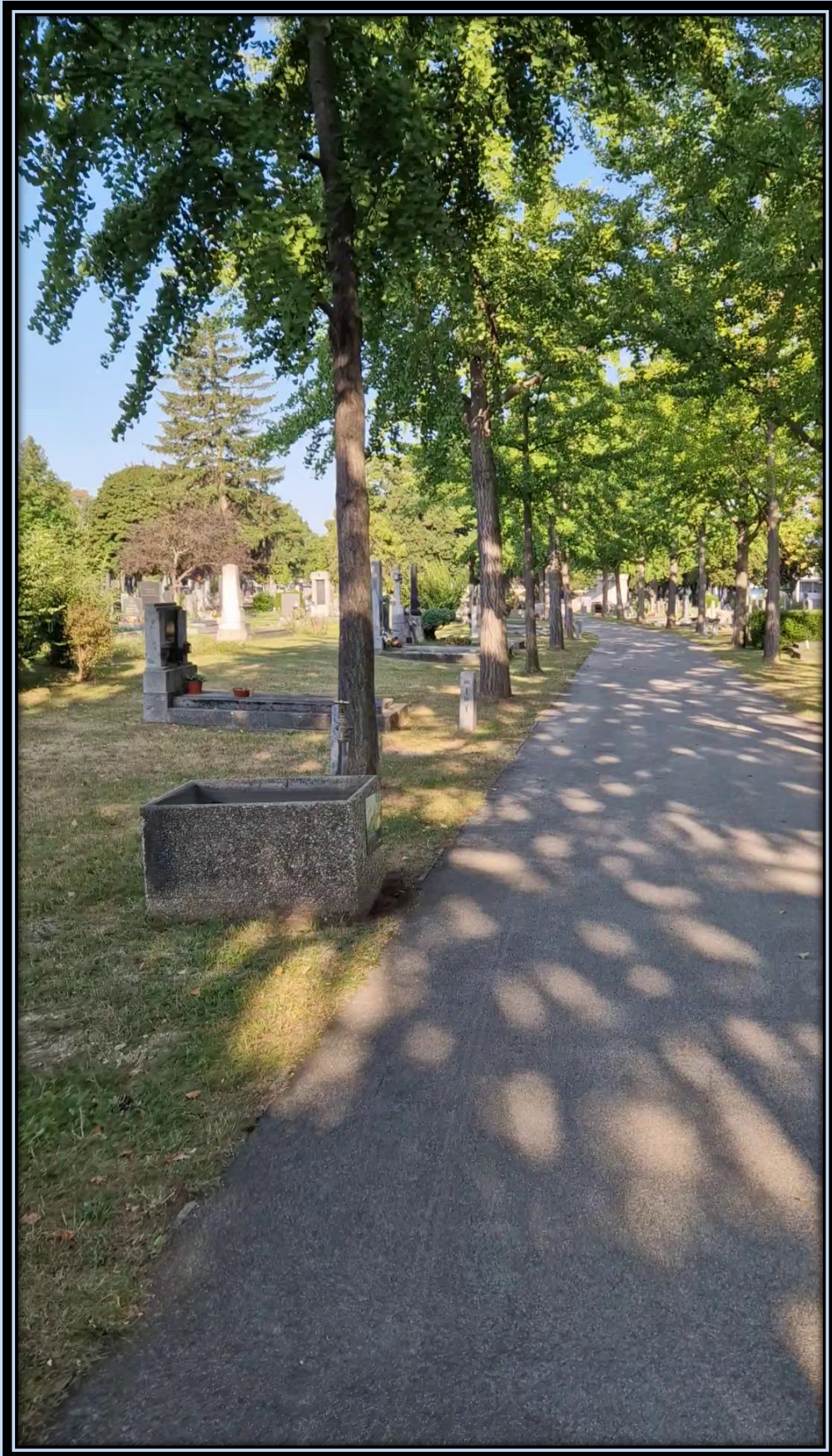
2 August – 11 August 2024

Introduction

10 days in central Europe with the goal of seeing European Hamster, Alpine chamois, European souslik and as many bat species as possible.

