# Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria & Croatia

## Birding the Former Iron Curtain



**Great Bustard displaying by Gerrard Gorman**

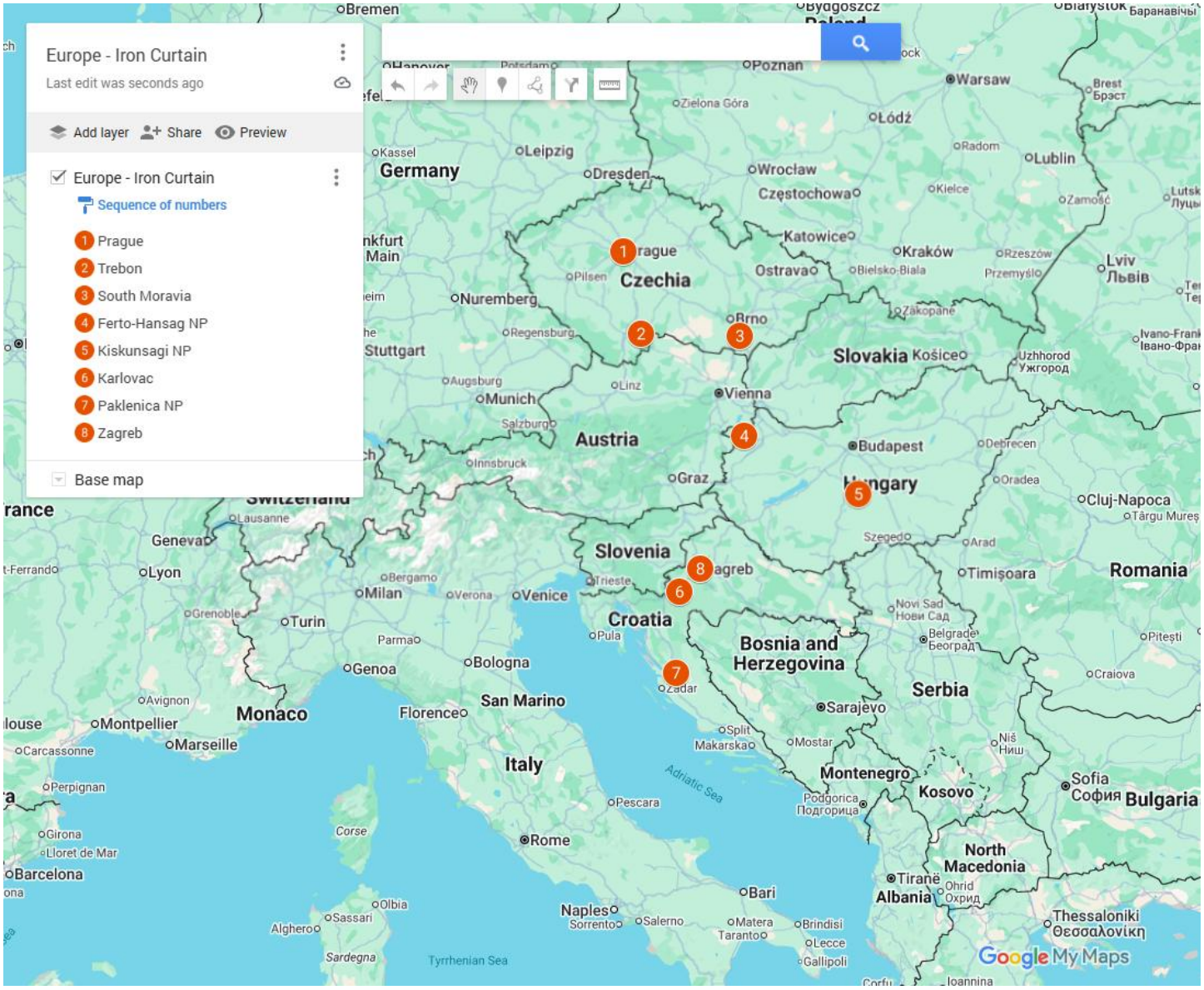
*Birding the former Iron Curtain birdwatching tour will explore the prime birding areas in the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. Plenty of 'eastern' specialties occur here and these will form the focus of our birding. Targets on our Europe birding tour include Bearded Reedling, Pygmy Cormorant, Ferruginous Duck, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Saker Falcon, Little Crake, Syrian, White-backed and Grey-headed Woodpecker (all 10 European woodpecker species are possible on this Europe birding tour!), River Warbler and Lesser Grey Shrike.*

