



Romania – Mainly Mole Rats

2nd – 13th April 2025

Introduction

I joined a <https://www.sakertour.com/> special tour in search of the 4 Romanian species of mole rat.

Our leaders were Janos Olah and Zsolt Hegyeli and there were six participants including myself and fellow mammal watchers Jon Hall and Carlos Bocos. The group was excellent company and it made for an enjoyable trip.

I flew with Wizz air (Luton to Bucharest) who moved the outgoing flight to 10pm arriving at 3am! But all went smoothly both ways.

All the accommodation was excellent apart from the hotel in Letcani which was not the best.

The weather for the second part of the trip was challenging, cold and windy which made staking out the mole rats pretty tough.

This was an excellent trip to see some very difficult mammals, the Saker tours team did a brilliant job.



Bukovina Blind Mole-rat

Wednesday 2nd April

After a 3am landing, I made it to the hotel by 4am and got some sleep before being picked up at the hotel at 1pm, we collected the others and we all headed off to the Dobruja region. A few common birds were seen during the journey but nothing of note. Late afternoon we arrived at some Steppe habitat, we had some European sousliks, hoopoe, isabelline wheatear and long-legged buzzard. After dinner we headed out for a night drive, red fox, badger, golden jackal and Steppe mouse along with several Northern White bellied hedgehogs of note.



Crested Lark



Isabelline Wheatear



European Mink

Thursday 3rd April

A close-up photograph of a Lesser Blind Mole Rat. The animal's head and one of its small, pinkish eyes are visible as it peeks out from a circular hole in dark, moist soil. The surrounding area is slightly blurred, showing some green grass blades.

Lesser Blind Mole Rat

After breakfast we headed to a nearby grassland to search for our first mole rat, the weather was good, and a few butterflies were flying and quail calling. We opened up a burrow and waited, it was not long before we got a view of the lesser blind mole rat. Time for refreshments at a nearby petrol station before returning to see that Zsolt had caught the lesser blind mole rat. He processed the animal, taking weights and measurements etc. for a scientific study that he is working on. We took some photos and put the animal back in its burrow. After some lunch we headed to a nearby grassland where we saw plenty of European sousliks, hoopoe and Calandra lark.

A photograph of a Queen of Spain Fritillary butterfly. The butterfly is the central focus, showing its vibrant orange wings with numerous black spots and markings. It is perched on a green grass stem. The background is a soft-focus field of green grass and small purple flowers.

Queen of Spain Fritillary



Stone Marten

We drove to Tulcea, boarded our boat and headed into the Danube delta, clearly no mole rats here but we were after European mink, which I had failed to see here on a previous trip. We saw pygmy cormorants and other waterbirds on the way to the restaurant. After dinner we boarded the boat. We headed off as dusk fell and as it did so came the rain. Tricky conditions for wildlife watching but we quickly found brown rats, muskrat and a few birds with the thermal imagers. A mustelid got us excited, but it was a stone marten, still nice to see, but eventually a European mink was located, and we had it off and on for at least 30 mins with cracking views, although tricky conditions for photography. We made it back to Tulcea a little cold and damp well after midnight and headed back to the hotel.



European Mink



Pasqueflower

Friday 4th April

Already securing good views of our first mole rat we headed on the long journey north to our second destination for another species. There were plenty of stork nests already occupied along the route. We got to the hotel in Letcani by mid-afternoon, checked in and then headed off to look for mole rat mounds, but we picked up a puncture by the hotel, after the complex process of removing the spare wheel from under the vehicle we changed the wheel then headed off straight into a massive traffic jam caused by an accident. We gave up and headed back to the hotel for dinner. After dinner we headed out for a short night drive, seeing mostly roe deer and brown hares..