It turned out to be easier said than done...

In Vienna I stayed 2 nights for some sightseeing in this wonderful city and of course to visit Friedhof Meidling Cemetery for the European Hamster. More on this further down in the “species” section but they were very easy to see, to say at least.



Friedhof Meidling Cemetery in Vienna. Where the European hamster thrives.

I then took the train to Bratislava for a couple of nights just for sightseeing and then train on to Kosice in eastern Slovakia.

Here I had a booked a 4day/3night tour with Ecotours Hungary <https://ecotours.hu/>

I contacted a few companys but Gabor Orban at Ecotours was by far the most responsive and fast feedback. He have some good reviews on this website as well. He put together a tour with a bat specialist Stephan as my guide. With a schedule to cover my targets and also visit a lot of day roosting places for bats and bat netting at night.

None of this would happen in the end...

In the evening the day before the tour start in Kosice, Gabor contacted me and told me that we had a big, big problem...

Stephan, the best (and more or less the only) mammalwatching guide in Slovakia was in hospital for Hanta virus! Probably too much rodents for him lately as this is a virus from rodents.

Such a bummer!

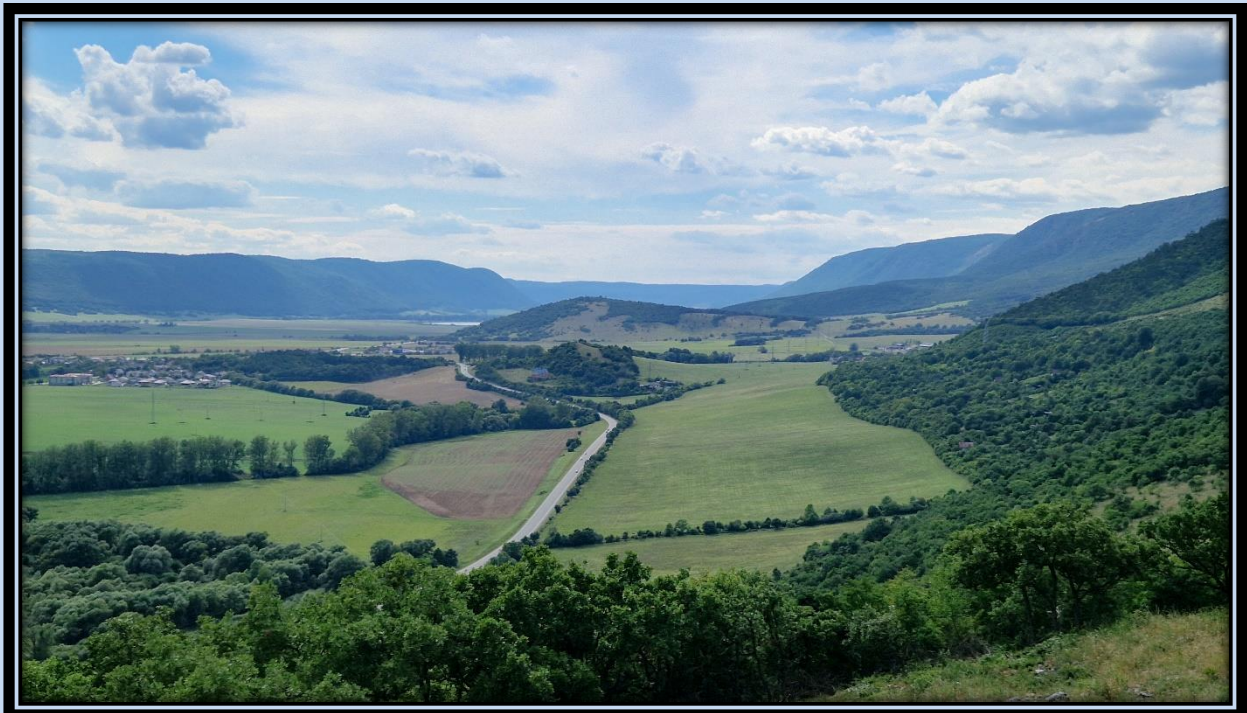
Gabor and also me got stressed of what to do. One suggestion that was floated was to rent my own car and be guided remotely by Stephan from the bed in hospital...

