

The Birds of Brandenburg & Berlin

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Berlin from regional airports: transfer Semlin.
Day 2/4	Daily programmes of birding excursions from Semlin.
Day 5	Transfer Berlin; fly UK.

Departs

March/October

Focus

Birds

Grading

A - short day walks only

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code DEU03)

Highlights

- Spectacle of up to 70,000 Cranes going to roost and Great Bustard very accessible.
- Large wintering flocks of grazing geese namely Tundra Bean and White-fronted.
- Raptors may include White-tailed Eagle, Rough-legged Buzzard, Merlin and Hen Harrier.
- Exploring the woodlands may reveal Black and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.
- A worthwhile extension easily organized to Berlin.



Images from top to bottom. Cranes, Bean Geese with Cranes and Berlin Cathedral



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Introduction

A birdwatching holiday might not immediately spring to mind when mention is made of Berlin, or of north-east Germany in general. This area is, ornithologically speaking, one of Europe's backwaters, currently little-known and under-visited despite an abundance of attractive habitat and superb birding. Things are changing though. Considerable efforts are being made in Germany to protect wildlife, and the popularity of birdwatching as a hobby is growing fast, particularly with the younger generations. Many of the reserves in this area now offer well-constructed hides and observation towers to rival the best on offer at British nature reserves.

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Arrive Berlin transfer Semlin

We fly during the course of today to Berlin (where possible from convenient regional airports – contact us for details). Our base for this tour will be a comfortable, warm hotel in the small village of Semlin which lies on the shores of Seeblick, an attractive lake tucked into the western edge of the state.

Day 2- 4

Daily excursions from Semlin

Over the next three full days we will explore the area in search of the varied and exciting birdlife on offer and below highlights the species we shall focus on finding.

Brandenburg's landscapes are generally flat, but nevertheless offer considerable variety in an area roughly twice the size of Yorkshire, notable for over 3,000 significant lakes, two major rivers (the Elbe and Oder) and

extensive woodland, with the largest tract of lowland beech forest in Europe.

The avian spectacles on offer during these two key months — March and October — are mouthwatering. We will visit the extensive rough grassland and cultivated fields of Havelländisches Luch in search of some of northern Europe's few remaining Great Bustards. About 100 bustards reside in a protected area between the towns of Nauen and Rathenow to the west of Berlin. We stand an excellent chance of tracking



Great Bustards

down these impressive birds which flock together in winter and become easier to find and close views are certainly possible.

Another target will be the large numbers of geese that visit the area at this time of year, tens of thousands of birds seek refuge in and around the lake, adjacent meadows and streams of Gülper See. Wintering flocks of Tundra Bean Geese with smaller numbers of Tiaga Bean Geese are also present. White-fronted Geese also winter throughout the state, appearing in flocks of up to 10,000. Barnacle Geese can be seen in much smaller numbers amongst the geese flocks and a few Pink-footed Geese also winter here. Lesser White-fronted and Red-breasted Geese very occasionally join them and we shall keep sharp eyes for these rarely seen species.

Wintering ducks, both dabbling and diving, are numerous too, with Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Teal, Northern Pintail, Common Goldeneye and both Pochard and Red-crested Pochard possible.

North-east Germany is also one of the major staging posts for Common Cranes, with truly spectacular numbers migrating south to their main winter quarters in Spain. The best-known Crane site in Brandenburg is Linum Ponds — an extensive area of former peat cuttings, 30 miles north-west of Berlin. We shall explore this area in search of these impressive birds and our two departures are timed to catch the peak Crane passage. October sees the Cranes heading south-west bound, and in March, the birds are on their



Common Crane feeding before going to roost (Oct 2015 tour)

way to breeding grounds across northern Europe. Watching the Cranes come in to roost at dusk is an evocative experience and without doubt one of the “must see” avian spectacles in Europe if not the world. We will position ourselves to witness tens of thousands of birds flying low overhead to their roosting site.

This proliferation of birdlife in attractive, well-managed habitat attracts a healthy population of raptors. Amongst them is the White-tailed Eagle, a species that has done particularly well in recent decades and may be found wintering here. Of other winter visitors, Rough legged Buzzards patrol the rough grassland areas from October to March and can be easily seen, whilst Hen Harriers, Merlins and Goshawks are all much more common than in the UK. Great Grey Shrikes also winter here in good numbers and we stand a very good chance of seeing this species.

In the extensive woodlands we plan to enjoy a walk or two in search of Hawfinch, Black, Middle Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, whilst open fields will be checked for winter flocks of finches, larks and buntings.

Day 5

Transfer Berlin, fly London

Today we will transfer to Berlin Airport for our flight back to the UK.

Extension

On completion of this tour, we highly recommend an extended stay in Berlin, which we are happy to organise for you. Modern-day Berlin buzzes with a vibrancy brought by international artists, immigrants and visitors from all over Europe, attracted by its progressive cultural scene and relatively low cost of living. It is a city full of interest and reminders of a turbulent 20th century, with some of Europe's finest museums clustered together on the UNESCO-listed Museum Island in central Berlin. Since the fall of its infamous Wall, Berlin has busied itself with, once again, becoming one of the most stimulating creative and cultural centres in Europe. The city's parks and green areas can also hold interesting species, difficult to see in the UK. Berlin is now famous for its Goshawk population and is reputed to have the highest breeding density of these magnificent birds in the world! An early morning walk around one of the city's parks offers a superb opportunity to see these birds which are



Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

notoriously difficult in their usual forest habitat.

Tour grading

This tour is graded A

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday.

How to book your place!

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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