# European Conservation Action Network

**EuCAN Community Interest Company**



**Visit to Aggtelek National Park, north-eastern Hungary**

Tuesday 5th – Thursday 14th May 2015

**Joining Instructions and other information**

Travel arrangements

The journey out: Kathy and I will be driving the minibus out to Hungary with John and Diana, leaving on Friday May 1st, camping on the journey down and reaching Aggtelek on the evening of Monday 4th. On the morning of Tuesday 5th we will meet the 8 rail travellers at Keleti Station in Budapest around 9.10am – the night train is due to arrive at 9.05am. This will be considerably easier for the group than having to change trains for Gödöllö station as originally suggested. The four arriving by plane are going to make their own way to Aggtelek in their hire car. If anyone wants us to bring anything out in the minibus, we are quite happy to but we have to receive it by April 30th as we will be leaving early on the 1st.

We will aim to stop for lunch on the way to Aggtelek and to arrive at Komjati in mid-afternoon.

The journey back: the sleeper train leaves Budapest Keleti station at 9pm and after changes in München, Köln and Bruxelles, will arrive at the Eurostar terminal at St Pancras at 7.57pm all being well. We will drop the rail travellers at Keleti station with an hour or two to spare as we hope to get out of Budapest that evening – times to be negotiated! Happy to take bags back to the UK but we are not due back until the 22nd.

Insurance: you will need to take out insurance cover for your personal belongings and medical expenses. You should also make sure you have an International Health Card which you can obtain free (be careful, some providers make a charge).

Extras: The cost of the holiday does not include meals and refreshments on the journeys, entry fees into caves and other attractions (which are very inexpensive) or drinks with the meals while we are there (we will buy bottled water to accompany the picnics). It does include breakfasts each day in Hungary, picnics which we will buy or have made up locally and the evening meals at the guest house. It also includes minibus travel in Hungary and nine nights in the guesthouse.

The balance of the fee is now due – please pay it into the EuCAN account if you have not already done so.

Bank details:

Account name: EuCAN Community Interest Company, Sort Code: 08.92.99. A/c no. 65472987 Put your name and Aggtelek as the reference with the payment.

Cancellations: In the event of cancellation after the balance has been paid, the whole fee may be forfeited unless the place can be filled.

One of the aims of this holiday is to make a small profit to help fund EuCAN’s conservation activities – the proceeds from our 2014 Brenne trip helped to fund a group of 15 for a very successful working visit to France this February just past.

We have been visiting this area of Hungary since 2006 and have brought groups here to carry out conservation work or surveying from 2007 until 2010. We have got to know it very well and have become very fond of the people, the wildlife and the culture. One of our visits was in May (2009) when we carried out butterfly surveying for a PhD student, our friend and colleague Janos Tóth. Have a look at the photos from that trip on our Flickr site to get an idea of the scenery and landscape, and the richness of the fauna and flora. Go to: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/20427639@N06/sets> and scroll down to Hungary May 2009. What you cannot gather from the photos are the calls of all the birds, insects and amphibians that you can hear everywhere at this time of year. On our first night there we could hear a ‘bushcricket’ calling continuously nearly all night. In the morning we discovered it was a River Warbler!



You can see species lists and read the reports written by the participants on our EuCAN website: <http://www.eucan.org.uk/europe/2009-2/hungary/>

This will be the first time that we have taken a wildlife holiday as opposed to a training group to Aggtelek and we shall be staying in different accommodation. However we have visited the guest house at Komjati before (it belongs to the village mayor) and we know the village of Tornaszentandrás very well. We certainly know about Eszter’s catering! The week’s itinerary will be based on all our previous experience – every time we have been there we have discovered more new and amazing sites.

Accommodation

We have arranged to use the Malomtanya Guesthouse just outside the hamlet of Komjati in the valley of the Bódva river on the edge of the Gömör-Torna Karst, the extensive limestone area that extends into Slovakia. See: <http://www.malomtanyavendeghaz.hu/vendeghaz.html> ; and the Gulipán Guesthouse in the next village, the pretty little hamlet of Tornaszentandrás. See: <http://hotelce.com/gulipan-vendeghaz-tornaszentandras> .

Catering will be provided at the Malomtanya Guesthouse by the same family who have cooked for us on all the previous visits to Aggtelek – Eszter cooks superb Hungarian food. The surroundings of Komjati and Tornaszentandrás are full of wildlife and easily accessible. Take a look at the google earth aerial views of the area.

<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/dir//Tornaszentandr%C3%A1s,+Hungary/@48.5351009,20.7629978,8138m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m13!1m4!3m3!1s0x473f0c22104567d7:0xfc492b197375526b!2sTornaszentandr%C3%A1s,+Hungary!3b1!4m7!1m0!1m5!1m1!1s0x473f0c22104567d7:0xfc492b197375526b!2m2!1d20.7772253!2d48.5207883>

**Equipment List Make sure that your passport has at least 6 months on it** and keep it with you, not buried in your main suitcase! Please photocopy your passport (in black and white – it is illegal to make a colour copy of a passport apparently) and keep the copy in your main bag – that will make it much easier if anything happens to the original!