I saw about 1500 problems and obstacles with this idea no matter how much technology and coordinates exists nowadays. There was also one other gentleman booked on this tour, Charles from UK and none of us liked the idea.

Late evening Gabor and Stephan had found a fairly good solution for us. A guy named Peter...

He worked for an energy company and monitored birds and wildlife around wind turbines. He had free time for 4 days and were willing to help us out. Thanx a lot Peter!!

Of course there would be no bat netting at night and a lot of day roosting places for the bats were also now long gone but we agreed to make the most of the hastily created situation and like the circumstances!



Slovak karst - Southern Slovakia

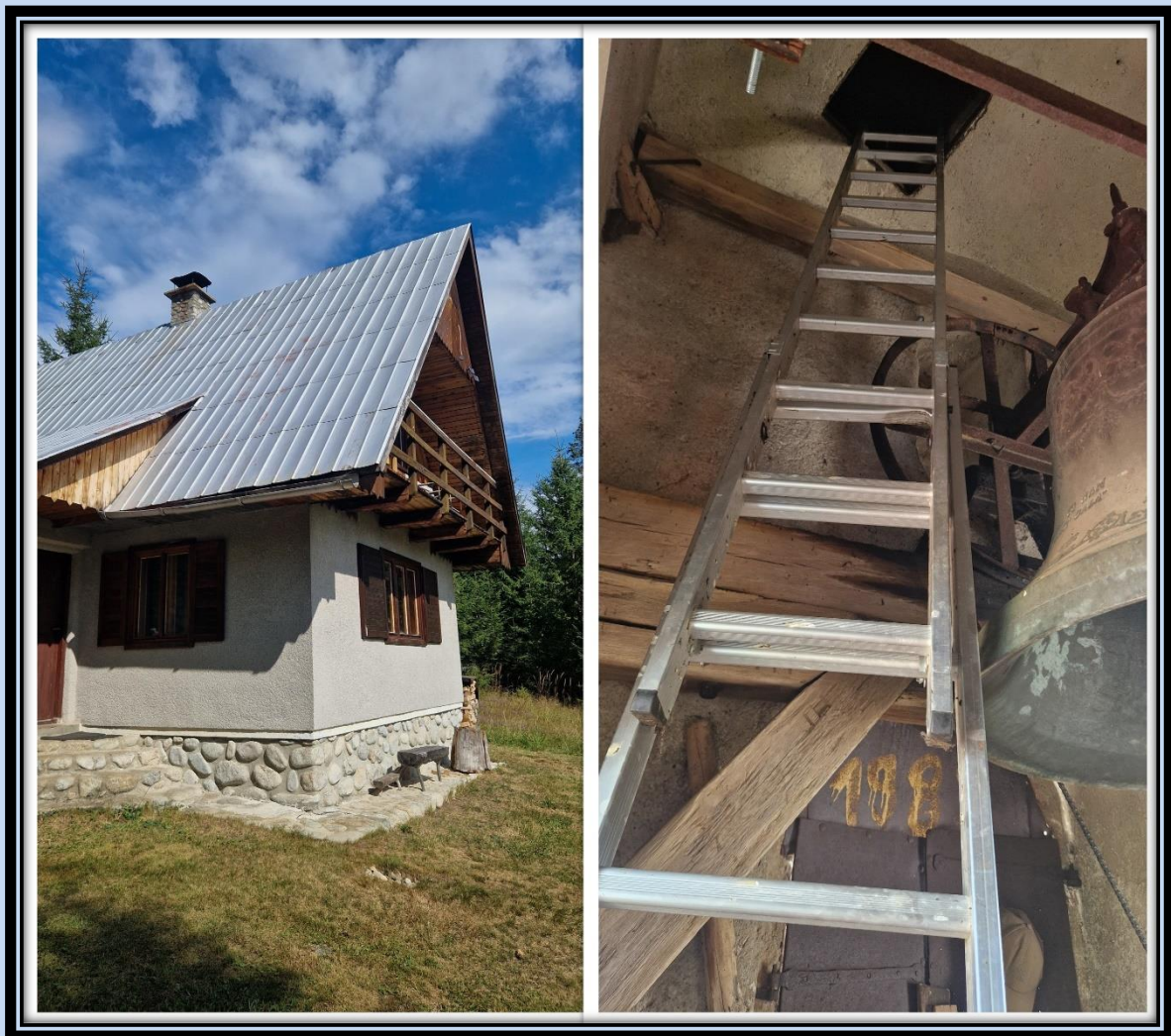
I will also say that Gabor Orban at <https://ecotours.hu/> did his very best to solve this. Not easy when you only have one guide in Slovakia for this kind of mammalwatching. Unexpected things can happens, which I respect.

