

MAREK BORKOWSKI

WILDLIFE  POLAND

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A proposition of an itinerary for Berkshire Ornithological Club, 4th to 11th of May 2013

The trip is concentrated on watching birds in NE Poland - arguably the best birding area of Europe. We are going to see Polish bird specialities, the tour is run in time when very the most of migrants are already back but vegetation cover hiding the birds is not so dense yet. We start at **Biebrza Marsh** where I live, then move to **Bialowieza Forest** and finally will have a look into Warsaw, the present capital of Poland. Apart from wide range of Polish habitats and bird species with all Polish specialities (see below) we will also have a chance to see impact of **Tarpan Horses** into different wildlife areas - the nature protection technique being invented in Poland and then transferred to Western Europe, including the UK; in fact there will be a chance to see where Tarpans grazing English reserves (including Minsmere) came from originally. It is going to be not only a tourist trip; we will offer you an insight to the nature, culture and history of Poland with all implications for wildlife, based on over thirty years of my and my family's work and life in the field - you will be watching not just our special horses (once at the edge of extinction) bred by us for ten generations for conservation, but also "our" Great Snipe, Aquatic Warblers, Corncrakes, etc. breeding on land managed by us for tens of years. As you can imagine by taking a part in the trip you are **contributing** straight to pure **conservation**.

4th May: Arrival to Warsaw airport, transfer to Biebrza Marsh for four nights stay, birding on a way. Our hotel is nicely located in the middle of nowhere, in mature Scots Pine Forest at a bank of a lake (with a bit of luck **White-tailed Eagle** or **Black Woodpecker** can be seen through bedroom or dining room windows, but also **Hawfinches** feeding on a pavement occasionally, **Red Kite** and the others are to be seen on or over the lake and **Red Squirrel** climb over 100 years old trunks). Welcoming dinner and an optional evening birding afterwards.

5th & 6th: An early morning birding in my gardens at Biebrza Marshes. It is here where in two days we are going to see Polish specialties. On the garden breeding bird list are all big four: **Aquatic Warbler, lekking Great Snipe, Corncrake and White-backed Woodpecker**. Through the years there are also recorded up to **19 species of warblers** breeding here including **Savi's, River, Great Reed, Barred, Icterine, Marsh** and others. **Middle Spotted (as well as Lesser and Great), Grey-headed & Black Woodpeckers, Wryneck**, etc. **Both Storks (Black and White), Cranes, Greater and Lesser Spotted, Short-toed and White-tailed Eagles**, 3 (maybe 4) species of **harriers, Honey Buzzard, Red-footed Falcon** and any of **20 species of raptors** breeding nearby are possible soaring overhead during long al fresco lunches or afternoon teas in the garden (weather permitting). **Penduline & Bearded Tits, Hoopoe, Citrine Wagtail, Thrush Nightingale, Bluethroat** and several others I manage the marsh for. Breakfast at my farm, visit to fish ponds around, short brake and afternoon back to my gardens again for some more birding and reception at my farm. An optional evening birding (**Nightjar, Tengmalm's Owl, Eagle Owl, Corncrake**). Full day excursion to southern part of Biebrza Marsh (ducks, waders, all **3 species of marsh terns**, including **White-winged Black Tern, Black Stork**, etc., **Elk**).

We may still hope to see some late migrating geese: **Bean, Greylag and White-fronted** being the majority, occasional **Barnacles, Canada or Brent** but every spring we have here also **Lesser White-fronted and Red-breasted**, sometimes **Bar-headed** or even **Ross's**.

We will start early one morning to visit a **Black Grouse** lek and another morning to visit the **Ruff** leks. One evening, we will visit my **Great Snipe** lek reserve (the first non-governmental one in Eastern Europe). In

between all this, we will do some waterfowl, raptor, crane and warbler watching. **Nightjars** hunting and breeding nearby are a possibility for the evening (after early dinner) as well as **Spotted-, Little or Corn-crake** (all often heard from the dinner table, as well as a **Bittern** and even an **Eagle Owl**) or **Tengmalm's Owl** whilst doing some night watching. **Beaver, Otter, Wolf, Lynx, Marten** are all also present here.

There will be a chance to have a look into **Tarpan** horses breeding program. They are the nearest to original wild horses of Europe, once roaming free up to Atlantic coast in the West, including British Isles. Close to extinction one day when I have started to use them for limiting the process of overgrowing marsh, now they found their place in nature conservation of wetlands in several European countries but it is here where the idea was born.

7th: After optional pre-breakfast trip and another substantial breakfast we will go to Masurian Lakes to explore huge reed beds (**Bittern, Savi's and Great Reed Warblers, Long-tailed Tits**, several species of raptors, including **White-tailed Eagle** and probably the best chance for **Osprey or Red-crested Pochard**), in the afternoon search for some forest birds (**Nutcracker**).

8th: An early morning pre-breakfast optional birding, after breakfast a transfer to Bialowieza Forest on Polish Belorussian border for 3 nights stay. Although it is only couple of hours driving, there will be several stops on the way according to monitored present bird situation: for **Syrian Woodpecker**, at picturesque small town of Tykocin with several historic elements (a castle, the first in Poland XVIIth century house for retired and disabled soldiers, a monastery, a synagogue, nice market square, etc.), at a **Bee-eaters** colony, at fish ponds (**all 5 European** species of **grebes** some years), at artificial reservoir (numerous waterfowl, another chance for **Citrine Wagtail**), etc. Lunch on the way. The hotel in Bialowieza is a picturesque wooden cottage located on the clearing in the forest and from our dinner table we may again hear **Corncrake** calling, as well as experience nice home atmosphere and traditional cooking. An optional evening birding after dinner.

9th & 10th: Early morning pre-breakfast optional birdings, after breakfast we will be exploring the nearest to primeval forest of Europe including the core of National Park with restricted access. It is a unique mixture of ancient oak, lime, hornbeam, ash tree, but also Norway spruce and Scots pine, with enormous amount of wildlife of all kinds (**all 10 species of European woodpeckers**, including **Three-toed**, elusive **Hazel Grouse, 4 species of flycatchers**, The place for **European Bison**). We will have two full days to explore the fantastic old growth forests of Bialowieza and the surroundings. The primeval forests here once stretched from Ural mountains to Atlantic, now have been reduced to an area of about 1200 square kilometers divided roughly evenly between Poland and Belarus. The core of this forest remains untouched and represents the largest area of old growth forest left in Europe and (what is remarkable) on the rich lowland grounds - not in inhospitable and poor mountains.

11th: Transfer to Warsaw, for some final birding (**Syrian Woodpecker** or **Roller** if we miss it so far), short walk on Old Town (time permitting), transfer to Warsaw airport for a flight back to UK.

Price: £150 per day (£1050); £15/night (£105) single person supplement. Fares to Warsaw are not included.