Whether you are travelling by train or plane, it is very important to bring only the essential items. Eurostar limit personal baggage to two medium sized cases and one piece of hand luggage. If possible, bring one medium sized case/bag and a small rucksack/haversack which you can use during the stay to carry packed lunches, water bottle, id books, wallet etc in. Very large cases will make life difficult – (if there is a choice between a giant case and two smaller ones, bring the two smaller ones!).

Just in case anything goes astray on the journey, I would recommend that you label each case/bag with your name, mobile phone number (beginning 0044..) and your home details on it.

**Identification Books**. It is useful to have a library of id books (in English) which covers as wide a range of animal and plant groups as possible and to try to arrange for them all to be transported in the minibus. To avoid duplication and to minimise the weight you have to carry, I have listed below the books we are bringing.

The flora of Hungary reflects its geographical position at a junction between four different vegetation areas (Mediterranean, northern European, western European and that of the eastern steppes) and therefore has to be covered by at least four floras! We have the definitive flora of the Carpathian basin – it measures approximately 450mm x 300mm x 120mm and weighs a ton! Luckily we shall have the minibus to carry it in. We have the Collins Bird Guide, Reptiles and Amphibians, Alpine and Mediterranean Flowers and the Wildflowers of Northwest Europe, Collins Butterflies of Europe by Tolman & Lewington and the new ‘Collins Guide’ edition of this one; Butterflies of Europe by Tristan Lafranchis; Chinery’s Butterflies and Dayflying Moths of Britain and Europe, and the new Dragonflies book by Dijkstra and Lewington; the Field Guide to the Moths of Britain and Ireland and the new photographic guide to British Moths and Butterflies by Chris Manley (of limited use as there are 10,000 moth species in Europe and ‘only’ 2500 in the UK!), the French European moths book and the reprint of the Guide to Moths of Northern and Central Europe (in Czech and German!); several Hungarian Lepidoptera books; guides to European Grasshoppers and Bushcrickets, Spiders and European Bats; and last but not least one of the best Field Guide to insects you can get for the UK, Michael Chinery’s ‘Insects of Britain and Western Europe’ (now republished by A & C Black). All these books will be transported in the trailer with the moth traps.

Let me know what else you might have that you could bring. If you have a bat detector, please bring it.

**Checklist of equipment to bring:**

**Passport,**

**International Health Card**. The International Health Card has replaced the E111, and can be obtained free via the internet. (don’t apply through the private company that makes you pay £10!) Passengers in minibuses in the EU have to carry one with them.

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**Money**: we suggest that you bring some Hungarian forints (HuF). It is possible to use bank cards to obtain cash in the post offices in Jósvafö and Szögliget, but it might be sensible to bring, say, £50 in forints (there are around 400 to the £ at the moment), more if you are not planning to bring your bankcard. You will need to have money to cover the cost of drinks, ice creams etc , souvenirs and entry to caves etc. You will also need a few euros for the journey out and back.

\*\*Banks like to be told if you are going abroad so that they know that someone hasn’t stolen your card and fled to Europe, so I would suggest that you let the bank know. We also suggest you store the emergency 24hour number for reporting stolen bank cards in your phone.

**Mobile phone/phone charger/battery charger**. Bring your own socket adaptor. It might be worth checking with your phone company that you will be getting the reduced rates that they are supposed to be applying for European calls, and that your phone will work in Hungary. The signal there is not always very reliable.

Notebook and pencil

**Hungarian Phrase book** – please bring your own so that you have no excuse for not trying the language, difficult though it is – the alphabet has 44 letters!

**Binoculars and camera**, +? telescope if you have one. Bring a charger for your camera battery if it is a special one and a USB lead for downloading photos – we will be bringing a laptop.

Toilet things – including a towel - night clothes, sun block and sunhat, insect repellant.

Wet weather gear – waterproof coat and overtrousers. Spare pair of light trousers for areas where shorts are inappropriate. It is likely to be hot! (possibly very hot) so bring suitable clothing.

Tough outdoor boots.

A set of smarter clothes and shoes perhaps for the evenings (!)

Bring a warm jumper for the visit to the caves and for the evening moth trapping and bat sessions, in case the nights are cold.

**A small personal 1st Aid Kit** – with plasters and a small roll of micropore tape, waspeeze, antiseptic wipes, a roll of bandage, a medium wound dressing and two prs of disposable gloves. We will be bringing a full 1st Aid Kit as well.

A torch.

Plastic box for packed lunch. We can pick up plastic bottles for drinks after we arrive.

Proposed programme for the week

The programme will be left as flexible as possible to enable us to make allowances for the weather, the season and the particular needs and interests of the participants.

During the week we would hope to visit as many as possible of the following – as you see we are not going to be short of options! These ideas are in no particular order:

1. Rákóczi Cave in the Bodvá valley with its old iron ore mine and the beautiful cave system within it. From here one can walk up to the top of Esztramos Hill to see the old limestone workings and a completely different plant community, birds and butterflies.

