



Sunrise Birding, LLC
POLAND
May 28 – June 4, 2011

TRIP REPORT

**Leaders: Gina Nichol, Steve Bird
& Henryk Sulek**





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Poland is a remarkable country with a fascinating history, important cultural heritage and many areas of exceptional natural beauty. This tour focused on two of Europe's most unique and important habitats, the famous bird-filled Biebrza Marshes and the ancient Bialowieza Forest. Eleven birders joined our inaugural trip to Poland and, in all; our tour recorded 152 species of birds (seen and/or heard) plus several butterflies, dragonflies and gorgeous wildflowers.

HIGHLIGHTS: Either for rarity value, excellent views or simply a group favorite.

- Great Snipe
- Black Woodpecker
- Three-toed Woodpecker
- Aquatic Warbler
- Citrine Wagtail
- Roller
- Bee-eater
- Fields filled with wildflowers
- White-tailed Eagle
- Black Stork
- Bluethroat
- Penduline Tit (2 nests)
- White-winged Tern
- Red-breasted Flycatcher
- Orlotan Bunting
- Tawny Owl chick
- Stunning countryside
- 17 species of Old World Warblers & developing a new appreciation for "brown"!
- Extended time in the restricted area of Bialowieza Forest
- The long walk at Mscichy through the sprawling Biebrza Marshes

Day 1: Warsaw / Nowograd

Several people in the group arrived in Warsaw in the days before the trip started. On Saturday morning, they made their way to the airport to meet those arriving from the US. Our local guide Henryk was there to welcome us to his beloved country and we gathered with excitement and anticipation of our days ahead. We loaded our bags on the bus and met our wonderful driver Krys.

President Obama was in Warsaw meeting with other dignitaries and that meant that the air space over the city of Warsaw was temporarily closed delaying Karen's arrival by three hours. We bided



Looking for birds in all the wrong places.
Or, was this our money changing stop?

our time at the airport coffee shop and were soon evacuated due to an unattended bag in the terminal. Karen arrived a little later and soon we were on our way out of the city.

A quick stop to change money offered a look at the raunchier side of Warsaw. As we got off the bus, we found our first **Chaffinch** of the trip and this was a common species for the rest of the tour. We continued out of Warsaw, crossing the Vistula River and heading north-eastward for the edge of the southern basin of Biebrza. Along the way, we had our first **Fieldfares**, **House Sparrows** and **Hooded Crows** of the trip and a traffic jam allowed views of **Black Redstart** and **Greenfinch**. A coffee stop at a restaurant yielded a **Lesser Whitethroat** and a chance to see the **preparations for a wedding** with traditional tables set up. Outside the restaurant we had **Common Swifts**, **Serin**, a **White Wagtail** eating a **Brilliant Emerald** (much to Steve's dismay) and a **Marsh Harrier** that flew by in the distant background. We continued on seeing our first **White Stork** nests and enjoyed many views of these during the trip.

We arrived at our hotel, in Nowograd in the late afternoon, settled in and enjoyed our welcome dinner before heading out to explore the edges of the **Narew River**. A loud party had started at the hotel but that didn't stop several **Eurasian Woodcocks** from doing their roding flight display above our heads. Along the river we had **Great Cormorant** and **Sedge Warbler** and soon became familiar with the incessant song of **Thrush Nightingale**. A **Common Cuckoo** was calling and a **Blackbird** was spotted perched on a bare tree. As darkness fell, a few bats began to fly and Steve found several dragonflies roosting in the grasses along the river.



Day 2: Nowograd to Biebrza

Up and out early, we birded around the hotel and the river before breakfast. As we stepped outside, it began to rain lightly but it didn't dampen our enthusiasm. From the front of the hotel we scoped a **Corn Bunting** and **Red-backed Shrike** and as we walked around to where the party had been the night before, a **Eurasian Collared Dove** was seen. A **Thrush Nightingale** was singing across the river and **Blackbird** was once again perched in the "Blackbird" tree. Nearby, a juvenile **White Wagtail** was being fed by an adult. The rain persisted and got heavier so we sought shelter in an open air restaurant. A **Great Tit** foraged around a fence just across an open meadow and we had great views of a male **Linnet**. **Yellowhammer** was seen and there were quick views of a **Hawfinches** streaming over at a 100 miles an hour. An **Icterine Warbler** heard and later seen and we added **Blue Tit** and a nice male **Blackcap** to our growing list.

