

Photographing Birds in Hungary
Images and text copyright Jan Duker and Hillebrand Breuker, all rights reserved

Introduction

If you are keen on photographing birds, consider a visit to Hungary. Hungary offers opportunities to photograph birds that are rare in West European countries such as Holland or Germany. Birds seem to be less shy too, but still take your portable hide with you. Like bird photography around the world, you will have to get up early in the morning!

Hungary is a popular destination for vacationing, but slowly photographers seem to be discovering what this country offers. The Balaton region is well known for tourism, but it's also a good place for you to bring your camera. Where I spent most of my time was at the Donau Delta; I stayed in the little village of Vajta, to the west of the Donau, at road number 63. It is about 100km south from Budapest and about 60km at the eastside of the Balaton lake.

We stayed for only a short period, about a week or so. I was overwhelmed with photographic subjects and had to work to focus on particular subjects and/or areas for best results.



Photography Areas

Very close to the campsite (about 15km), three areas were rich with photo possibilities: Lato Hegi, Retimajor and Kistapé. We also made a trip to Kis Balaton, at the southwest corner of the (much larger) Lake Balaton. Kis Balaton is a restricted area and normally not opened for the public or photographers; to enter this area you need a permit. Because the road signs are a bit vague, directions to specific areas have been included here.

Lato Hegi

Lato Hegi is close to the campsite. Upon leaving, follow the road to Vajta. Not far along, across from a large white house, is a road to the left. Take this and after about 500 meters don't follow the road to the right, but follow the sandy road straight into the woods. Follow the white signs on the trees (sometimes hard to see) and after a while you will reach the area called Lato Hegi. After entering the area you will find a place where they dig sand at your right. Here you will find Bee Eaters and Sand Martins. The Sand Martins have their nests in the steep sandy walls.

This area is quite nice for landscape photography, with its open areas and small hills. It also has a lot of woodland scenes with a variety of trees. There are reasonably good sandy roads in this area and you are free to go where you want.

If you get up early enough you may come across Red Deer, Roe Deer and also Wild Boar. In the mulberry tree we found the Eurasian Hoopoe, a beautiful bird, but we were unable to take much for photos. However, seeing this bird through the binoculars was a wonderful experience regardless.



Retimajor

Retimajor consists of a large number of small lakes, which are in use as fish ponds. Because of the large amount of fish, this area is bird heaven and, therefore, also great for bird photography.

Retimajor is about 10 kilometers to the north of Camping Aucost (campground.) Take the road to Cece and follow road number 63 through Rétszilás. After Rétszilás, you will enter a small village, which has some silos at the left side of the road. After these silos, take the first road to the left, and after about 5 kilometers, you will find the entrance to Retimajor on the left. Before entering, have a look at the small lake at the right – the number of birds in this small lake is astonishing! Here we found species such as Little Egret, Great White Egret and Night Heron. And not just one bird, but 10 to 15 egrets at a time. The small lake is close to the road. When we first arrived we slowly drove up and down the road and took pictures from the car, using the car as a hide. Birds like the Night Heron were easy to approach from the car; at times we were able to get within 10 or 15 meters. The road is very busy with cars passing very close. We found that a bit too dangerous, so we decided to leave the car behind and go on by foot. At the edge of the lake, with the camera on a tripod, chances of photographing Great White Egrets and other birds are great. You can watch and photograph the birds fishing, flying and roosting in the trees without disturbing them. Species like Little Egret and the Night Heron are very rare and shy in the Netherlands.

Upon entering Retimajor there is a small office near the first fish pond. Here you have to buy a permit, which allows you to drive through the whole area. The permit is valid for one day and will cost about 10 Euros. Next to the office is the largest fish

pond of Retimajor, and you may see a lot of people fishing. Based on this, Retimajor may seem a bit crowded, but typically the people who fish stay at this pond only. Driving to other areas should reveal more isolated spots quiet enough for bird photography, much of which is best done from the car. In this part of Retimajor birds are very shy; leaving the car will likely cause the birds to take flight. Here we found Squacco Heron, Nightingale and Red-backed Shrike. We spent two days in Retimajor; it was one of the best spots we visited.

