

THE CZECH REPUBLIC: Birds & Music tour

“At just 15 cm (smaller than such passerines as Hawfinch and Great Reed Warbler which were still to come) the Eurasian Pygmy Owl – the smallest Palearctic owl – had enough charisma and self-confident presence to fill an owl twice its size, so it seemed an appropriate species to launch our bird list on our first evening in the forests of the Sumava mountains as it perched in bright light on the nearest small pine. Woodcock sneezed and grunted overhead on their roving flights and a Grasshopper Warbler reeled from across the meadow. Other memorable moments in this attractive area included scoping a Black Grouse lek whilst the tree alongside us hosted a succession of supporting acts (Common Rosefinch, Hawfinch, Marsh tit, Spotted Flycatcher, Fieldfare); the instant roadside cabaret from our wish-list trio of Firecrest, Goldcrest, and Crested Tit; the Whinchats, Red-backed Shrike, and Wood Warbler on our walk to Soumarsky Most; and even the Siskins, Bullfinches, and Grey Wagtails seen from our bedroom balconies. And all the more enjoyable thanks to the perfect weather: warm sun with a pleasantly cooling breeze and clear blue skies to enhance our scenic photographs.

Photographic opportunities abounded also in the fairytale town of české Krumlov and our stroll down through the gardens of the castle brought us more birds including not only the ubiquitous Black Redstarts and Nuthatches but also Lesser Whitethroat and Common Redstart. The Trebon basin with its mosaic of 500 mediaeval fishponds and ancient oaks yielded five White-tailed Eagles, the only Spoonbills nesting in the Czech Republic, our first Collared Flycatchers, our only Grey-headed Woodpecker and Goldeneye, numerous Red-crested Pochards, and a range of species from Black-necked Grebe and Night Heron to Little Ringed Plover and Shelduck – and all this despite an unexpectedly drizzly day.

Baroque and Renaissance shield houses were the common denominator on our journey east from Trebon, via Telč (enlivened by a colourful competition of drum majorettes), to Třebíč (where we found time to explore the largest remaining Jewish quarter in the country). Then on to Vltčnov with its even more colourful Ride of the King festival (and singing Icterine Warbler and Serin) and our border-castle hotel at Hlohovec. The hotel grounds around the lake provided Black Woodpeckers for those who had missed this species in Sumava plus our first Black Stork and our only Long-tailed Tit. Nearby were a pair of Garganey and Cuckoo, Golden Oriole, and Nightingale finally showed themselves after so many days of ‘heard only’. Only a little further afield Lednice castle park delivered Great Reed Warbler, Great Egrets, and a profusion of Night Herons and Continental Cormorants. And other Moravian target species included Yellow Wagtail, Linnet, Penduline Tit, Caspian and Mediterranean Gulls, and spectacularly a colony of Bee-eaters which are usually found in Europe only as far north as the 21°C July isotherm. But without doubt the best of birding in this area was thanks to the permission granted to enter the Soutok flood plain (a formally forbidden no-go buffer zone on the borders of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Austria). Eastern Imperial Eagles, Black Kites, and Red Kites all performed for us together with such passerine padders as Stonechat, Reed Bunting, and Yellowhammer.

Our final morning in Pruhonice park on the outskirts of Prague offered a reprise of various species encountered over the previous ten days – no less than seven Great Spotted Woodpeckers, both male and female Collared Flycatcher, our final Jay, and a final Kingfisher flashing by.

Complementing the birds were our musical events. The charming Pipers of Trebon offered a comprehensive introduction to the Czech musical tradition which was developed by various folk ensembles at Vltčnov and Prague and by our cymbalon trio in the wine cellars. The ceremonial opening concert of the Moravian international music festival of 13 towns in the basilica of St Prokopius (with the Brno Philharmonic and the Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno performing Schubert’s wonderful aria *Salve regina*, Fibich’s seldom-performed graceful *Missa brevis*, and Dvorak’s famous *Te Deum*) was as thrilling an experience as could be imagined. The trumpet and organ recital in St Nicholas church also thrilled us with rousing renditions of Handel, Haydn, Buxtehude, Mozart, Bach, Pachelbel, Mouret, and černořorsky. And our two Mozart operas (the

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Magic Flute and Cosi fan tutti) – though very different productions – were both spectacular in their way.

Add to this a series of varied and substantial meals (with imaginative vegetarian and celiac options), a charming and efficient escort, a safe and particularly obliging driver, a succession of knowledgeable local guides, and ten very congenial participants, and our ten days in the Czech Republic could not have been bettered.” – *Bryan Bland*.

Bird List:

Column A = Number of tours on which this species has been recorded.

Column B = Number of days this species was seen on the last tour.

Column C = Maximum daily count for this species on the last tour.