Across the river, a **Song Thrush** was perched and a **Marsh Warbler** was seen working low on a tree trunk at the river's edge. A **Golden Oriole** was singing and eventually showed in the blackbird tree as did a **Thrush Nightingale**. As Steve tried to stir our excitement about the brown birds we were seeing, a **Common Rosefinch** male offered a much brighter alternative. On the way back, a **Woodlark** was seen in flight over the open field and we saw several **House Martins** gathering mud from a puddle and then bringing it to the hotel walls where they were building nests near the windows.

After breakfast we loaded up and went to our first site in the lower Biebrza basin. It was a dirt road off the main road with a forest on one side and an agricultural area on the other. When we arrived, a **Cuckoo** was present but flew off quickly. There were **Fieldfares** around and a **Serin** sang above us. We walked the road trying to take everything in including the flowers of the forest floor which included Lily-of-the-Valley. Around the corner, we encountered a **White Stork** nesting on a post with **Tree Sparrows** nesting below. A few steps off the main road into the forest led to a quickly disappearing **Eurasian Jay** and a **Common Redstart**. Back out on the road, we had good views of **Spotted Flycatcher** and then caught sight of a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** following a group of **Starlings**. It was here that we noted that these were indeed wild **Starlings** and should be appreciated as such.



A **Common Buzzard** soared in the distance and a **Eurasian Hobby** was seen here. We scoped a **Red-backed Shrike** across a sprawling meadow and noted a few **Ravens** on a power stanchion. A **Black Redstart** was seen and try as we may we could not see the **Hoopoe** that was calling from somewhere just inside of the forest. Two **Common Cranes** flew across in front of us landing in the distance and a **White Stork** wowed us as it flew

toward the nest with some vegetation in its bill. A small herd of cows approached as we enjoyed better views of **Blackcap**.

Soon we were on our way to the next stop which offered bathroom facilities. As several took advantage we noted **House Sparrows** and several **House Martin** nests being taken over by **Tree Sparrows**. A couple of **Eurasian Goldfinch** were seen as was a **Yellow Wagtail** (blue headed race *Flava*), and a **White Stork** nest was scoped in the distance revealing three half grown chicks.

We stopped along the Narew River where a group of 30+ **Great Egrets** caught Henryk's attention. This was an unusual concentration and by the end of the day, we had seen more than 200 of this species. There were also **White Storks** and **Gray Herons** in the area and we enjoyed our first views of **Common Pochard**, **White-winged Tern**, and **Black Tern**. Our first **Black Stork** was seen along with several **Black-tailed Godwits** and Northern Lapwing. We moved further on to the confluence of the Narew and Biebrza Rivers where we walked up a hill to get a look at a **White Stork** nest with five chicks. Our picnic lunch was taken at an overlook on a hilltop which allowed incredible views of the sprawling marsh below. It was difficult to sit and eat with so much to see including a group of fourteen **Common Cranes** circled over and eventually landed in the marsh.

There were **several Black Storks**, **Common Pochards**, and many **Mallards** to see and Steve found a few **Variable Damselflies** and a **Red Admiral**. The **beautiful view** on this lovely, cool, sunny day made this excursion particularly enjoyable and for some it was a highlight of the trip.



We continued to another site where there were sand dunes overlooking another expanse of marsh. As we made our way toward the dunes, two **Linnets** were seen as were **Whinchat** and another **Yellow Wagtail**. An ambitious **Skylark** gave a remarkable flight display right in front of us and it was amazing just how long the show lasted. We scanned the marsh from the top of a dune and suddenly two **White-tailed Eagles** flew in putting up all of the ducks! Eventually, the ducks settled back down and we continued to scan through the **Mallards** to see what else we could find. A **Common Teal** was tucked in among them and while looking for that Sara found a **Garganey**. **Mute Swans** dotted the background and a **Whooper Swan** with a numbered blue neck band was seen as well. Another goose appeared in the distance and was determined to be a **Greater White-**

fronted Goose after some deliberation. On the way back toward the bus, a **Common Swallowtail** butterfly was seen and a **Sand Lizard** was found.