Kistape

In the nature reserve, Kistape, one can find a Bee Eater colony, Great Reed Warblers, Stone Chats, Purple Herons, bittern, woodpeckers and more, most of which can be photographed quite easily from a portable hide. We concentrated most of our time on the Bee Eaters, but did not hesitate to push the shutter button when a Stonechat family landed on our perches.

When you travel by car from Vajta to Kistape you will drive through Bikács, which is a very small village. From Bikács one drives on a sand road along a fishing pond into the woods. In the middle of the woods (where the Black Woodpecker breeds) you have to make a turn and drive along a little stream. At the riverbed of this stream the Bee Eaters are situated. This is the place to be! If you drive a little further you will find a small lake, which is surrounded by marsh with some nice trees. You can hike around the small lake. In this area you will find all kinds of reed warblers, Night Herons, Squacco Herons, Purple Herons, Marsh Harriers, Water Rail, Reed Bunting, bittern, woodpeckers and also lapwings on the farmland.

We photographed about three days in this area. For two complete days we stayed in a little hide to photograph the Bee-Eaters, which was worth it! The Bee Eater is such a beautiful bird that it is almost addictive to photograph it.

Kis Balaton

The Kis Balaton (or little Balaton) was once a part of the Balaton lake but is now a very important wetland area and one of the best birding spots in Hungary. More than 150 different species breed there; it is a restricted area, but we arranged guidance well before our trip to Hungary and could freely walk and drive through the area. This was a terrific experience. Although we did not photograph much, our eyes were spoiled with lots of treats like Purple Heron, Night Herons, Great Reed Warblers, and Ferruginous Duck.

Pygme Cormorant and White Egrets. In several places one has a good view of the entire area. There are two birding towers. The area is also attractive to people who are interested in flora, butterflies and landscape photography.



Travelling and a Place to Stay

Travelling to Hungary is relatively easy. The main roads in Hungary are very good. In our case, we travelled by car. Despite the fact that most of the areas we visited are close to the campsite (except Kis Balaton), most of the areas are very difficult to reach by public transport. Travelling by plane and renting a car in Hungary is also possible, but expensive!

We stayed at Camping Aucost, which has good facilities if you want to stay for a week or longer. You can bring your own tent, or rent one, or even rent a caravan or a holiday house. In the spring the prices are very reasonable, especially when travelling together with other photographers so you can share the costs.

The last two weeks of May and the first two weeks of June are great times to visit. At the end of May the temperature is about 20 to 25 degrees Celsius, but will rise fast in June.

Aucost Holiday Parc
Termálsor 1
7041 Vajta
Hungary
Telephone: 00 36 25 229 700
Telefax: 00 36 25 229 700
www.aucost.nl
holidayparc@aucost.nl

Summary

If you prepare your trip well, Hungary will reveal its birding gems to you on a daily basis. Get up early, work from a hide or car, be persistent and focus on a few species to get the best results.



Jan Duker and Hillebrand Breuker are two dedicated nature photographers from the Netherlands. Bird and landscape photography are their mutual and main interests. When their business and family schedules allow them, they photograph together in the north of the Netherlands. The Waddensea and the marshlands of Friesland are their “home grounds.” To share their experience with other people they developed a weekend workshop, Nature Photography and Digital Imaging. For more information on Jan, please visit www.janduker.com; for more on Hillebrand, please visit www.breuker-fotografie.nl. Jan and Hillebrand are members of the PIXUS agency. A bit more info about the agency and its photographers can be found at www.pixus.nl

Feel free to send your comments on this article to the [editors](#) at NatureScapes.Net.

[COVER](#) [HOME](#) [GUIDELINES](#) [FORUMS](#) [MEMBERSHIP](#) [WORKSHOPS](#) [ARCHIVES](#) [LINKS](#)

All content on this site is copyrighted material as indicated. Unauthorized use or reproduction is prohibited.