

## **Trip Report Vienna 17th to 21st July 2025**



Tania and I took a short break to Vienna in the summer of 2025 principally to see and photograph the critically endangered European Hamsters that occupy the cemeteries in the heart of the city. We also tried and were successful in seeing Souslik which are also critically endangered. We did try for several bird species but due to the intense heat and time of year our attempts at Woodpeckers and Little Bittern were unsuccessful. Because of that we didn't try for Red breasted Flycatcher or River Warbler which were also in our sights to attempt to see and photograph.

We chose an apartment close to the cemeteries on AirB&B for the equivalent price of £357.62 for four nights. We wanted to self-cater as it's easier with my allergies than eating out in a hotel.

Flights were booked through Trailfinders at a cost of £740 return for the two of us with Austrian Airlines who subcontracted to Baltic Airlines for the outward flight. We flew out on an Airbus 220-300 from Heathrow to Vienna and returned on an Airbus A220. A hotel was booked at Heathrow with integral parking for the duration of our stay in Vienna at a price of £148.78. We decided not to hire a car but have taxis for the duration of our stay although public transport in Vienna comprising of busses and trams is relatively easy and apparently cheap we found Ubers much more convenient.

#### **Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – warm and sunny**

Due to many roadworks and diversions as well as a late start, due to me working until 10pm running a Nightjar evening for NWT (Norfolk Wildlife Trust) we didn't arrive at the hotel at Heathrow until very early in the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> at circa 3am so we didn't get much sleep before getting to the airport 3 hours in advance of our flight time of 10:25am. The flight took an hour and 45 minutes to complete.

A taxi from the hotel to terminal 2 was £23 for the two of us.

Tania and I shared a cooked breakfast at the airport at the Pride of London Bar for £30.

On arrival at Vienna we took a taxi to the apartment which was at Brambillagasse 4/ 110 Vienna. The journey took around 30 minutes and cost 60 Euros.

Entry to the flat was by a digital lock both on the main door to the building and the flat door the codes for which were given to us in advance for use after 3pm (we had to wait 10 minutes outside before that time had elapsed). All worked perfectly.

After unpacking we did a rudimentary shop at the local supermarket some 400m away, made a quick meal and spent the rest of the evening in the local cemetery looking for but not finding any Hamsters. We did find a fledging party of Black Redstarts and some Firebugs among other things.





Firebugs at the Cemetery near the apartment around Friedhof Wien Simmering



We came across a family party of Black Redstart – this was the female



... and this was one of the fledglings around in the area of Friedhof Wien Simmering



### **Friday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – warm but windy with an odd light shower**

After breakfast we walked it to the central cemetery in Vienna. It was about a 30 minute slow walk. We could have taken the tram or bus of which Vienna is amply supplied but we wanted to walk. We took a packed lunch.

On entering gate 1 (Tor 1) of the Central Cemetery (Zentralfriedhof) at Simmeringer auptstraße 234, 1110 Vienna we found ourselves in the Jewish sector which is supposed to be the best for area to see the hamsters. We eventually saw two, perhaps three individuals as well as several Red Squirrels and a charming mother and fawn Roe Deer.



European Hamster – Central Cemetery

There was some great butterflies the best of which was probably a Great Banded Grayling. Some confusion arose with several Common Blues being identified by the ‘seek app’ as Chapman’s Blues. However, clearly they weren’t as all had the ‘basal spot’ on the underside of the forewing said to be missing in Chapman’s. Perhaps the best insect of note was a Splay footed Carpenter Bee.

The work taking place by groundsmen including mowing, strimming and watering kept the hamsters at bay. They seemed very sensitive to sudden movement and noises. On several occasions I was photographing an individual when it quickly took to its burrow when there was a slamming of a truck door group of people passed by. We were the only people looking for the hamsters and the area was generally quiet and not busy.



European Hamster – Central Cemetery





European Hamster – Central Cemetery



Roe Deer – Central Cemetery





Fawn Roe Deer – Central Cemetery

Having arrived at around 9:30am we left at around 2pm and walked back to the apartment via a supermarket to collect the evenings dinner before heavier showers set in.

The remainder of the evening was taken up writing notes and processing photos.