He found a solution for us in the end. Not as good as the original plan of course but the best we could do. I wouldn't hesitate to book another tour with him and his company somewhere in Europe.



High Tatras in search for Tatra Chamois

Peter stayed in contact with Stephan at the hospital and got some coordinates every now and then where we should search for our targets. Peter also knew some places himself.



Left: These cottages out in the forest housed bats behind the window coverings. We searched some 8-10 cottages and found bats in 3-4 of them. I don't want to know what the police thinks of some crazy mammalwatchers searching in windows like this 😊

Right: An old church-tower somewhere in Slovakia where it should be some bats roosting... scary climb!

We did our best and managed to see a lot of Slovakian countryside and the most important targets for me.

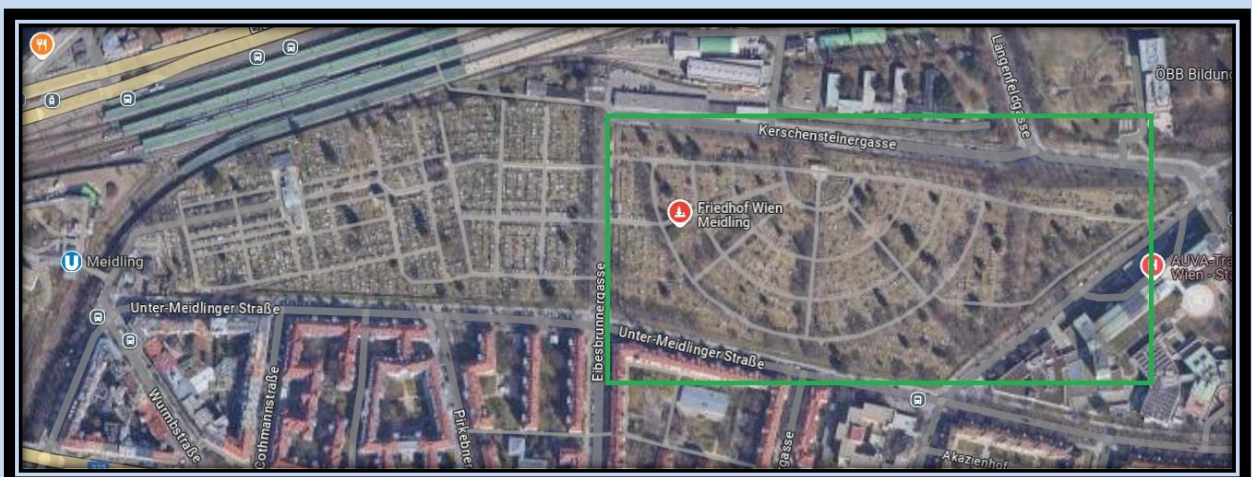
The weather was hot and sunny most of the time. Only in the High Tatras at 1750 meters (5741 feet) there were some clouds and light rain in the morning which we had to wait out.

In the end I saw **12 species** of mammals of which **6 were lifers** and this is the story about them...