H = Heard only

(H) = Mostly heard but some seen

A		B	C		
10	Little Grebe	1	1	H	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
10	Great Crested Grebe	5	60		<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
10	Black-necked Grebe	1	3		<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
10	Continental Cormorant	3	50		<i>Phalacrocorax (carbo) sinensis</i>
2	Little Bittern				<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
10	Night Heron	6	100		<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
1	Squacco Heron				<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
6	Little Egret				<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
6	Great Egret	2	5		<i>Egretta alba</i>
10	Grey Heron	5	100		<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
9	Black Stork	2	5		<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
10	White Stork	5	50		<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
9	Spoonbill	1	5		<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
10	Mute Swan	6	75		<i>Cygnus olor</i>
10	Greylag Goose	4	60		<i>Anser anser</i>
5	Shelduck	3	23		<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
1	Mandarin				<i>Aix galericulata</i>
1	Wood Duck				<i>Aix sponsa</i>
1	Wigeon				<i>Anas penelope</i>
10	Gadwall	6	20		<i>Anas strepera</i>
4	Teal				<i>Anas crecca</i>
10	Mallard	10	100		<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
8	Garganey	2	2		<i>Anas querquedula</i>
1	Pintail				<i>Anas acuta</i>
9	Shoveler	2	9		<i>Anas clypeata</i>
10	Red-crested Pochard	5	100		<i>Netta rufina</i>
10	Pochard	5	'00s		<i>Aythya ferina</i>
10	Tufted Duck	6	45		<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
10	Goldeneye	1	4		<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
1	Smew				<i>Mergellus albellus</i>

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10	White-tailed Eagle	1	5	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
8	Honey Buzzard			<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
10	Black Kite	1	7	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
7	Red Kite	2	5	<i>Milvus milvus</i>
10	Marsh Harrier	4	8	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
1	Hen Harrier			<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
1	Montagu's Harrier			<i>Circus pygargus</i>
4	Goshawk			<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
8	Sparrowhawk	1	1	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
10	Common Buzzard	9	10	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
10	Imperial Eagle	1	2	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>
2	Lesser Spotted Eagle			<i>Aquila pomarina</i>
2	Osprey			<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
10	Kestrel	7	7	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
8	Hobby			<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
5	Saker			<i>Falco cherrug</i>
6	Peregrine			<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
3	Hazel Grouse			<i>Bonasa bonasia</i>
10	Black Grouse	1	3	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>
8	Grey Partridge			<i>Perdix perdix</i>
4	Quail			<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
10	Pheasant	3	2	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
1	Water Rail			<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>
9	Corncrake			<i>Crex crex</i>
7	Moorhen	2	1	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
10	Coot	5	70	<i>Fulica atra</i>
2	Black-winged Stilt			<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
9	Little Ringed Plover	2	2	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
2	Ringed Plover			<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
1	Grey Plover			<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
10	Lapwing	4	20	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
1	Temminck's Stint			<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
3	Ruff			<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
5	Common Snipe			<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
9	Woodcock	1	11	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>
7	Black-tailed Godwit			<i>Limosa limosa</i>
3	Curlew	1	2	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
1	Spotted Redshank			<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
8	Redshank	2	10	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
3	Greenshank			<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
4	Green Sandpiper			<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
5	Wood Sandpiper			<i>Tringa glareola</i>
5	Common Sandpiper	1	1	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
7	Mediterranean Gull	1	3	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
4	Little Gull			<i>Larus minutus</i>
10	Black-headed Gull	6	'00s	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>

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1	Common Gull				<i>Larus canus</i>
9	Caspian Gull	2	6		<i>Larus (cachinnans) cachinnans</i>
10	Common Tern	3	35		<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
3	Whiskered Tern				<i>Sterna hybrida</i>
7	Black Tern				<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
10	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	9	50		<i>Columba livia</i>
8	Stock Dove	1	1	H	<i>Columba oenas</i>
10	Woodpigeon	9	12		<i>Columba palumbus</i>
10	Collared Dove	9	50		<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
10	Turtle Dove	2	1	(H)	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
10	Cuckoo	10	4	(H)	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
1	Barn Owl				<i>Tyto alba</i>
1	Scops Owl				<i>Otus scops</i>
5	Eagle Owl				<i>Bubo bubo</i>
9	Pygmy Owl	1	1		<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>
1	Little Owl				<i>Athene noctua</i>
6	Tawny Owl				<i>Strix aluco</i>
3	Ural Owl				<i>Strix uralensis</i>
2	Long-eared Owl				<i>Asio otus</i>
8	Tengmalm's Owl				<i>Aegolius funereus</i>
5	Nightjar				<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>
10	Common Swift	6	25		<i>Apus apus</i>
9	Kingfisher	2	2		<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
8	Bee-eater	1	30		<i>Merops apiaster</i>
3	Hoopoe				<i>Upupa epops</i>
9	Wryneck				<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
10	Grey-headed Woodpecker	1	1		<i>Picus canus</i>
10	Green Woodpecker	2		H	<i>Picus viridis</i>
10	Black Woodpecker	3	4		<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
10	Great Spotted Woodpecker	5	7		<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
8	Syrian Woodpecker				<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>
9	Middle Spotted Woodpecker				<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>
3	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker				<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>
5	Three-toed Woodpecker				<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>
4	Crested Lark				<i>Galerida cristata</i>
1	Woodlark				<i>Lullula arborea</i>
10	Skylark	1		H	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
10	Sand Martin	1	30		<i>Riparia riparia</i>
10	Swallow	10	30		<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
10	House Martin	9	15		<i>Delichon urbica</i>
10	Tree Pipit	1	2		<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
10	Meadow Pipit	1	1		<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
7	Yellow Wagtail	2	3		<i>Motacilla flava</i>
10	Grey Wagtail	4	8		<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
10	White Wagtail	9	8		<i>Motacilla alba</i>
3	Dipper				<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>

