

Serbia's Long-eared Owls

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Depart from London to Belgrade

Day 2/4 Excursions in Kikinda

Day 5 Return to Belgrade

Day 6 Arrive back in London

Departs

November to January

Focus

Long-eared Owls, birds and other wildlife

Grading

Grade A. Easy to moderate day walks

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code SRB01)

Highlights:

- Kikinda hosts one of the largest known roosts of Long-eared Owls.
- Explore the wetlands and open plains of northern Serbia, rich in wintering waterbirds and raptors.
- Visit Carska Bara Nature Reserve and Kapetanski Rit.
- Winter landscape in and around Kikinda.



From top: Long eared Owl (courtesy of Shutterstock), Golden Eagles and Bearded Reedling (courtesy of Nenad Mihajlovic)



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

In the far north of Serbia, close to the Romanian border, lies the town of Kikinda – a place that has become internationally renowned among birdwatchers for hosting one of the largest winter gatherings of Long-eared Owls anywhere in the world. Each winter, hundreds of these elegant owls gather to roost in the town's parks, churchyards and tree-lined streets, creating a remarkable wildlife spectacle in the heart of an urban setting.

This short winter tour offers the opportunity to witness this extraordinary natural phenomenon while also exploring the diverse landscapes of northern Serbia. The fertile plains and wetlands of the Vojvodina region support a rich variety of birdlife during the winter months, including large numbers of geese, ducks and raptors. During our excursions we will visit important wetland areas such as Carska Bara Nature Reserve and Kapetanski Rit, where species such as White-tailed Eagle, Pygmy Cormorant and Hen Harrier may be encountered.

In addition to the wildlife highlights, the tour also provides an opportunity to experience the culture and landscapes of this fascinating region. Our journey begins and ends in the vibrant Serbian capital of Belgrade, while a visit to the historic city of Novi Sad offers a glimpse of the rich cultural heritage of the Vojvodina province, reflected in its Austro-Hungarian architecture, relaxed café culture, and broad, tree-lined boulevards. The imposing Petrovaradin Fortress overlooks the Danube and provides wide views across the river and surrounding plains, while the nearby floodplain habitats support a variety of birdlife, often including herons, egrets, and migrating waterbirds.

Combining exceptional owl encounters with winter birding in wetlands and open countryside, this tour offers a unique introduction to one of Europe's most unusual wildlife spectacles.

ZIMOVALIŠTE SOVA UTINA *Asio otus*
THE LONG-EARED OWL WINTER ROOST SITE

KAKO POMOĆI UTINAMA?
Najvažnije je sačuvati drveće na kojima utine bravaju. Pored toga, glave se treba uzimati pažljivo i staviti u hladno, suvo i tamno mesto. Glave treba čuvati u hladno, suvo i tamno mesto. Glave treba čuvati u hladno, suvo i tamno mesto.

O UTINI
Sova utina duga je oko 35 cm, a raspon krila iznosi oko 100 cm. Smeđe sivo obojeno perje omogućava joj da ostane neprimetna u krošnjama drveća. Utine se mogu videti na različitim stajalištima. Često su grupisane i uočljive zbog svoje boje. Utine su veoma mirne i ne letaju često. Utine su veoma mirne i ne letaju često.

ZIMOVANJE UTINA U VOJVODINI
Tokom zime, utine se najčešće okupljaju u masivima glave zapadno-provode-dan. U većini gradova i sela u Vojvodini postoji bar jedno mesto, najčešće park, čestito obilještvo ili džamija sa kvalitetnim drvećem gdje zimuju utine. U nekim od njih nalaze se najveće grupe utina na svetu, u kojima često biva više od 1000 utina. U rekord je došlo njih u Kikindi gdje je broj bilo oko od 1400 jedinki. Sove koje dan provode u jelama u razvijena tokom hladne zime gladuju i druge utine. Zbog toga na njima, hladama, parkovima, u parkovima i džamijama u široj okolini.

DA LI SU UTINE UGROŽENE?
Utine je strogo zaštićena vrsta, pa je zakonom zabranjeno njihovo ubijanje, proganjanje, hvatanje, uznemiravanje i uništavanje staništa. Ipak, svi takvi krivi se od strane neopreznih i nezavestnih građana. Čime se ove vrlo klonove treba oglašavati. Jedna od najvažnijih stvari za utine je očuvanje stabala na kojima zimuju.

DA LI SU UTINE KORISNE?
Glavna hrana utina su miševi, vešuharice, pacovi i drugi mali sisari. Tokom zime, svaka utina pojede prosečno tri glodara. Pretpostoji se da u ovoj Vojvodini utine tokom zime pojedu oko 15 miliona glodara, koji bi mogli biti izazivajući hrana u vrednosti od nekoliko desetina miliona evra! Ne treba zaboraviti da na ovaj način utine sprečavaju i širenje mnogih zaraznih bolesti koje prenose glodari!

