

Poland's Primeval Forests

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Warsaw and transfer Bialowieza.

Day 2/3 Bialowieza Forest.

Day 4 Transfer to Warsaw and fly London.

Departs

April or May

Focus

Birds and mammals

Grading

Grade A. Day walks only.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code POL01) or see the current Naturetrek brochure

Highlights:

- Enter the primeval forests of Bialoweiza at dawn.
- Search for 8 species of woodpeckers including Three-toed, White-backed & Black Woodpecker.
- Chance of encountering European Bison.
- Look for Pygmy Owl at dusk.
- Pied, Collared & Red-breasted Flycatchers.
- Scan Siemianówka Reservoir for migrant waders, terns and waterfowl.
- Raptors including Lesser Spotted Eagle, White-tailed Eagle & Montagu's Harrier.
- Led by an expert UK ornithologist & local naturalist guide.



*From top: Pygmy Owl, White-winged Tern, Nutcracker.
Images by Shutterstock Images & Paul Marshall*



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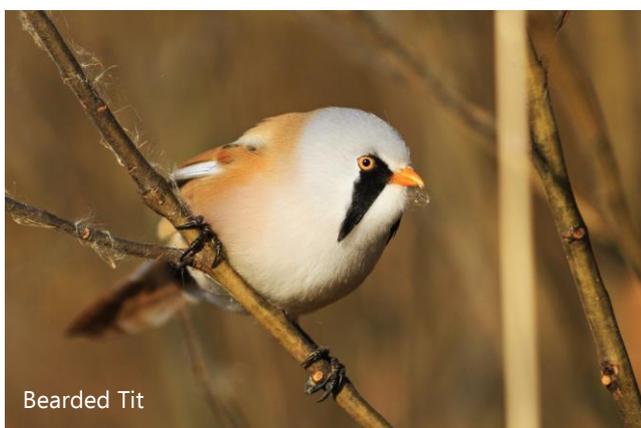
Itinerary

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

Bialowieza Forest

Our flight departs from London, normally early morning. On arrival in Warsaw we will be met by our local guide and drive eastwards to the Bialowieza National Park. The long journey will take us across eastern Poland, through a peaceful rural landscape typified by fields of crops and patches of forest dotted with lakes and small villages. Most villages here contain one or more small wooden churches, the denomination of which (catholic or orthodox) can be gauged by the design of their crosses. Horse-drawn transport is still occasionally used in this area as is the strip farming method of agriculture.



Bearded Tit

En route we will stop at the Bialystok's Dojlidy Fishponds an excellent area of reed-fringed ponds which hold numerous birds including Whooper Swan, Red-necked Grebe, Penduline Tit, Bearded Tit, Marsh Harrier and Garganey. We aim to arrive in the small village of Bialowieza by the early evening.

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Days 2 – 3

Bialowieza Forest

We will spend the next two full days exploring in and around the Bialowieza Forest, walking the trails that criss-cross this magnificent mixed woodland. This is the largest remaining remnant of the original European forest and is both the oldest national park in Poland and one of the oldest in the whole of Europe. In Poland alone it covers an area of 580 square kilometres and continues into a vast tract of woodland across the Belorussian border. Much of the Polish side is managed for forestry, but 47.5 square kilometres are protected within the Bialowieza National Park, known locally as the 'Strict Reserve'. Access to this area is strictly controlled and only granted if accompanied by one of twenty or so licensed guides. On one morning a guide will meet us at the entrance and take us through this magnificent remnant of primeval woodland describing the area's rich ecology en route. The swampy alder woods and ancient Limes, Hornbeams, Oaks and Norway Spruces are truly impressive, and together with the park's rich diversity of fauna, assured its selection as a



Bialowieza Forest

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1977 and a World Heritage Site two years later. Indeed, the Bialowieza Forest as a whole still retains a near complete natural assemblage of animals and plants, from top carnivores such as Wolf and Lynx, through large herbivores, in particular European Bison and Elk, down to an unparalleled diversity of higher plants, mosses, lichens and fungi. It has been estimated that the forest contains approximately 8,500 species of insect, 12 species of amphibian, 44 species of mammal and 232 species of bird, 120 of which remain to breed. There are 40 distinct plant communities, including 20 forest communities, indeed within the strict reserve alone there are 560 species of vascular plants representing almost 30% of the total flora in the whole of Poland!