Our last site of the day was along a road that bisected another marsh area. There were several more **Common Cranes** in the distance bringing our total close to 50 for the day. A **Yellow-spotted Whiteface** sat perched for us and we had more views of the spectacular terns, particularly the **White-winged Tern** which was one of the favorite birds of the trip. As we scanned the marsh, Steve found a **Large Skipper** in the nearby grasses.

We continued to Goniadz traversing the Biebrzanski National Park on the “czar” road through this fabulous forest of Black Alder, Aspen and Silver Birch. A stop alongside the road to see a close **Beaver** lodge was our last of the day before checking into our hotel along the Biebrza River for the next three nights.



Day 3 – Biebrza Marshes

We awoke to a gorgeous, clear sparkling blue day in Goniadz with Church bells ringing as we gathered for our early morning walk. **Common Swifts** were flying low over us and a **Golden Oriole** appeared over the parking lot. A few steps from the hotel, a **Fieldfare** gave good views on a bare branch. We turned off the road down a track toward the river and along the way a **Willow Warbler** and **Common Whitethroat** were seen and we had good views of **Thrush Nightingale**, a common but very difficult to see passerine. Down at the river, Steve spotted a **Great Reed Warbler** perched on a grass stem across the divide. A **male Marsh Harrier** flew by being dive bombed by a tern and a **Black Stork** flew in. There were close **European Goldfinches**, a **Serin** in the open, **Sedge Warbler**, and several **Greylag Geese**. Nina spotted a couple of **Common Redshanks** in the distance. One landed and we scoped it as it perched on a post. Two **White-tailed Eagles** were perched on a distant tree across the marsh and as we made our way up to a bridge, a **Eurasian Jay** was seen. **House Martins** were building nests under the



bridge and we were now very familiar with this species that approximates our **Tree Swallows** at home.



After breakfast, we stopped at Post Office before heading toward Biebrzanski National Park. Our first stop was along the road where **several cows were grazing in a field full of buttercups**.

Common Snipe was seen here as was a **Hoopoe** on a distant post and a **Tree Pipit**. Soaring above the tree line was a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** and a male **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was seen in the trees

dividing the farm fields. On the other side of the road, a **Great Gray Shrike** family was moving around the base of a large tree and a couple of **Ravens** flew over.

Our next stop was in Osowiec at a monument site where we had **Red-backed Shrike**, **Sooty Skipper**, and a quickly departing **Common Cuckoo**. We walked a trail toward an observation tower and found a nice male **Bluethroat** perched up and singing from the branch of a low shrub. From the observation tower, we could see several **Reed Buntings** perched and singing and another **Common Cuckoo** flew by very low over the marsh. We made our way down to a boardwalk but not before we noted pairs of **Hairy Hawkers** mating. Along the boardwalk, we had **Sedge Warbler**, **Common Rosefinch**, and **Common Snipe** doing display flights over the marsh. Henryk located a **Penduline Tit** nest and we were treated to quick views of bird going into and out of the nest. We took lunch up on another observation tower while **Honey Buzzard**, **Common Buzzard**, and **Montagu's Harriers** soared in the distance.



In the afternoon, we took a long walk across sprawling marshes of Biebrza. This was one of the highlights of the tour for many and the sheer magnitude of gorgeous habitat was inspiring. At the beginning of the walk, we scoped our first **Marsh Orchids** to see the fine detail of this beautiful flower. Another **Bluethroat** showed well with the white spot on the throat and also seen were **Meadow Pipit**, **Reed Bunting** and **Sedge Warbler**. A male **Montagu's Harrier** coursed over the marshes revealing its unique wing pattern. Denise spotted a **Citrine Wagtail** on a post and we had scope views of it. A stop near a watery ditch yielded several **Edible Frogs** in various stages of courtship and the ditches on each side of the road held hundreds of **Variable Damselflies**, also involved in their mating rituals. A small group of **Common Cranes** flew over and four **Black-tailed Godwits** were seen on the wing. We eventually got good views of **Savi's Warbler** and Steve continued to encourage us to appreciate our ever growing list of brown birds.