My species list

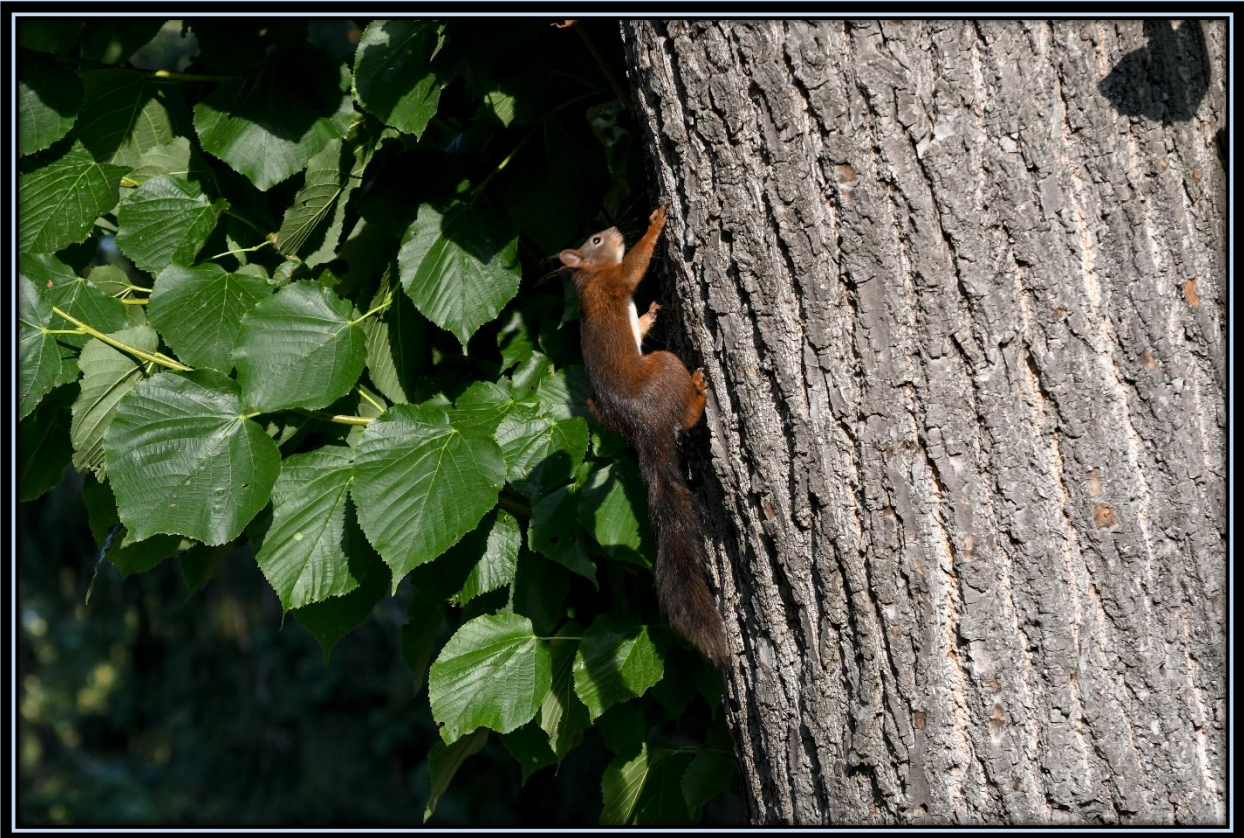
1. European Hamster --- (Lifer) The main reason for me to come to Vienna. Friedhof Meidling Cemetary is a well known hot spot for them and I went there an early morning at opening time 07:00. As earlier stated it's the eastern part (the cemetery is divided by a road in the middle) which is the far best for the Hamsters.