2. The flora and fauna of the limestone karst above Jósvafö. We will be searching for evidence of wolves and experiencing the varieties of forest and the lovely grassy dolinas beyond the abandoned vineyards and fields.

3. We can visit the huge cave system at Baradla or the smaller system at nearby Vőrős-to where Fire-Bellied Toads can usually be heard calling.

4. The nearby village of Szögliget nestles under some extensively wooded hills with the ruins of a castle on the crag above. We should have nice views of Fire Salamanders and Yellow-bellied toads. Wonderful birds in the woods. This area is home to all but one of the 10 species of European woodpeckers. Pygmy Owls have also nested in the area. There are abandoned fields at Acskó where in the not-too-distant past, herds of dairy cattle grazed. These are now full of life but threatened by scrub and woodland on all sides.

5. We would hope to do at least two moth-trapping sessions – for moth records from previous years’ visits, please look at our EuCAN website: <http://www.eucan.org.uk/europe/moth-species-lists/>

6. There are many abandoned vineyards above the villages of Perkupa, Varbóc, Szalonna and Szendrö with a fabulous diversity of plants and insects.

7. If there is a time, a great adventure would be to drive across the Zemplen Hills to the Tisza River and the Tokaj area with its famous vineyards. There is a wine cellar at Bodrogkisfalud just outside Tokaj, where we have eaten and taken part in a wine-tasting with eight different Tokaj wines. We may decide that there is plenty to see on our doorstep without travelling a great distance.

8. Tornakápolna not far from Jósvafö is one of the smallest villages in Hungary with a fascinating assemblage of buildings and some wonderfully rich grasslands around it.

9. The Roman Catholic and Reform churches in the area are worth visiting. The little church on the knoll above Tornaszentandrás has some fabulous frescoes and carvings.

10. There should be plenty of opportunities for bat watching and it may be possible to catch some of the bats to see them at close quarters if we can enlist the help of our local bat expert. On a previous occasion, he caught 10 bats of 5 different species. An amazing 21 species have been recorded from Jósvafö.

11. The eco-village of Gömörszőlős beyond Aggtelek to the west is the site of a project that promotes sustainable buildings, farming and crafts in the region.

12. Also west of Aggtelek is the village of Szuhafö where there are good stands of Greater Burnet Sanguisorba officinalis with their associated insects (including Large Blue butterfly species – though we will be too early for them).

13. There is an old sand quarry at Galvács where we have watched a super colony of Bee- eaters.

14. Not far away is the reservoir lake of Rakaca, good for water birds and migrants. Nearby in the middle of the beech woods stand the ruins of Martonyi monastery which has been undergoing repairs in recent years.

Some species we might expect to see if we are lucky!

Birds: this area is tremendously rich in bird species having a wide range of habitats including lakes and rivers.

Lesser Spotted Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Ural Owl, Hoopoe, 9 species of woodpeckers, River Warbler, Marsh and Great Reed Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Grasshopper Warbler, Barred and Icterine Warblers, Collared Flycatcher, Golden Oriole, Lesser Grey Shrike, Little Bittern, Hawfinch.

Butterflies: our list for May 2009 included 72 species including Eastern Festoon, Purple Emperor, Poplar Admiral, a great range of Fritillaries including the ‘Hungarian’ Fritillary Melitaea telona, Hungarian and Common Gliders, Large, Osiris and Chequered Blues…..

Moths: with 181 species on our 2009 list, we should be guaranteed to see a variety of fabulous moths while we are in Hungary with many that are not found at all in the UK. We will take a moth trap and put it out as much as time and the weather allows.

A list of species in other groups that we saw during our 2009 stay is on the Hungary section of the EuCAN website – <http://www.eucan.org.uk/europe/2009-2/hungary/> . It includes a number of different snakes and lizards, several species of bats, and other mammals rare or not found in the UK.

Useful phone numbers: Nigel SpringTel: 01963.23559 Mobile: 0044.7981.776767

Kathy Henderson 0044.7806.752412

**For further information, please visit: www.eucan.org.uk**

**Contact: Nigel Spring** Tel: 01963.23559 Mobile: 07981.776767

Email: [nigelspring@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nigelspring@yahoo.co.uk).

The aims of EuCAN CIC are

* to encourage and facilitate cultural exchange and the exchange of environmental ideas and skills between the UK and other countries (particularly within the European Union).
* to promote practical conservation volunteering both in the UK and abroad
* to promote the conservation of the physical and natural environment by promoting biodiversity.
* to encourage sustainable development in the rural economy through environmentally sensitive farming and food production.
* to promote the research and development of systems of conservation management and agriculture which are both economically viable and environmentally sustainable.
* to provide education and training related to these activities and to disseminate relevant information and guidance to the public at large.

**www.eucan.org.uk**

*EuCAN CIC is registered in England and Wales as a Community Interest Company limited by guarantee.*

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