We arrived at an observation tower where the surrounding wetlands were full of birds. In every direction there were things to see and we enjoyed **White-winged Terns**, **Black-headed Gulls**, **Common Redshank**, **Great Egrets**, **Black-tailed Godwit** and a **Black Stork** that glistened in the afternoon light. There were **Barn Swallows** nesting in the tower and one or two **White Wagtails** working the immediate area. There were several **Graylag Goose** families with young goslings, a few pair of **Shovelers**, **Garganey**, and **Teal** and a lone **Ruff**. We spent a good amount of time here taking in the natural spectacle around us and reflecting on the importance of this habitat to the birds we were seeing. It was well worth **the long walk**.



As the afternoon sun began to fall back to the horizon, we began the long walk back to the bus. We could hear the booming of **Great Bittern** in the marsh and the winnowing of **Common Snipe**. A **Great Gray Shrike** was seen and a **River Warbler** was heard. A **Garden Warbler** was more cooperative and showed for a few of us before disappearing into deep brush.

In the evening, we visited another marsh to look for the rare and range restricted **Aquatic Warbler**. The fen marshes of Biebrza are vital to the survival of Aquatic Warbler and hold the largest population of this bird in the world. So, donning our mosquito protection, we ventured out along a boardwalk into a marsh in the hopes of seeing this rare bird. The sun was setting and it didn't take long before we had one of the birds in our sights. We managed fairly good views and enjoyed a superb sunset as well.



Day 4 – Biebrza Marshes

We awoke to another crystal clear sunny morning and made an early trip to an observation tower not far from the hotel. Looking out over the expansive marsh, Sara spotted a pair of ears which turned out to be those of a **Moose** (or **Elk** as the Europeans call it). We watched it for a while and it occasionally lifted its head as it rested in the tall grasses next to a bush. In the meantime, a dark shape in the distance was thought to be a Black Grouse but when it flew it morphed into a **Marsh Harrier**. Krys, our driver spotted **Roe Deer** on the other side of the marsh and there were several **Black-tailed Godwits**, **Northern Lapwings**, and **White-winged Terns** around. A pair of **Black Storks** was also in attendance.

After breakfast, we set off and visited the Biebrzanski Park Headquarters which held some exhibits and a few souvenirs. We continued into the park stopping at a bridge over the Biebrza River which offered views of **Banded Demoiselle**, a **Common Raven** in a distant tree and a **Great Reed Warbler** singing from the reeds. A **Common Rosefinch** was seen and another set of ears were spotted. This time it was a **Roe Deer**. Our next stop was along the road near some farm fields. While scanning, Krys our driver found a **Eurasian Curlew** so we piled out of the bus to get better views. There were many **Yellow Wagtails** around and we had good, close views of a **Montagu's Harrier** flying over the fields.

We spent a little time exploring the area around the **Augustowski Canal** where we saw **Red-backed Shrike**, **Icterine Warbler**, **Common Buzzard**, **Eurasian Goldfinches** and **White Wagtail**.

Then it was on to lunch around some quiet ponds (except

for **Mallards**). As we worked our way back, a family of **Mute Swans** with cygnets kept us entertained. As we gathered at the bus, Gina scoped a **Reed Bunting** and a **Whinchat** while a **Marsh Harrier** flew along the far edge of a field. The weather was stunning but the birding was slow. On our way out, Steve breathed life into the afternoon with the spotting of a **Red Kite**. We piled out of the bus to see the bird disappear over some distant trees.



At the next stop, Sara found a **Northern Wheatear** and some bright **Linnets** caught our attention on some dirt piles. In the background, the distant wetlands were teaming with terns, egrets, and ducks, all of which we had great views previously. Further on, we stopped to check a farm field that had more than thirty **Black-tailed Godwits** in it among many **Black-headed Gulls**. A flock of domestic white geese with goslings caught our attention as we got off the bus at the next stop which was another observation tower overlooking a watery marsh. More **Garganey** were seen here as well as **Northern Lapwings**, **Mallards**, terns, **Great Egrets**, and a **Great Crested Grebe** showing off its fishing skills not far away.

Steve spotted a **Little Ringed Plover** on a distant sand bar and fortunately the bird decided to fly in and land right in front of us offering great views. A **White-tailed Eagle** came through and created a frenzy among the birds and revealing just how many birds were in the hidden areas of the marsh that we could not see. Our final stop of the day was along a cobblestone road overlooking some grassy fields. We listened and searched for **Ortolan Bunting** and soon we were looking at a nice male perched up on a wire and singing.



