

The Netherlands – Texel & the North

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Amsterdam
Day 2	Texel
Day 3	Texel
Day 4	Lauwersmeer NP and Zuidhorn
Day 5	Oostvaardersplassen. Fly London



Departs

November – February

Focus

Birds

Grading

A – Easy short walks

Dates and Prices

See website (Tour Code NLD02)

Highlights

- Visit to Texel, a rarity hotspot
- Tens of thousands of wintering geese
- Barnacle, White-fronted, Tundra Bean, Brent, with the chance of Snow and Red-breasted
- Wintering wildfowl with good numbers of Smew, Scaup and Long-tailed Duck
- Raptors may include Rough-legged Buzzard, Hen Harrier and White-tailed Eagle



Greater White-fronted Geese, Shore Lark, Rough-legged Buzzard



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Introduction

Although the Netherlands has the highest population density in Europe, the government has set aside a large part of the country for use as nature reserves. These protected areas consist mainly of polders, mudflats, marshes, reedbeds and sand dunes and are home to a large number of wintering birds. An excellent network of roads and motorways makes it possible to explore many of these exciting birding sites within a few days and during this tour we will spend our time in the northernmost provinces of Friesland and Flevoland, as well as two days on Texel – a winter and migrant hotspot.

We begin our tour with a morning flight to Amsterdam and then making a bird stop in the afternoon close to the capital, depending on recent bird sightings. One such place might be the nearby Zuid-Kennemerland National Park. During winter, its combination of open lakes, dunes, and thickets provides sanctuary to a dynamic mix of scrubland birds and raptors, particularly Goshawk and Hen Harrier, making it a prime destination for birdwatchers seeking seasonal sightings. It is also home to a herd of European Bison and can be one of the best places in Europe to see this species, occasionally at spectacularly close quarters.

The next two days we will spend on Texel, an island just off the mainland which is renowned for



White-tailed Eagle

being a rarity hotspot. Here we have a good chance of seeing Twite, Shore Lark, Snow Bunting and occasionally Lapland Bunting, as well as a whole host of resident and wintering birds including grebes, divers and seaduck which often surround the island. We will also be keeping a close eye on sighting reports and hopefully find something very unusual – a repeat of the Spectacled Eider (Jan 2025)?!

On the penultimate day we will visit Lauwersmeer National Park, which is a true winter-watching haven with over 100,000 geese wintering here alone. It's also excellent for ducks and other waterbirds, both of which attract vast numbers of raptors including White-tailed Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin and the nationally rare Rough-legged Buzzard – one of the last places this species is frequently seen in the Netherlands.

For our last day we head into Flevoland and to the famous marshland reserve of Oostvaardersplassen. Renowned as a bold experiment in rewilding, it uses large herbivores such as Konik horses, Heck cattle, and Red Deer to maintain an open complex of habitats which mimic pre-agricultural European ecosystems. We will spend our time exploring this enormous reserve from all possible angles and targeting species which we have either yet to see, which may include Smew, or potentially want to see more of! As one of the best places to see large congregations of White-tailed Eagle, you know you're in for a spectacular day. From here we make our way back to Amsterdam Airport and join our early evening flight back to London.

If you're looking for a slice of incredible winter birding, just a stone's throw distance from home, look no further. It would not be unexpected to see over 130 species in just five days!

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather, recent sightings and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme or visiting different locations 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

Fly Amsterdam

We catch a morning flight from London to Amsterdam, from where we will make the short drive to one of the nearby reserves, one of which is Zuid-Kennemerland National Park. It is a large protected reserve on the North Sea coast, consisting of huge, rugged and grass-covered sand dunes, scrubland, pine forests and various ponds and it is home to a wide variety of wildlife – over 40% of all species in the Netherlands have been recorded here. In the ponds we are likely to see Shoveler, Pintail, Common Pochard, Goldeneye and Ring-necked Duck amongst many other waterfowl. The forested areas hold many species of tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Firecrest and Siskin. The windswept beach is populated with various waders and smaller shorebirds, with gulls and terns overhead, as well as Goshawk and Hen Harrier. This should be an excellent start to our Dutch birding holiday and don't forget there is a chance of European Bison!

From here it is a 90-minute drive north to Den Helder and our hotel for the next 2 nights.

Days 2 & 3

Texel

On both days we will take the short ferry ride from Den Helder across to the island of Texel, one of the best places for birding in the Netherlands. The most westerly and largest of the Frisian Islands, which span half of the Dutch coastline and across into Germany, Texel attracts many birds, with over 400 recorded! As well as the plethora of more common species, it is particularly good for rarities, as anything can turn up and it usually does, with a drake Spectacled Eider at the start of 2025 a recent highlight.



Red-breasted Goose

On the protected waters on the east side of Texel, we will scan the seas for more waterfowl and geese, with large numbers of Greylag, Egyptian, Barnacle, Greater White-fronted and Dark-bellied Brent Geese, and we will keep a sharp eye scanning the flocks for a rare Black Brant or Red-breasted Goose. There are rafts of Gadwall, Tufted Duck, Teal, Shelduck, Common Scoter and Common Eider



bobbing in the waters, as well as Common and Red-breasted Merganser and maybe Red-throated and Black-throated Divers.