*We also spend some time near the Mediterranean, taking in the delights of Croatia for Rock Partridge, Western Black-eared Wheatear, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Sombre Tit, Western Rock Nuthatch and Black-headed Bunting. We have good chances for displaying Great Bustard (surely one of the greatest birding spectacles in the world!), Common Crane, the fabulous Black Woodpecker and beautiful Bluethroat are but a few of the numerous avian attractions in this fascinating land.*

*Though the focus of our Europe birding tours is essentially upon the area's birds, we certainly will not neglect the many cultural and historical sites and old towns that we encounter. Indeed, this is a region steeped in history, both ancient and recent, and there will be opportunities to opt out of some of the birding excursions for those who wish to take in more of the area's rich history instead. We will stay in small guesthouses at great birding locations throughout this Europe birding tour, and food will always consist of hearty local cuisine. Several of the areas we visit are also wine-growing regions, and we will no doubt sample some of the local viticultural produce!*

## *Itinerary & Map*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Day 1** | **Arrival in Prague, transfer to Trebon (Czech Republic)** |
| **Day 2** | **Trebon** |
| **Day 3** | **Trebon to South Moravia** |
| **Day 4** | **South Moravia** |
| **Day 5** | **South Moravia to Ferto-Hansag (Hungary via Austria)** |
| **Day 6** | **Ferto-Hansag area** |
| **Day 7** | **Ferto-Hansag to Kiskunsagi National Park (Hungary)** |
| **Day 8** | **Kiskunsagi National Park** |
| **Day 9** | **Kiskunsagi National Park to north-west Croatia (Croatia)** |
| **Day 10** | **North-west Croatia to Paklenica National Park via Dalmatia** |
| **Day 11** | **Paklenica National Park** |
| **Day 12** | **Paklenica National Park to Zagreb** |
| **Day 13** | **Final departure** |


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Sequence of numbers
1 Prague
2 Trebon
3 South Moravia
4 Ferto-Hansag NP
5 Kiskunsagi NP
6 Karlovac
7 Paklenica NP
8 Zagreb
Base map
Germany
Czechia
Slovakia
Austria
Hungary
Slovenia
Croatia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Serbia
Montenegro
Kosovo
North Macedonia
Albania
Bulgaria
Romania
Italy
Switzerland
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## *Birding sites in detail*



**Long-eared Owl by Gerard Gorman**

**Prague to Trebon.** After arriving and meeting in Prague, we head south to through the pleasant rolling landscapes of south Bohemia to our destination in the Trebon Basin Biosphere Reserve. This scenic lake-land is actually a mosaic of more than 500 man-made fish ponds, many dating from the Middle Ages when monks created them for carp production. Besides the water features, there are conifer forests, birch, willow and alder thickets, farmlands and wet-meadows with a great diversity of birds.

**Trebon.** The town has rooftop nests of White Storks, and we may find European Green Woodpecker, European Serin, Black Redstart, White Wagtail, Spotted and Collared Flycatchers, Short-toed Treecreeper and Fieldfare in the surrounds.

**Trebon Basin Biosphere Reserve.** We'll spend time visiting the various habitats around Trebon. Our birding will be set in attractive, quiet rural landscapes dotted with old villages. The drives between sites are short and walks are flat and easy. The ponds vary in size from small hatcheries to large open waters and can be explored from convenient raised dams and dykes. Birds may include Black-necked and Great Crested Grebes, Common Goldeneye, Common and Red-crested Pochard, White-tailed Eagle, Green Sandpiper, Lesser Spotted, Middle Spotted, Grey-headed and Black Woodpeckers, Whinchat, Common Stonechat, singing Bluethroats (white-spotted race) and reedbeds filled with Savi's, Sedge and Great Reed Warblers and the lovely Bearded Reedling. This evening we will also go out just before dusk to look for Eurasian Pygmy Owl and displaying Eurasian Woodcock.



**Middle-spotted Woodpecker by Gerard Gorman**

**Trebon to South Moravia (Czech Republic).** We move eastwards from Bohemia into South Moravia, the Czech Republic's southernmost region. As we do so, the landscape changes dramatically, being typified by vineyards and orchards. Indeed, Moravia has a generally more "Mediterranean" feel to it than Bohemia. We will make several birding stops in the varied habitats on the way, including the limestone Palava Hills that are dominated by a castle ruin and blanketed by vineyards. Here typical birds include Eurasian Wryneck, the beautiful Eurasian Golden Oriole, Common Cuckoo, Woodlark, Red-backed Shrike, Collared Flycatcher, Common Nightingale, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Common Whitethroat and Yellowhammer. We also have the opportunity to visit a colony of colourful European Bee-eaters at their nesting burrows, and will probably see our first Syrian Woodpecker - a bird of villages and orchards. Possible raptors today include Eurasian Hobby, European Honey Buzzard, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Northern Goshawk. Below the hills, the Nove



**Hawfinch by Adam Riley**

Mlyny reservoirs host a noisy mixed colony of Common Tern and Black-headed Gull, and often include some pairs of Mediterranean and Yellow-legged Gulls.