Red-breasted Flycatcher

By early spring the forests will be alive with bird song as wave after wave of returning migrants stake their territorial claims for the year. Collared, Pied and Red-breasted Flycatchers all breed here along with Thrush Nightingale, Redstart, Icterine and Wood Warblers. Within this chorus we will be listening out for the characteristic notes of the woodpeckers, from the explosive laugh of the mighty Black Woodpecker to the falcon-like chittering of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. White-backed Woodpecker are early nesters and may have

already be feeding large young, and we hope to locate the most elusive, and sought after, of the *Picidae* family, the unobtrusive Three-toed Woodpecker. A sudden flurry of wings and leaves may herald an escaping Hazel Grouse whilst other birds to look out for - in and over the forests - include Nutcracker, Common Crossbill, Hawfinch, White Stork, Lesser Spotted Eagle and perhaps even a Pygmy Owl on an evening foray.

During our stay we will spend most of our time exploring the managed portion of the forest. Although this habitat generally contains a less diverse assemblage of birds, the managed woodland holds a larger number of many of the sought after species. Pygmy Owl, Grey-headed, Middle-spotted and White-backed Woodpeckers are all commoner here than in the primeval forest as is Hazel Grouse. The distinctive 'crex crex' call of the Corncrake is often heard emanating from the rough meadows, whilst in the scrub and thickets that edge the woodlands Barred Warblers breed.

The managed forest also holds nearly all of the Bialowieza's European Bison. The Wisent, as it is also known, is the largest land mammal in Europe and became extinct in the wild in the 1920's. Shortly after its demise, a programme of captive breeding was initiated and in 1952 this magnificent animal was successfully re-introduced back into the forest.



White-backed Woodpecker

The Bialowieza now contains one of Europe's, and indeed the world's, last remaining herds with around 250 Bison ranging freely within the Polish section of the forest and another 300 across the Belorussian border. For such a big animal Bison can be very elusive, but if we are fortunate enough to locate one, or maybe a group, slowly plodding their way through the forest it will undoubtedly be one of the highlights of the tour. Other mammals to look out for include Red and Roe Deer, Elk, Red Squirrel, Pine Marten, and perhaps Wild Boar. Both Lynx and Wolf occur here in reasonable numbers but it would be a very fortunate group indeed to spot either of these!



The Palace Park is another very productive area to explore, both for woodpeckers and other bird species. Here a patchwork of open woodlands, grass lawns and small lakes provides the best habitat in which to look for Grey-headed Woodpecker, Wryneck and Hawfinch plus occasional parties of lingering Waxwings. The park is also the place to search for the Syrian Woodpecker, a rare bird in Poland that is expanding its range up from the south but is still only occasionally seen.



We will also head north to explore the marshes and woodlands surrounding the Siemianówka Reservoir, approximately 1 hour from Bialowieza. Lake Siemianówka is a superb area of open water and marsh formed by the damming of the Narew River and holds a rich assemblage of resident and migrant bird species, including Citrine Wagtail. Black, Whiskered and the beautiful White-winged Terns all breed here as do Garganey, Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes. Various wading birds should be tracking their way north and this is a

good place to watch Ruff displaying, the males resplendent in their breeding dress.

The surrounding woodlands and marsh are also excellent for birds of prey. White-tailed Eagles are a regular sight perched on dead trees around the lake shore or drifting overhead on huge outstretched wings whilst Marsh Harriers quarter the reedbeds below. Lesser-spotted Eagles, Hobby, Goshawk, Red Kite, Osprey, Spotted Eagle and Short-toed Eagle have all been seen here in the past.

Day 4

London

We should have time this morning to take a final look around the forests and marshes of Bialowieza before heading back to Warsaw in time to catch our early evening flight to London. Our flight usually arrives back in London mid-evening.

Tour grading

This tour is graded A, consisting of day walks only. We will travel to each site by minibus, then take leisurely walks to explore the area, generally over easy terrain, although some paths can be rough in places. The holiday is therefore suitable for anyone who enjoys walking in the countryside and is of an 'average' level of fitness.

Clothing & equipment

Please refer to the clothing list sent to you with your pre-departure information on booking.

Weather

The weather in Poland at this time of the year is very similar to that experienced in the UK. It can be changeable but can also be pleasantly sunny and warm. The evenings and early mornings will be fairly chilly, however, so you will need to pack for all eventualities!

Food & accommodation included in the price

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

Your Safety & Security

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/poland> 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.