Bukovina Blind Mole-rat Hills



Corn Bunting



European souslik

Saturday 5th April

We had an early breakfast then headed out, the grassland site had plenty of mole rat mounds, we opened a few burrows but there was no movement. So the rest of the group moved down the valley to try more mole rat mounds. I remained to monitor the site. The weather was very pleasant, and a few butterflies were about, mallow skipper, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow. Marsh frogs were calling from a pond, field crickets were calling from their burrows but no mole rats. I got a message that I was being picked up as there was activity at the second site. On arrival Zsolt quickly caught the Bukoviana blind mole rat, it was processed for the scientific study before we got some photos and returned it to its burrow.

Late afternoon we headed to another site and set up some small mammal traps, we disturbed a short-eared owl in the process.

After Dinner with worsening weather, we returned to check and collect the small mammal traps, only one was tripped with a Bicoloured white toothed shrew inside, it was photographed and released.



Bukovina Blind Mole-rat

Sunday 6th April

With the second Blind mole rat successfully seen we moved on once again, a long drive to Transylvania to our next site. We went through the Carpathian Mountains that had had a heavy fall of snow overnight making the views picturesque. We made a stop for wallcreeper, one showed nicely in a gorge. But we could not find any Chamois, probably due to the snow conditions. We arrived at our hotel in Rimetea (Torockó) but did nothing that night due to the cold conditions.



Bicaz Gorge

Monday 7th April

We headed to a steppe hillside for our next mole rat, it was cold and windy and we spent hours looking at burrows in worsening weather. I got a brief view of a Mehely's blind mole-rat as did a couple of others. The poor conditions made it difficult to see other wildlife but a roe deer, cuckoo and pallid harrier of note. After a tough day in the field, we stayed in at night to recover..



Marsh Frog



Field Cricket

Tuesday 8th April



White Stork

Pretty much a repeat of Monday but no mole rat sighting for anyone apart from the leaders and probably colder than Monday, a hen harrier the only thing of note seen. After Dinner we took a night drive not much seen a mouse sp some foxes and a song thrush..



Wallcreeper

Wednesday 9th April

Back on the hill again for Mehely's blind mole-rat, I took 2 holes to monitor one I placed a camera in video mode and another 20 metres away that I monitored.

The camera only runs for 15 mins before the record button needs to be pressed again (I don't know why) so I moved back and forth regularly. One visit there was a Mehely's blind mole-rat, it had already half filled the hole and it went back in and then finished off filling the burrow.

A very nice sighting and I was very happy with the video as it showed a nice bit of activity before I arrived. The weather was a little better than previous days and I took this to wander round and photograph some of the early flowering plants. Pasque flowers were just starting to flower and yellow Pheasant eye was growing everywhere on the hill. After dinner we did a night drive a badger, plenty of roe deer and a few foxes of note. It was the first night that it was feasible to run the moth trap but it attracted nothing..



Mehely's blind mole-rat



Hoopoe

Thursday 10th April



Hungarian Blind Mole-rat

We changed location and headed north of Cluj for the day, arriving at the site a few burrows were opened before the heavens opened and heavy sleet and gale force winds had us retreat to a petrol station for a hot drink. By lunch time it stopped sleeting, but the gale force winds remained, and it remained bitterly cold. We did not get a view of any mole rats. For the last hour or so we moved slightly and opened two new burrows, and a Hungarian blind mole rat was spotted briefly in one of the burrows. Brown hare and stonechat the only sightings of note, we got back late and stayed in..



Brown Hare



Orthodox Church Rimetea

Friday 11th April

I took a very cold pre breakfast walk round the village Syrian woodpecker, grey headed woodpecker and black redstart of note.

Today we returned to the Mehely's blind mole-rat hill again as most of the group had not seen them. Conditions were less than ideal for mole rat spotting, and I had no sightings during the day, and just missed one at some new burrow we opened up further along the hill. Roe deer and brown hare of note but little else.