**South Moravia.** We visit the gardens, parkland and lake of the Zamecky Chateau at Lednice. This is easy birding in a wonderful cultural and architectural setting! Eight species of woodpecker occur here, including Grey-headed, White-backed and possibly Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, as well as Common Kingfisher, Willow, Wood, Garden and Icterine Warblers, Common and Lesser Whitethroats, Eurasian Jackdaw, Greenfinch and Hawfinch. Regular ducks on the lake are Gadwall, Garganey, Northern Shoveler, Tufted Duck and both Common and Red-crested Pochards. Besides the impressive chateau and grounds, the centrepiece at Lednice is a mixed island colony of White Stork, Great Cormorant, Black-crowned Night Heron and Grey Heron. Red and Black Kites and Black Stork often soar over the nearby floodplain forest. We'll probably also see Red Squirrel and find signs of European Beaver activity, such as felled and gnawed trees and with a little luck on our side, we may even see one of these mainly nocturnal mammals. At the end of the day, we will visit a site for Eurasian Eagle-Owl.

**South Moravia to Ferto-Hansag (Hungary via Austria).** We head south, crossing into Austria as we continue towards Hungary. En route, we will follow the formerly closed border-zone between 'Czechoslovakia' and Austria. This floodplain is dotted with large, gnarled oaks, ashes and elms, plantations, ox-bow lakes, damp meadows, temporary pools and channels. As we bird, we'll see the old concrete military bunkers (remnants from WW2 and the notorious Iron Curtain). On the bird front, Black and White Storks, Eurasian Spoonbill, Red and Black Kites and the uncommon Saker Falcon breed here.

As we continue through Austria, we may well stop at any likely looking spots for Montagu's Harrier, Common Kingfisher, Common Grasshopper, River and Marsh Warblers, Short-toed Treecreeper and Middle Spotted Woodpecker. Overhead, we can expect to see European Honey Buzzard and both Red and Black Kite.

**Ferto-Hansag area.** The Austro-Hungarian border region of the Hansag hosts two cross-frontier National Parks (Neusiedler See-Seewinkel in Austria and Ferto-Hansag in Hungary), which jointly protect the varied wetland habitats around the large steppe lake of Neusiedler. Once again, this is another example of a former border area that became a wildlife haven and subsequently a protected area. Habitats include saline-lakes, salt-marshes, fens, traditionally managed pastures, grazing meadows and copses. Up to 30 species of shorebirds are possible here on passage,



**Bearded Reedling by Gerard Gorman**



**Little Crake by Adam Riley**

including Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Dunlin and Spotted Redshank. Breeding species include Kentish Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Common Shelduck and Mediterranean Gull.

With some 178 square kilometres of reed-beds within the park, it is not surprisingly a haven for nesting Eurasian and Little Bitterns, Little and Red-necked Grebes, ducks, herons, Spotted and Little Crakes and Water Rails. This is also a particularly good area for wetland songbirds, such as Eurasian Penduline Tit and Moustached Warbler and we will look hard for these species. A few Great Bustards still reside on the cross-border grasslands and we may take another look at these very impressive birds. We will also search for any species which may have escaped us so far on the tour..

**Ferto-Hansag to Kiskunsagi National Park (Hungary).** We head further eastwards through Hungary to cross the Danube and enter the Hungarian Plain. We will make stops in areas where two decidedly eastern European birds of prey occur: Eastern Imperial Eagle and Saker Falcon. Other birds en route should include Common Quail, Grey Partridge, European Turtle Dove, European Roller, the blue-headed race of Western Yellow Wagtail, Tawny Pipit, Crested Lark, Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting and more White Storks on their huge nests.

**Kiskunsagi National Park.** The superb Kiskunsagi region is a mosaic of varied lowland habitats. The wetlands here host some birds that we will have seen on the previous days, but also some others of a more easterly distribution, including Pygmy Cormorant, Ferruginous Duck and Little Crake.

Ponds have colonies of Whiskered Terns, and marshes host Black and White-winged Terns in most years. Purple Heron and Little and Great White Egrets are fairly common. Some Mediterranean Gulls breed amongst the Black-headed Gulls and both the recently split Yellow-legged and Caspian Gulls can be compared here. The other main habitat is puszta (lowland grazing land) and we will explore it for Great Bustard - Hungary's national bird. Other possible species include Collared Pratincole, Eurasian Stone-curlew, Little and Long-eared Owls, and Lesser Grey Shrike. Raptors include Long-legged Buzzard, Saker and Red-footed Falcons, the latter breeding in colonies at this time.