In one hours time I probably had around 10 sightings of Hamsters. All but one in the eastern part. You just walk on the walkways and look round. You will see them running around. Some of them are more shy than others. So if it doesn't cooperate. Find another one 😊



Hamster area marked in green

2. Eurasian red squirrel --- The other mammal running around at Friedhof meidling cemetery. I also saw one in Slovakia.



3. Roe deer --- Very common in Slovakia. You see them everywhere on the fields.



4. European souslik --- (Lifer) Also called European ground squirrel. There are some good places for them in Slovakia. We visited two places. One place with totally wild and skittish Sousliks and one place with habituated ones.

Between the towns Hrhov and Zadiel in Slovensky krast, Southern part of Slovakia, there is a pasture with a colony of Sousliks. Around here: [48°36'24.1"N 20°46'44.9"E](#)

They are very skittish. Sit still or in the car to wait them out to come back out.



Skittish Souslik from Slovak karst

Habituated but wild Sousliks you find in hundreds here: [48°45'26.6"N 20°04'20.1"E](#) Where they have become a tourist attraction. Warning for MANY people and not that wild experience. The place even have it's own website: <https://www.syslovisko.sk/>



Habituated Sousliks make up for some good photos though

5. Alpine chamois --- (Lifer) Subspecies Tatra chamois. Lives in the High Tatra mountains of Poland and Slovakia. Just above 1000 individuals now roam these mountains.

I had my sighting here: [49°11'58.2"N 20°14'06.3"E](#) on a misty day. It's quite cold up here so bring a jacket. We saw a mother with young after scanning the mountain side with binocular for about 1 hour after the fog left.

You can take the cable car up, so you don't have to walk all the way. It's here: [49°09'57.4"N 20°16'09.0"E](#) and cost about 30 Euro for a return ticket. Then it's well marked pathways once you are on the mountain.



6. **Red fox** --- At dusk there were always some Foxes out in the open fields...



7. **Lesser horseshoe bat** --- The only cave we visited was Jasovska cave: [48°40'37.0"N 20°58'34.8"E](#)

There is a small parking space for the caves and then you walk a couple of hundred meters. There is a path on the right which winds its way up the hill. It will take you 5-10 minutes to reach this cave which is free to visit. There is another “show cave” which costs money and which most people visit. The bats are in this other, smaller cave.



8. Greater horseshoe bat --- (Lifer) Also seen in Jasovska cave. A lifer for me as I had only seen it's lesser cousin before...

A bit far away up in the cave ceiling though.



Lesser and Greater horseshoe bats was what we saw in the Jasovska cave. Sometimes there are other species here too.

9. Geoffroy's bat --- (Lifer) In an old church-tower which I forgot where...

There was a colony of this species roosting here. But too scary climb for me to see them. Lucky me one tried to escape and flew almost in my head...



10. Whiskered bat --- (Lifer) Several bats of this species had taken refuge behind the window coverings at the forest cottages.



11. Parti-coloured bat --- (Lifer) Also found behind the window coverings at the forest cottages.



12. Red deer --- No photos of them but very common in the fields at dusk

Stuff I missed

Alot of bat species. You can easily see around 20 species of bats in Slovakia (out of 28 recorded) if you do some bat netting and know where to go. Unfortunately Stephans illness made this impossible for us.

A lot of interesting rodents missed as well but we didn't look for them. Nor did we catch any rodents.