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10	Wren	2	2		<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
10	Dunnock	1	2		<i>Prunella modularis</i>
10	Robin	4	3		<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
10	Nightingale	4	3	(H)	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
9	Bluethroat				<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
10	Black Redstart	9	8		<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
10	Redstart	2	3		<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
10	Whinchat	3	4		<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
9	Stonechat	1	4		<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
3	Northern Wheatear				<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
5	Ring Ouzel	1	3		<i>Turdus torquatus</i>
10	Blackbird	10	40		<i>Turdus merula</i>
10	Fieldfare	3	20		<i>Turdus pilaris</i>
10	Song Thrush	10	30		<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
10	Mistle Thrush	2	7		<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
10	Grasshopper Warbler	2		H	<i>Locustella naevia</i>
10	River Warbler	1		H	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>
8	Savi's Warbler				<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>
10	Sedge Warbler	1	1		<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
10	Marsh Warbler	1	3		<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>
10	Reed Warbler	1	3		<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
10	Great Reed Warbler	1	1		<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
10	Icterine Warbler	1	2		<i>Hippolais icterina</i>
5	Barred Warbler				<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>
10	Lesser Whitethroat	3	2		<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
10	Whitethroat	2	1		<i>Sylvia communis</i>
10	Garden Warbler	3	1		<i>Sylvia borin</i>
10	Blackcap	9	20	(H)	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
10	Wood Warbler	2	1		<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
10	Chiffchaff	10	10	(H)	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
10	Willow Warbler	2	10	(H)	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
10	Goldcrest	1	2		<i>Regulus regulus</i>
10	Firecrest	1	1		<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
10	Spotted Flycatcher	4	5		<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
6	Red-breasted Flycatcher				<i>Ficedula parva</i>
10	Collared Flycatcher	5	3		<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>
5	Pied Flycatcher				<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
2	Bearded Tit				<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>
7	Long-tailed Tit	1	1		<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
10	Marsh Tit	2	1		<i>Parus palustris</i>
7	Willow Tit				<i>Parus montanus</i>
10	Crested Tit	1	6		<i>Parus cristatus</i>
10	Coal Tit	2	8		<i>Parus ater</i>
10	Blue Tit	8	5		<i>Parus caeruleus</i>
10	Great Tit	9	3		<i>Parus major</i>
10	Nuthatch	4	14		<i>Sitta europaea</i>

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10	Treecreeper	1	1		<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
10	Short-toed Treecreeper	1	1		<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
10	Penduline Tit	1	1		<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>
10	Golden Oriole	6	4	(H)	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
10	Red-backed Shrike	5	12		<i>Lanius collurio</i>
7	Great Grey Shrike				<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
10	Starling	6	10		<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
10	Jay	4	2		<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
10	Magpie	9	8		<i>Pica pica</i>
1	Spotted Nutcracker				<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>
10	Jackdaw	1	1		<i>Corvus monedula</i>
8	Rook	1	20		<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
5	Carrion Crow	2	2		<i>Corvus corone</i>
10	Hooded Crow	4	4		<i>Corvus cornix</i>
8	Raven				<i>Corvus corax</i>
10	House Sparrow	9	12		<i>Passer domesticus</i>
10	Tree Sparrow	6	20		<i>Passer montanus</i>
10	Chaffinch	10	50	(H)	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
10	Serin	2	5		<i>Serinus serinus</i>
10	Greenfinch	6	9		<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
10	Goldfinch	5	4		<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
10	Siskin	3	6		<i>Carduelis spinus</i>
10	Linnet	2	2		<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
9	Redpoll				<i>Carduelis flammea</i>
9	Crossbill				<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
10	Scarlet Rosefinch	2	4	(H)	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
10	Bullfinch	3	9		<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
10	Hawfinch	1	2		<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
10	Yellowhammer	3	1		<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
10	Reed Bunting	1	3		<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
4	Corn Bunting				<i>Miliaria calandra</i>