On one of our evenings here, we will try for Eurasian Scops Owl and European Nightjar.



**Eastern Imperial Eagle by Adam Riley**



**Male & Female Red-footed Falcons by Rob Williams**

**North-west Croatia to Paklenica National Park via Dalmatia (Croatia).** We depart north-west Croatia this morning and head to towards the Dalmatian Coast before turning south towards Paklenica National Park. Passing through agricultural fields dotted with Mediterranean scrub we shall search for a variety of Calandra and Short-toed Lark, Cirl Bunting, Common Linnet, Tawny Pipit, European Turtle Dove, Eurasian Hoopoe and Western Black-eared Wheatear.

In the afternoon we head up to known stakeout for one of the Western Palearctic's most elusive resident species, Rock Partridge. Here we shall search the expanses of grey limestone rock for a very similarly coloured bird. With luck and many good sets of eyes to help, we should get visuals of the tricky species before the sun sets. Aside from the Rock Partridge, the surrounding slopes are covered in Spring orchids, while on the avian front we should find Eastern Orphean Warbler, Western Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Black-headed Bunting, European Pied and Spotted Flycatcher, Sardinian and Wood Warbler, Whinchat and Woodchat Shrike.

**Paklenica National Park.** Located on the Dalmatian coast, Paklenica National Park is a large karst river canyon. Due to the parks topography, accessibility is difficult and development almost impossible. This has allowed a host of near endemic fauna and flora to flourish in the park. As one of the most popular rock climbing destinations in eastern Europe, we should certainly expect to see the odd climber scaling the gorges above us. We shall concentrate our initial efforts at the entrance to gorge, where noisy colonies of Alpine Swift and Eurasian Crag Martin keep us occupied while we scour the lower scrub for Western Rock Nuthatch. Other species we may find include Sardinian and Subalpine Warbler, Eurasian Wryneck and possibly European Scops Owl. With a little luck, we may find a host of other interesting fauna including Fire Salamander, Grass Snake, Northern Chamois and Eurasian Red Squirrel.



**Eurasian Stone-curlew by David Hoddinott**

## *Tour Grading & Key*

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|---|---|---|
| **Overall Ease** |  | Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels. |
| **Birding Ease** |  | Moderate to undemanding. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions. |
| **Accommodation** |  | Comfortable. |
| **Walking / Trails** |  | Reasonably easy. Most walks on flat ground, paved/gravel roads. A few longer hikes on rougher ground with short inclines (optional). Some boggy areas. |
| **Vehicles / Roads** |  | Good quality sealed roads & unsealed dirt roads. Some long drives broken up with birding stops. |
| **Photography** |  | Good to very good. |
| **Annoyances** |  | Very long days with some very early mornings. Weather is variable, shifting quickly from mild to cold, or very cold due to wind chill. Small biting insects can be numerous under the right weather conditions. |

## *Financial Arrangements and Important Notes*

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- All lodgings;
- Ground and boat transportation as noted in the itinerary;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (**including bottled water** and mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- No tips or gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**Single Supplement**: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

**Tipping**: As noted above, gratuities are NOT included on this tour. If you feel that your leader/s have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 18kg (40 lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.

**Seasonal Timing & Weather Variability**
This tour is scheduled to coincide with what has historically been the most productive period for birding in the region. However, weather patterns, including temperature, rainfall, snow cover, wind strength and wind direction, as well as broader environmental factors such as food availability, can significantly influence migration timing, breeding activity and bird distribution from year to year. In some seasons, key events such as migration peaks, breeding cycles or post-breeding dispersal may occur earlier or later than average, and the duration of these peak periods can be surprisingly brief. At migration bottlenecks in particular, prevailing wind conditions can have a major impact on the volume and diversity of birds moving through an area on any given day. While our itinerary is designed around long-term historical patterns and offers excellent birding prospects, no fixed-date tour can guarantee that it will coincide precisely with the absolute peak of every seasonal phenomenon. Guests whose primary objective is to experience a specific migration event or seasonal spectacle at its peak may wish to consider a Tailor-made Tour, where travel dates and locations can be adjusted closer to departure in response to prevailing conditions.

## *Arrival and Departure Details*

The tour will depart from Václav Havel Airport, Prague (IATA: PRG) in the Czech Republic on day 1, and will conclude at Franjo Tuđman Airport, Zagreb (IATA: ZAG) in Croatia after breakfast on day 13.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Václav Havel Airport, Prague (IATA: PRG) is the main port of entry for international flights into the Czech Republic and is well serviced by most of the world's major airlines, while Franjo Tuđman Airport, Zagreb (IATA: ZAG) is the main port of departure for international flights out of Croatia.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

**DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.**