Day 5 – Biebrza to Bialowieza

As we gathered for our early morning walk in Goniadz, five **Great Cormorants** flew over with one showing its white breeding patches. **Common Swifts** were once again flying low over our heads and the walk yielded good views of **Icterine Warbler**, **Serin**, **Black Redstart**, **Willow Warbler**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Chaffinch** and **Jackdaw**. Nina made friends with a frisky foal which had to be told firmly not to bite! The reeds along the river held the usual **Great Reed** and **Sedge Warblers** and as we made our way back for breakfast we could feel the heat of the day building up already.

After breakfast, we set off for the day passing through the village of Monke which was hosting a flower market. We stopped at a big lake where there were lots of **Mallards** in the distance and caught a glimpse of **Caspian Gull** (a split from Yellow-legged). A **White-tailed Eagle** came through and caught a fish without much fanfare. We had close views of **Great Reed Warbler** and even closer views of **Common Reed Warbler** here. On the wires over the fish farm buildings, we saw a **Whinchat** and there were several **Yellow Wagtails** around.

A stop in Tycosin in an area of road construction yielded two **Marsh Warblers** and a lovely singing **Bluethroat**. Betty made friends with a couple of the construction workers before we moved on for lunch near a **newly constructed castle** on the edge of town. Some of us got a glimpse inside while others enjoyed the antics of a **White Stork** on a nest with five hungry chicks. The adult stood with wings outstretched shading the chicks blazing sun. Another adult flew in creating a stir and then proceeded to regurgitate liquid onto and into the chicks perhaps to feed and cool them at the same time. It was an amazing sight despite the fact that we were trying to eat lunch. We were so enthralled with the goings on in the nest that few of us saw the **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** that flew right above our heads chasing a passerine.



We explored some more farm lands after lunch hoping to see Bee-eaters that had nested previously in a quarry area. We walked a road between fields to see an **Ortolan Bunting** singing from a wire. Then, we walked up a small hill to get a wider view of the whole area. No Bee-eaters were in the area but we did get good views of **Tawny Pipit**, a close **Montagu's Harrier**, several **Bank Swallows**, and a **Yellowhammer**.

Our final stop of the day was near Bialystok at some ponds that held **Tufted Ducks**, **Gadwall**, and **Coot**. The nesting colony of **Black-headed Gulls** was very active and noisy and a few young gulls were venturing out into the open water. A pair of **Great Crested Grebes** with young was vigorously trying to protect their tiny chicks from getting snatched by the gulls and the views of these birds carrying their chicks on their backs were nothing short of endearing. A **Penduline Tit** nest near the track offered great views of an adult bird that game in and worked on its construction. At the next pond, we were treated to views of an adult, breeding plumage **Red-necked Grebe** which looked stunning in the afternoon light. We continued on to our hotel for the next three nights in charming Bialowieza village in the heart of the ancient Bialowieza Forest.



Day 6 - Bialowieza Forest

An early morning search for Bison was unsuccessful, though we drove several roads winding through the Bialowieza Forest. At one time, the range of this, the largest mammal in Europe, encompassed almost all of Europe, including southern England, and Russia. Though the bison became extinct in 1919, a reintroduction program in the Bialowieza Forest has brought the population to between 2-300 individuals. Still an endangered species, the Bison or Wisent's range is restricted mainly to the Bialowieza Forest. It was a sunny, fresh, dewy morning and there were many **Blackbirds** on the roads but no Bison in sight.

We spent some time around a railroad track which offered an elevated open viewing area at the edge of the forest. The area produced **Roe Deer**, **European Robin**, **Red Deer**, and a **Yellowhammer** singing from the top of a nearby plant. A **Stock Dove** flew over quickly and there was also a flyby **Crossbill**. **Blackcap**, **Garden Warbler**, and **Jay** were all in the area and all only allowed quick views.