Great banded Grayling – Central Cemetery





Splay Footed Carpenter Bee – Central Cemetary



Hooded Crows were very much in evidence – Central Cemetery

### **Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – hot and sunny with little wind**

We decided to spend today at the Wienerberg Recreation area situated in the central area covered by the city's 10th district between Eibesbrunnnergasse and Neilreichgasse. It covers 123 hectares, of which 16.1 hectares are water areas. It is possible to reach the area by tram 11 and bus 15A, 7A, 65A, 16A and 7B; Parking is available. However, we decided to take an Uber there and back which cost under £30 for the two of us. The area has extensive sunbathing lawns and the Austrians have no shame – public nudity is not an issue for them.

The recreational area also has some 14-kilometre-long network of trails and running routes and importantly the ponds which have some good reedbeds. I was interested to see if we could find the Little Bittern which apparently breeds here ... we didn't find it. In fact bird life was at a premium with few species seen.

There's lots of bushes and long wildflower meadows which attract butterflies and of course dragonflies in good number so there was enough to keep us entertained. We were apparently a little early for Large Copper (The Great Fire Butterfly as it's called in Austria) which should be on the wing here in a week or so.

We spent from around 09:30 to about 16:00 in the park and it was a little too long in the heat. We took refuge in a nearby café before we were picked up by our Uber.

A Grass Snake appeared as we were talking to a fisherman and I found two European Pond Turtles and we saw another Great Banded Grayling and several Scarce Swallowtails. Two that got away were a probable Austrian Glider and a Camberwell Beauty both seen too briefly to be sure.



Dingy Skippers were quite common at the recreational park





Some fabulous Lesser Emperors all around the lake



Plenty of keeled Skimmers around



These were the only two European Pond Turtles I could find and they were really skittish; disappearing in a hell of a rush as I tried to get closer for a better photo.





By far the commonest raptor during our visit was the Kestrel – this one perched on bushes close to the entrance to the park



Scarce Swallowtail – usually around fruiting trees

### **Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – hot**

We had several options for our last full day including Vienna Woods (Wienerwald), Schonbrunn Palace Grounds and Lainzer Tiergarten but with temperatures set to rise up to 30 degrees we opted to visit the botanical gardens at Blumengärten Hirschstetten in the north of the city. This turned out to be a good move as there was lots of shade, toilets and plenty of seating as well as a café.

As well as the very delightful geographical sections of the garden there is also a small 'petting zoo' which we avoided. The area can also be used for weddings so I'm guessing it is necessary to check the website for opening times and days.

We again travelled to and from by Uber which was delightfully air-conditioned. The outward cost was £17.63 and the return journey which we booked after we had had enough of the heat just before we wanted to return was £20.47.

Using Vodafone it is possible (without pre-booking) to use your normal data at no additional cost when in Austria. So 'calling up' an Uber on the Uber App was not an issue. We did this in preference to prebooking a slot given we didn't know when we would be ready to return.



The Botanical gardens are a known refuge for European Ground Squirrel or Souslik. This is another critically endangered species very much under threat. The area was also good for dragonflies and butterflies.

We arrived just after opening (9am according to the gardens official website) which again was a good idea given it was likely to get busy on a Sunday ... and it did. The Souslik were everywhere and were not difficult to find or photograph even when it got busy.

Perhaps the best butterflies were The Queen of Spain Fritillaries which were seen in good numbers. Scarce Swallowtails also put in an appearance and were more photographable here than in the park yesterday.



One of many Queen of Spain Fritillaries seen in the Botanical Gardens



Scarce Swallowtails were much easier at the Botanical Gardens







The reason for our visit to the Botanical Gardens. Souslik or European Ground Squirrels were very easy to see and observe almost anywhere despite them being critically endangered as a species.



Dragonflies abounded at the Botanical Gardens including this Scarlet Darter and a couple of Emperors







**Monday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2025 – very hot with rain later**

We walked back to the cemetery in the morning and returned to the apartment where we were allowed to store our luggage at circa 1pm for an Uber to the airport costing just under £20.

3 European Hamsters were seen plus a new butterfly, a Mallow Skipper, feeding on lavender.

The flight and subsequent return home, other than a ninety-minute delay due to bad weather, occurred without incident. We arrived back at Heathrow at 11pm

The taxi we took on demand at the airport back to the Raddison Red was only £12.20 – which was a bit odd given the cost the other way. The Raddison Red was in a state of carnage as the bad weather had cancelled several flights and loads of people were all checking in. Had we known we did not have to report we were checking out our vehicle as it had been entered into their computer system on arrival it would have saved us around 45 minutes.

After picking up our car we arrived back in Norfolk at 3:30am.



The Mallow Skipper was a new butterfly for us.



Who can resist another European Hamster ...

Carl and Tania Chapman

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