Mallow Skipper



Yellow Star of Bethlehem

Saturday 12th April

One last day looking for Mehely's blind mole-rat as most of the group had still not seen this species, conditions were better on the hill, incidental sightings of Alpine swift and golden eagle were noteworthy. Eventually most of the group got a sighting although some got very brief views, my view was not too bad. Eventually we ran out of time and we had to leave to move on to Zeteváralja.

Here we had some dinner and then headed out for a night drive, red deer were everywhere but two young brown bears were the highlight.



Cuckoo

Sunday 13th April

We took the long drive to the airport and said our goodbyes after a successful trip, despite the poor weather.



Pallid Harrier

Lists



Northern White Bellied Hedgehog

Birds - 63

Cuckoo	Skylark	Crested Lark
Corn Bunting	Golden Eagle	White Wagtail
Robin	Blackbird	Wallcreeper
Raven	Hooded Crow	Jackdaw
Rook	House Sparrow	Tree Sparrow
Alpine Swift	Little Egret	Great White Egret
Grey Heron	Mallard	Kestrel
Woodpigeon	Feral Pigeon	Collared Dove
Moorhen	Starling	Caspian Gull
Black Headed Gull	Pheasant	Buzzard
Montagu's Harrier	Pallid Harrier	Hen Harrier
Long Legged Buzzard	Great Cormorant	Pygmy Cormorant
Baltic Gull (lesser black backed gull)	Mute Swan	Coot
Sparrowhawk	Garganey	Teal
Little Grebe	Short eared Owl	Chiffchaff
Lapwing	Jay	Green Woodpecker
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Grey Headed Woodpecker	Syrian Woodpecker
Little Owl	Linnet	Serin
Great Tit	Black redstart	White Stork
Swallow	Yellow Wagtail	Stonechat
Great grey Shrike	Quail	Calandra Lark



Calandra Lark

Mammals - 22

Brown Rat	Noctule	Daubenton's Bat
Soprano Pipistrelle	Nathusius's pipistrelle	Red Fox
Golden Jackal	Brown bear	Red Deer
Roe Deer	European Mink	Stone Marten
Mehely's blind mole-rat	Bukovina blind mole-rat	Hungarian Blind Mole-rat
Lesser Blind Mole-rat	Apodemus sp	Brown Hare
European Souslik	Steppe Mouse	Northern White Bellied hedgehog
Muskrat		



Bi Coloured White Toothed Shrew

Selected Plants.

Mountain Lungwort	Yellow pheasant's eye	Field Star of Bethlehem
Common Field speedwell	Lesser periwinkle	Shepherd's Purse
Montpellier milkvetch	Spring Sedge	Wild Strawberry
Pasque Flower	Grape Hyacinth	Spring Cinquefoil
Ground Pine	Garden Star of Bethlehem	Small Alison
Leafy Spurge	Sea Rocket	Perfoliate Pennycress
Spring Groundsel	Common Storksbill	Austrian Flax
Brown Nonea	Corn Marigold	Cowslip
Cypress Spurge	Eastern Rocket	Dwarf Mouse ear
Fairy Flax	Field Pansy	Henbit Dead Nettle
Lesser Celandine	Lesser periwinkle	Perfoliate Pennycress
Small Alison	Sweet Violet	Thale Cress
Wild Strawberry	Field Gromwell	Spring Groundsel
Dwarf Pansy		



Mountain Lungwort

Selected Others

7 Spot Ladybird	Field Cricket	Common Heath
Purple Barred Yellow	Shieldbug sp	Green Tiger Beetle
Carabus coriaceus	Welsh Oak Longhorn Beetle	Pyrausta despicata
Swallowtail	Eastern Bath White	Queen of Spain Fritillary
Mallow Skipper	Marsh Frog	Winter Webworm
Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow	Large White	Brimstone
Peacock	Bordered Shieldbug	Dorcadion aethiops
Field Cricket	Green Tiger Beetle	Pyrrhocoris apterus
Welsh Oak Longhorn Beetle	White Spotted Rose Chafer beetle	



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Yellow Pheasant's-eye