Information board (Milan Ruzic)

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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 the best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Arrive Belgrade

We will depart around midday from London to Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport.

On arrival in Belgrade we will transfer to our hotel for the night. Depending on arrival times there may be an opportunity for a short walk in the surrounding area before dinner.

During the evening your tour leader will outline the plans for the coming days and introduce the remarkable natural history of the region we are about to explore.

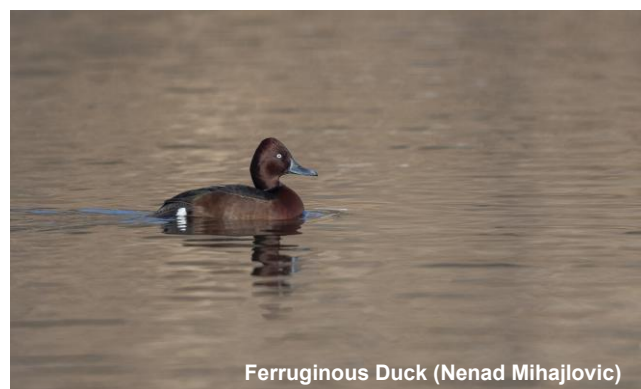
Day 2

Transfer Kikinda

After breakfast we begin our journey north across the fertile plains of Vojvodina towards the town of Kikinda, close to the Romanian border, which is widely known as the "Owl Capital of the World".

The drive takes us through a landscape of farmland, wetlands and scattered villages, an area that supports large numbers of wintering birds. En route we will make stops at lakes and marshes to explore the local birdlife.

Depending on water levels, these wetlands can hold impressive numbers of ducks including Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Teal, Common Pochard and Common Shelduck, while both Great Cormorant and Pygmy Cormorant may be present on open water. Among the gull flocks we will search for Caspian Gull, mixed with the similar Yellow-legged Gull.



Ferruginous Duck (Nenad Mihajlovic)

Large flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese and Greylag Geese often move across the sky, and we will remain alert for White-tailed Eagle, a species that is regularly encountered in this part of Serbia. Reedbeds may reveal Bearded Reedling and Reed Bunting, while careful searching could produce Penduline Tit.

By late afternoon we arrive in Kikinda, a town that has become internationally famous for hosting one of the largest winter roosts of Long-eared Owls anywhere in the world. After settling into our accommodation, we may take a short walk through the town where we could already encounter our first owls roosting quietly in the trees.

Day 3

Kikinda

Today we focus on the extraordinary winter roosts of Long-eared Owls for which Kikinda is renowned.



Long-eared Owl (Nenad Mihajlovic)

Our morning begins in the town's central square, located close to our accommodation. Here the mature trees provide ideal roosting sites for the owls and the number of birds present can be remarkable. In some winters as many as 150 owls have been counted in a single tree, and the total number of birds roosting throughout the town can exceed 800 individuals.

Even in years with lower numbers the spectacle remains impressive, with owls scattered throughout the town in churchyards, parks and quiet streets.

We will spend time observing these birds and learning more about their behaviour, ecology and the reasons why this particular town has become such an important winter refuge for the species.

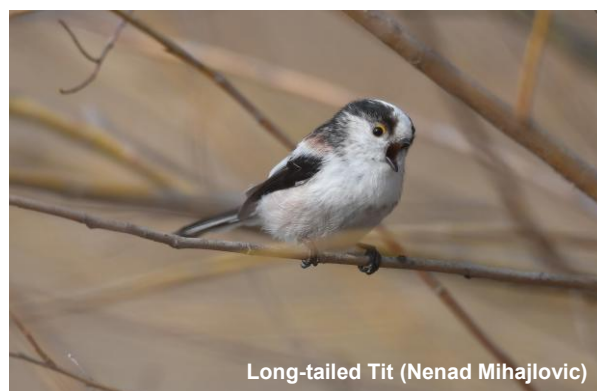
Later in the day we will explore other areas of Kikinda and the surrounding countryside. In addition to Long-eared Owls we may encounter species such as Little Owl, Syrian Woodpecker, Hawfinch and Black Redstart.

Day 4

Kikinda

After breakfast we once again check the owl roosts around Kikinda before heading out to explore the wider landscapes of the region.