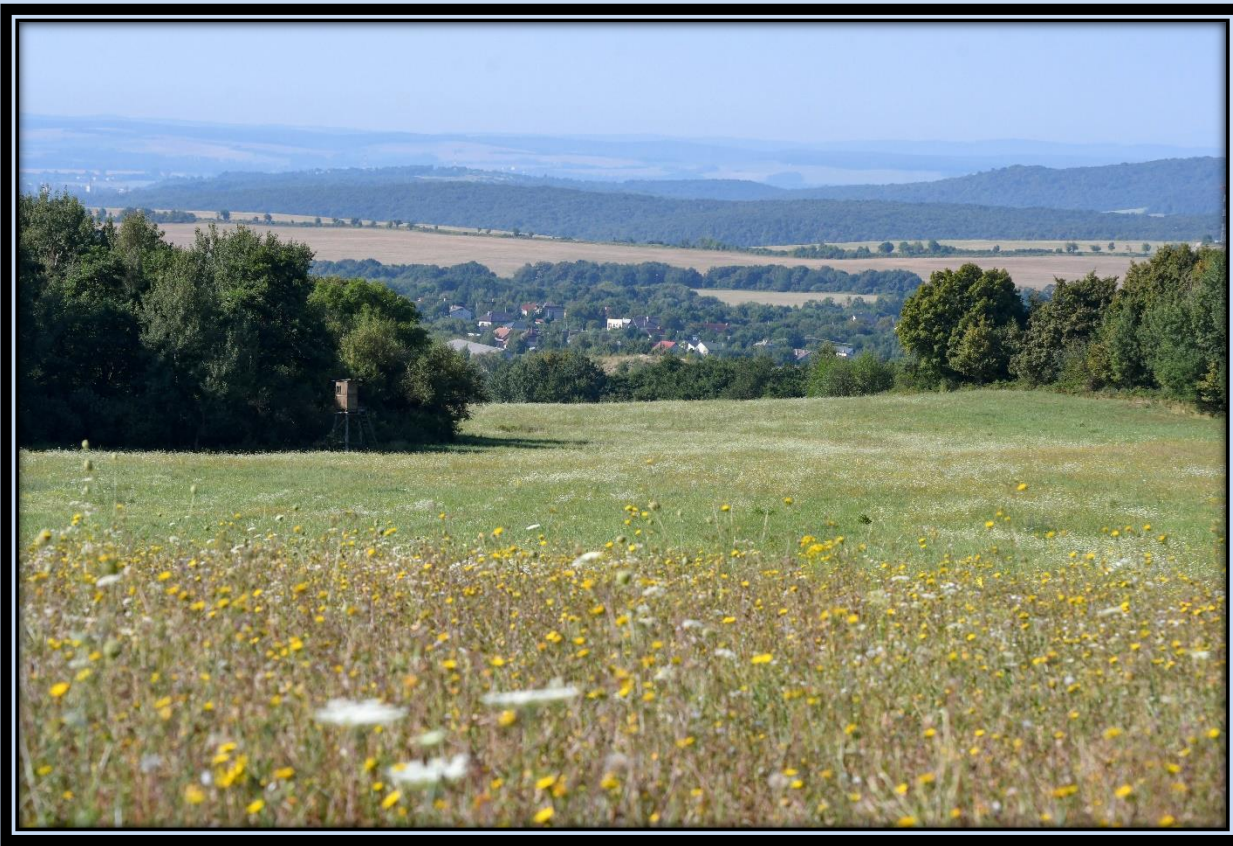
All in all 6 new lifers for me with top four sightings of **European hamster**, **European souslik**, **Alpine chamois** and **Parti-coloured bat**.

Random photos from my time in Slovakia



Left: Jasovska caves where we found Lesser and Greater horseshoe bats.

Right: Alpine chamois territory in the high Tatras.



Typical Slovakian scenery with meadows



European green lizard



Top left: Unknown butterfly

Bottom left: Sand lizard

Top right: Wasp spider

Middle right: Unknown butterfly

Bottom right: Unknown dragonfly



Grass snake



Lesser spotted eagle with prey



Left: *European hamster - Vienna*

Right: *European souslik - Slovakia*



Common european viper



High Tatras rising from the lowlands

Big thank you from me to...

- My guide Peter who with incredibly little time stepped in and helped us complete this tour. Without him there would be nothing.
- Also thanx to Stephan who remotely guided Peter and us from his hospital bed...
- Thank you Gabor Orban at Ecotours for quick responds and for trying to make the best of a difficult situation.
- Thanx Charles for great company.

Species list – Slovakia

Roe deer
Red deer
Red Squirrel
Red fox
Alpine chamois (subspecies Tatra chamois)
European souslik
Lesser horseshoe bat
Greater horseshoe bat
Whiskered bat
Parti-coloured bat
Geoffroy's bat

Species list – Vienna - Austria

European hamster
Red squirrel

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