There are plenty of waders here with large numbers of Black and Bar-tailed Godwits, Avocet, Curlew, Common Greenshank and Redshank, and closer to the shoreline species such as Dunlin, Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstone. The surrounding dunes and scrubland are perfect

habitat for rarer species such as Twite, Shore Lark, Snow Bunting and possibly Lapland Bunting.

It should prove to be an exciting and productive couple of days on Texel and we will catch the ferry back to the mainland on each day in the late afternoon. On Day 3 we will drive 90 minutes, crossing the provincial border into Friesland, to our hotel for the next two nights, on the banks of one of the many waterways that make up De Alde Feanen National Park.

Day 4

Lauwersmeer NP and Zuidhorn

This morning we will head north to the coast and the fantastic Lauwersmeer National Park, home to a large array of birds, both in terms of species and numbers. Once part of the North Sea, this huge body of water was closed off in 1969 for flooding management purposes and is now a haven for birds with a myriad of different habitats. There are lots of hides and viewing platforms in the various parts of the park which we will use throughout the course of the day.

Tundra Bean Goose, Pink-footed Goose, White-fronted and Barnacle Geese occur in huge numbers and most winters two or three Snow Geese associate with these big flocks, although locating these rare wanderers is always a difficult task. It is also a good area to observe all three swan species – Bewick's, Whooper and Mute – which often feed here side by side. In amongst the usual rafts of waterfowl we could see Goldeneye, Smew, Greater and Lesser Scaup, as well as Slavonian, Black-necked and Little Grebes. Bearded Tits and Reed Buntings are regularly seen in the reedbeds here, which are also home to more elusive species such as Water Rail and Bittern. On the banks are Large and Little Egrets, Grey Heron and Eurasian Spoonbills, and in the surrounding grassland there are Lapwings, Curlew, Black-bellied and Golden Plover. The wooded areas hold Firecrest, Goldcrest, Brambling, Siskin, Red Crossbill and Hawfinch. The mudflats all around the coastline of the Lauwersmeer are home to flocks of waders including Red Knot, Purple Sandpiper, Ruff and Little Stint, while flying overhead will be lots of gulls and terns.



It is another location where rarer species are spotted from time to time and we have a good chance here of Twite and Snow Bunting. Arguably it is one of the best locations in the country for birds of prey and we can hope to see White-tailed Eagle and Rough-legged Buzzard overhead, as well as Merlin, Hen Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel. There is so much to see here it might be difficult to know where to look!

After spending most of the day here, we will make a diversion on our way back to the hotel, via the fields outside of the small town of Zuidhorn, which are particularly good for feeding geese.

Day 5

Oostvaardersplassen, fly London

This morning we will start to make our way back towards Amsterdam through the province of Flevoland and will make a stop at the famous reserve of Oostvaardersplassen. Although difficult to work due to its large size, we will search the open water and extensive reedbeds from the IJsselmeerdyke or from one of the many hides that overlook this large wetland. Depending on the water level, vast numbers of duck can congregate on the open water including Greater Scaup, Goldeneye, Smew and Goosander.

Rough-legged Buzzards may often be seen hovering over the rough pastures beside the lake and these surrounding meadows are also populated by good numbers of Whooper Swan, Greylag, Bean



Great Grey Shrike

and White-fronted Geese along with flocks of wildfowl. Life for these birds is rarely peaceful for long and the appearance of a raptor on the scene will invariably create several minutes of panic before calm settles and heads are lowered to begin feeding again. In the myriad of vegetation surrounding the water edges there are many smaller species that can be found here such as Reed Bunting, Marsh and Willow Tit, and we might be lucky to find an over-wintering Great Grey Shrike.

Roe and Red Deer may be glimpsed feeding at dawn and again later in the day but these are timid creatures and prefer to remain concealed during the day, only venturing into the open when disturbed.

After a fitting finale to our week in the Netherlands, we will continue to make our way to Amsterdam Airport in time for our early evening flight back to London.

Grading

A. There will be no serious walking, with easy walks on gentle terrain.

Clothing & Equipment

Bring a telescope if you have one, since it will be useful for scanning the large lakes and open polders. Stout shoes or trainers will be adequate footwear, although it may be worth bringing walking boots if the weather looks like it will be wet. Winter weather in the Netherlands can be both cold and wet, so adequate warm and waterproof clothing is essential.

Food & Accommodation

All meals are included in the tour cost, starting with dinner on Day 1 and ending with lunch on Day 5. We stay for two nights in Den Helder in a comfortable hotel on the water's edge, and for the next two nights we stay in a lovely hotel in the middle of De Alde Feanen National Park, overlooking one of the many waterways, with excellent birding to be had in its surroundings.

Your Safety & Security

You have chosen to travel to the Netherlands. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice> regularly prior to travel.

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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