Our main destination today is Kapetanski Rit, a protected wetland area located around 80 kilometres north-west of Kikinda. Covering approximately 179 acres, this mosaic of marshes, reedbeds and open water provides habitat for a wide range of bird species during the winter months. Here we will search for Pygmy Cormorant, Great Egret and various ducks and gulls, while raptors such as White-tailed Eagle, Golden Eagle, Western Marsh Harrier and Hen Harrier frequently patrol the area. The reedbeds may again produce Bearded Reedling and Penduline Tit, while open fields nearby can hold flocks of wintering finches.



Long-tailed Tit (Nenad Mihajlovic)

Later in the afternoon we will explore surrounding farmland and woodland edges where other owl species may be present. Short-eared Owl, Little Owl and Barn Owl are all possible, while Syrian Woodpecker and Hawfinch may also be encountered.

We return to Kikinda in the late afternoon.

Day 5

Transfer to Belgrade

After breakfast we depart Kikinda and begin our journey south towards Belgrade.

En route we will visit Carska Bara Nature Reserve, one of Serbia's most important wetland areas. The reserve consists of a complex network of lakes, marshes and canals surrounded by reedbeds and woodland and supports an impressive diversity of wildlife. More than 500 plant species have been recorded here, along with numerous fish, amphibians, and reptiles, making it an important habitat for waterbirds and birds of prey.

During winter thousands of Greater White-fronted Geese gather here, and careful observation may reveal rarer species such as Lesser White-fronted Goose or Red-breasted Goose.

Among the ducks we may encounter Mallard, Eurasian Teal, Northern Shoveler and Eurasian Wigeon, with the possibility of Ferruginous Duck or Smew.

The reserve is also an excellent place to observe birds of prey including White-tailed Eagle, Hen Harrier, Western Marsh Harrier, Peregrine and Merlin, while nearby fields may hold flocks of Common Cranes.

Later we continue towards Belgrade, breaking the journey with a stop in Novi Sad. This pause provides both a natural and cultural contrast to the surrounding wetlands, offering insight into the distinctive character of the Vojvodina region. The city's elegant Austro-Hungarian architecture, open squares, and relaxed atmosphere make it a pleasant place to stretch our legs after time in the field, while the Danube frontage and views from Petrovaradin Fortress give a broader perspective on the landscapes we have been exploring. The surrounding riverbanks and floodplain habitats can also hold interest for wildlife, with opportunities to encounter additional waterbirds and raptors en route.

We then complete the final leg of the journey to Belgrade. In the evening we gather for our final dinner together and reflect on the highlights of the tour.

Day 6

Return to London

This morning we transfer to Belgrade Airport in time for our return flight to London.

Images courtesy of Nenad Mihajlovic, Milan Ruzic and Shutterstock

Tour Grading

Grade A – This holiday involves mostly easy walking on flat ground. Distances covered on foot will generally be a couple of miles, often around towns, wetlands and nature reserves.

Although walking distances are not great, we may spend extended periods outdoors observing wildlife, so participants should be comfortable being on their feet for much of the day. Warm clothing will be essential due to winter temperatures.

Focus

This tour focuses primarily on the remarkable winter roosts of Long-eared Owls in the town of Kikinda, where hundreds of birds gather each winter in trees throughout the town centre.

In addition to observing these owls at close range, we will explore a range of nearby wetlands, farmland and woodland habitats that support a rich diversity of wintering birds. During our excursions we will look for species such as White-tailed Eagle, Hen Harrier, Western Marsh Harrier and Pygmy Cormorant, as well as large flocks of wintering geese and ducks.

The tour provides an excellent opportunity to experience the birdlife of northern Serbia in winter while also discovering the landscapes and culture of the Vojvodina region.

Flights

We are aiming to take a direct flight from London Heathrow to Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport. There are a limited number of regional flight options for this tour, and these are rarely direct. If you would like information regarding a regional departure or upgrade options, please contact the Naturetrek office.

Weather

In winter, Kikinda, Serbia, experiences cold temperatures and reduced daylight. Typical temperatures for this time of year are -1 to 5°C (+30.2°F to 41°F). Waterproofs and a warm jacket should be carried at all times. Be prepared for the cold, as the best time to view the roosting owls is often in the chilly hours of the evening or early morning.

Food & Accommodation

All meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 6 are included in the tour cost. For dinner, we will visit different restaurants close by. Lunches will be light or packed lunches from the nearby shop/supermarket to maximise the time spent in the field.

We use a selection of clean and comfortable hotels, with all rooms being en suite.

Extensions

There are no set extensions for this tour, but this could include a few days in Belgrade. Please contact the Naturetrek office if you would like to discuss the options.

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, Commonwealth & Development 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/serbia> regularly prior to travel.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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Long-eared Owl (Nenad Mihajlovic)