After breakfast, we visited another area of the forest and walked an old road to look for **Hazel Grouse**. There were several areas of bare, disturbed earth where the birds had taken dust baths. We birded the road and had good views of **Wood Warbler**, **Wren**, **Dunnock**, and a **Treecreeper** that showed well as it worked up a trunk. **River Warbler** presented more of a challenge. Although nearby, it moved quickly and furtively through the vegetation and never allowed a prolonged view. We spent some time on an old bridge

and enjoyed good views of **Red-backed Shrike** while a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** was seen soaring in the distance from the bridge.

Later on, we visited a lake area where Betty found a sleeping **Teal** among the **Mallards** and a **Gadwall** was seen. From an observation tower, we spotted the usual terns, egrets and herons and a couple of pink men out fishing intrigued some members of the group. Back in the forest, we had good views again of **Wood Warbler**. At the next stop near a larger lake and very close to the Belarus border, we climbed up to some train tracks to see **Green Sandpiper**, **Common Gull**, and **Little Tern**. An approaching lightning storm sent us packing to the bus and after it passed we got back off and scanned the marsh again. We could hear a **Bittern** booming and Bernie had a quick view of it flying over the marsh.

On the way back to Bialowieza, Steve spotted **Bee-eaters** over the road. Panic ensued as we all got out of the bus and searched frantically for the birds. Across the field we could see the birds perched on power lines. As we got closer, we could see that there was a group of at least eight birds and we all had great views.

In the evening we met a local guide Arek at a site for **Pygmy Owl**, the smallest owl in Europe. Arek had been monitoring a nesting pair in the area and took us to a known area where the bird has been seen hunting. While there were several **Eurasian Woodcocks** flying around, the owl did not seem to be in the area. As we walked back to the parking lot, we heard the bird calling from some nearby conifers. We had several fly over views of this feisty little predator before darkness fell.

Day 7 - Bialowieza Forest – Restricted Forest – Great Snipe Lek

This morning some of us tried again very early for Bison. Our first stop revealed that it was much birdier early in the morning as we ticked **Fieldfare**, **Robin**, **Black Redstart**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, and **Song Thrush** for the day. Bison remained elusive and we continued to check areas of edge between open meadows and forest to try to get a view of the animals grazing. At one stop along the road, Krys put us on a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** flew in and perched on a tree in the middle of the field. We enjoyed excellent views of the bird as it assessed the open field from its lofty perch. Nearby, a **Middle-spotted Woodpecker** called and then flew into a tree not far from where we stood. A **Barred Warbler** also appeared offering good views.



On the way back to town, a **Marten** of some kind crossed the road in front of us. It quickly disappeared into the flooded forest demonstrating how elusive most wild animals are.



We picked up Penny and Betty at the hotel and went to another site in the park to try and see Black Woodpecker. A couple of **Collared Flycatchers** were hawking insects from perches in the trees and we saw **Spotted Flycatcher** and **Yellowhammer**. In the meantime, Henryk found the nest hole of the **Black Woodpecker** so we positioned ourselves and waited for the bird to show. Both the male and female birds flew in and gave fantastic views and for some this was the bird of the trip.

After breakfast we went to check the Pygmy Owl site again. The bird was still there as evidenced by its call and again only allowed fly over views. Above us was a high flying **Buzzard** and a **Montagu's Harrier**. Another nearby site offered **Wood Warbler** and a pair of displaying **Great Tits**.

After breakfast, we walked to the Czar's palace park in Bialowieza. While walking through the park to meet Arek to take us into the restricted forest, we saw **Blue Tit** and a close **Serin**. We met Arek and as we proceeded through an open meadow toward the gate, a **Green Woodpecker** flew across. Arek pointed out some beautiful **Broad-leaved Marsh Orchids** and Steve spotted two **Honey Buzzards** soaring in the distance. We reached the gate and entered this very special area of forest that remains unmanaged. A family of **Nuthatches** greeted us just inside the gate and a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was seen immediately. Not far along the trail, Arek showed us an active nest hole of **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** and soon the female arrived with food and fed the young. There were **Hawfinches** in the distance on the path ahead and a **Collared Flycatcher** was seen. At one point, we stopped to look a branchling **Tawny Owl** sitting quietly not far from the trail. We scanned the thick forest canopy for an adult which remained hidden.



