



## Trip report on Vienna, Lake Neusiedel and Thaya National Park

*From the 13-17<sup>th</sup> September 2022 I had a few days around Vienna to explore the region around Vienna. While the aim was to explore biodiversity with a focus on mammals, due to bad weather I decided to do a bit a road trip as well, visiting the neighboring countries. Mammals are in **bold**, birds in *italics*, a rudimentary species list is given in the end.*

### Logistics and Preparations

I read the available trip reports on Mammalwatching and Cloudbirders. Unfortunately, even if lots of people visit, especially birders, there is little information available outside of Vienna. I think Neusiedlersee has lots of potential to see some Eastern steppe species, all possible by public transport and bike. In the end I relied on my scouting during the day and observations on iNaturalist and ebird. I also asked some friends for tips regarding landscape and animals and tried to follow them. For identification of small mammals as well as habitat characteristics the website [kleinsaeuger.at](http://kleinsaeuger.at) is very helpful. Small mammals are listed here if I am quite sure of the identification based on familiarity with the species, and/or a combination of features seen of multiple animals.

In spirit of supporting local nature conservation a donation was left for the March Thaya Auen Projekt from WWF Austria.



### Vienna

I started in Vienna by hopping off my train from Switzerland at the station Wien Meidling, where I visited the adjacent cemetery. It didn't take long to find the first **Hamsters**. This place seems the best at the moment, as on the last day I tried Zentralfriedhof, while a friend was in Meidling – she saw lots of hamsters, I saw none in 25 min of searching. Meidling being a cemetery with mourning people is a strange spot and I had to calm my excitement to respect the place as much as possible. I wouldn't be sad if in the future someone finds a similarly productive place in a public park, surely there is. This map could help: <https://www.wien.gv.at/umweltschutz/naturschutz/pdf/feldhamster-karte.pdf>

The map illustrates the distribution of the invasive plant species *S. repens* along the Danube River. The river is shown as a prominent grey line flowing from the top left towards the bottom right. The area is divided into two regions by a horizontal line: Transdanubien (top) and Cisdanubien (bottom). Orange shaded areas represent the distribution of *S. repens*. In Transdanubien, the distribution is more fragmented and concentrated in specific urban and suburban areas. In Cisdanubien, the distribution is more extensive and continuous, covering large areas of the region. A scale bar at the bottom right indicates distances from 0 to 5 km.

Small mammal density was small, as the alluvial forest is probably flooded frequently. I found some obliging **Harvest Mouse** at some ponds and later saw what was a probable American Mink. For this species I walked further downstream the Danube, hoping to find it along the shore, where I saw **Beaver** and an **Eastern Hedgehog**, as well as **Fox**.



## Lake Neusiedl

This area is some steppe fragments and partly temporary lakes, some saline, as well as the big lake with a huge reedbeds. The area is fragmented by intensive agriculture, mostly viticulture. At this time of the year there is a “War on Starlings” and the soundscape is not pleasant with constant fire crackers to scare the huge flocks of birds to the grebes of the neighbors. I started in the morning by looking for Souslik in the famous (and big) colony at the camping in St.Andrä am Zicksee. After quite some time, I found the last **Souslik** not hibernating yet! A bit of a relief and nice to see another squirrel in Europe, one of my favorite mammal groups! After this success I birded a bit in the area and it was quite good with lot’s of resting migrants including wood warbler and residents like Syrian Woodpecker. Next up was a walk at the Lange Lache, where I primarily stayed in one hide (47.756968, 16, 877847) scanning for wildlife, mostly raptors. However on the way there I saw quite a few rodent tunnels in the steppe and fields adjacent to the path – I decided to return later...



I scouted a few more spots, found some **Rabbits**, and returned to Lange Lache for the night. Quickly I was on a few red dots in the thermal in a unused field. The grass was short (as mostly in the region), making conditions perfect. After approach the not so shy mice turned out to be **Pygmy Field Mouse** (*Apodemus uralensis*). This species was overall quite common, I also found them at the second spot (47.781458, 16.848696) where I went spotlighting and added **Brown Rat** and **Stone Marten** to the species list, as well as **Common Vole** in the meadow. Wherever I had a look this night, there were multiple **European Hares** and usually also **Roe Deer** visible, in an incredible density. During the next morning I visited the Hungarian side, where in the area of Király-tói kilátó in the Fertő-Hanság National Park I found some Imperial Eagles, shortly before it started pouring down.



### Hungary: Lake Balaton and Őrségi Nemzeti Park

I decided to spend the day at Balaton Lake, one of Hungary's most famous touristic spots. While I was not convinced by the murky waters, the landscape was very scenic and a hike beautiful, with green forests and remnant volcanos. I decided to drive the stretch to my next National Park (Őrségi Nemzeti Park) in the night to maybe spot a few animals. Not so much (in Switzerland I would have seen more on a comparable route), but on arrival in the area I had some impressive observations of rutting **Red Deer**. Spotlighting I found my first **Fat Dormouse**. In the morning I did a hike, visiting the border to Slovenia in endless (but mostly managed) forests intercepted by pretty settlements.



### Austria/Czech Republic: Thaya National Park

As the weather was not improving (I was missing my gum boots), I decided to drive back towards Vienna, passing it to the border with the Czech Republic, to the National Park Thaya. What a gem! I started the night at the bridge in Hardegg, where at the water barrier an **Otter** was hunting and many bats were hunting, including **Daubenton's Myotis**. While I not like everything about thermals, for prolonged, undisturbed observations in the night, this is a great tool! I spotlighted a bit further down the stream along the path, observing **Beaver**, **Fat Dormouse** and **Yellow-necked Mouse**. A bit further up on the plateau leading to the Umlaufberg I found some **Hares**, **Roe Deer**, **Wood Mouse** and **Hazel Dormouse**. In the morning I did a hike around the Umlaufberg. I got very lucky, as I had a very long observation of an adult and two juvenile **Otters** hunting and playing. At one point the adult guided the young quickly to the bank, when a huge White-tailed Eagle was flying overhead. This was accompanied by the frequent roaring of **Red Deer** and a Kingfisher, who was following the Otters, in hope it could profit from disturbed fish (it did!). A scene I will never forget!

At the "Überstieg", the path that crosses the hill, there is a nice lookout (48.843492, 15.892152) that allowed to take in the whole wilderness of the area, here I also caught some glimpses of the Red Deer. Sitting here in the evening might also yield some observations of the animals coming out to graze or hunt.





### Species list

Common Name	Latin Name	Place
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Vienna
Souslik	<i>Spermophilus citellus</i>	Lake Neusiedl
Hazel Dormouse	<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i>	Thaya
Fat Dormouse	<i>Glis glis</i>	Thaya, Őrségi Nemzeti
Eurasian Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>	Thaya, Vienna
Common Vole	<i>Microtus arvalis</i>	Lake Neusiedl
Common Hamster	<i>Cricetus cricetus</i>	Vienna
Yellow-necked Field Mouse	<i>Apodemus flavicollis</i>	Thaya
Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	Thaya
Pygmy Field Mouse	<i>Apodemus uralensis</i>	Lake Neusiedl
Harvest Mouse	<i>Micromys minutus</i>	Vienna
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Lake Neusiedl
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	lots
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Lake Neusiedl
Northern White-Breasted Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus roumanicus</i>	Vienna
Noctule	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>	Vienna
Daubenton's Myotis	<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>	Thaya
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	lots
European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	Thaya
Beech Marten	<i>Martes foina</i>	Lake Neusiedl
European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	lots
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Thaya, Őrségi Nemzeti