Lunch was taken at a trail junction and soon we were on our way again along the trail. Arek showed us another nest hole, this time that of a **Three-toed Woodpecker**. A female appeared in the nest hole and then departed. It wasn't long before a male arrived with food. Clearly, the birds were feeding young. At this point, Arek offered to extend our walk through the forest and we all enthusiastically agreed. As we walked, Arek relayed stories about the history of the forest and its inhabitants and we were enthralled by the surroundings. An elevated boardwalk led through an often flooded area and offered good views of a male **Red-breasted Flycatcher** and a **Red Squirrel**. We thoroughly enjoyed our extended time in this special place and slowly made our way out to the gate. Steve found a **Poplar Admiral** in the trees near the entrance, a very rare sighting.

Arek invited us to see him play the organ in a local church. Those of us that took up his offer were treated to a short recital, tour of the church, and a **Wryneck** in his garden. After an early dinner, we took an evening excursion to try and see **Great Snipe** performing courtship displays on a communal lek. On the way, we passed the **Bee-eaters** on the same wires across from a church in Dubiny. We arrived at the site to find a **Chiffchaff** singing and showing well on the top of a pine tree.



Again donning our best anti-mosquito-wear, we walked through a meadow and along **the edge of a swamp**. An **Aquatic Warbler** showed close by and some **Black-tailed Godwits** were flying in the distance. Some **Common Snipe** flew out nearby and got our hearts pounding. And then we heard the clicking sound of **Great Snipe** in the tall grasses in front of us. Fortunately, there was an area of lower grass and luckily a **Great Snipe** chose that area to begin displaying! Fantastic! In all, we could see four of the birds and there were probably ten in the immediate area.

For some, it was the highlight of the trip and Henryk remarked that this was the best he had ever seen them. On the way out, we heard a **Corncrake** calling but it remained elusive in the tall grass. A **Grasshopper Warbler** was also heard but by then, it was too dark to see.

Day 8 – Bialowieza Forest - Warsaw

An early morning walk in the park was planned for today and most people took advantage of it despite getting back at 11 PM after the Great Snipe excursion. It was another crisp, clear day and as we walked out of our hotel rooms, a very tame **Song Thrush** greeted us. We walked to the park picking up **Greenfinch** and **Spotted Flycatcher** enroute. As we crossed the bridge into the park, we found **Great Reed Warbler**, **Mallards**, and **Common Swifts**. The drumming of a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was heard and soon Henryk located the bird for us. **Marsh Tit**, **Blue Tit**, **White Wagtail** and **Nuthatch** were all seen and Ann happily caught up with the **Jay** that had been eluding her all trip. We walked through a gorgeous meadow enjoying good views of **Serin**. A family of **Crested Tits** worked the spruce trees at the edge of the forest and allowed good views and some **Eurasian Goldfinches** were seen along with male and female **Common Rosefinch**. We staked out a **Gray-headed Woodpecker** at a nest hole and soon the bird appeared flying quickly on to the trunk and disappearing into the hole. As quickly as it appeared, the bird flew back out across over our head disappearing in the thick canopy above. We headed back to the hotel for breakfast adding **Wood Warbler** and **Blackcap** on the way.

After breakfast, we departed Bialowieza heading toward Warsaw and the airport. We stopped along the road to see a **Mistle Thrush**, a pair of **Skylarks** and a **Fieldfare**. **Raven** and **Red-back Shrike** were also in the area. Our last stop was at a known nesting site for **Roller** and we were soon looking at this stunning bird perched on a power line. **Great Gray Shrike** and **Tawny Pipit** were also in the area. In Warsaw, we said good bye to our wonderful local guide Henryk and driver Krys and thanked them for all of their efforts to make the trip so enjoyable. We said good bye to each other and went away with wonderful memories of the beautiful countryside and birds of Poland.

This was an exceptionally good tour with good views of many species including several of the specialty birds of eastern Poland. We shared many wonderful experiences as well as laughs with this jovial group and this added to the fun of the trip. Thank you to Henryk for all of your efforts in making us comfortable and finding the birds for us, Arkadiusz Schymura (Arek) for showing us the beautiful and amazing Bialowieza Forest, and Steve Bird for his sharing his excellent birding skills, his enthusiasm for butterflies and dragonflies, and his passion for brown birds.

Gina Nichol, Sunrise Birding, LLC



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