

# The Birds of Brandenburg & Berlin

Naturetrek Tour Report

12 – 16 October 2015

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Report compiled by Gerald Broddelez



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Tour participants: Gerald Broddelez & Simon Tonkin (leaders) with a group of Naturetrek clients

## Introduction

Brandenburg might not sound like a birdwatcher's paradise but this area of Germany offers surprisingly good birding. It is a great place to combine a city trip to Berlin with a birding excursion to the Brandenburg-Havelland area. This ornithologically 'undiscovered' area of old East Germany is a fantastic place in early spring and autumn when geese and cranes are very numerous as they stop on migration.

The terrain is mainly flat but very varied. Wetlands abound with hundreds of lakes, large rivers, polders, marshes and reed-fringed fish ponds interspersed with meadows and forests.

This short autumn visit coincided with the time when Common Crane numbers peak, geese are at their maximum, and when Great Bustard and raptors such as White-tailed Eagle, Rough-legged Buzzard are most easily seen.

The woodlands are generally quiet at this time of year, but we still managed to see a nice selection of birds that included Crested Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper and Black Woodpecker.

## Day 1

**Monday 12th October**

### Berlin – Semlin

Everybody arrived on time and after collecting our rental vehicles we were on our way to Brandenburg and Semlin, our base for the next four nights. En route we saw our first flocks of cranes and geese right by the highway.

After checking into our hotel we explored an area nearby. A short walk took us to a hide overlooking a large wetland that now was mostly dry. Some time spent scanning produced a nice set of birds: our first but brief White-tailed Eagle, a juvenile Goshawk in flight and perched, flocks of White-fronted and Bean Geese, Bearded Reedling and Willow Tit in the reedbeds beside the tower, and introduced Coypu and Red Fox!

With light conditions fading fast we drove back to the hotel and enjoyed our first local-style dinner in our charming restaurant.

## Day 2

**Tuesday 13th October**

### Gulper See – Linum

Weather: dry, sunny and overcast. After breakfast we drove to the Gulper See where we had a walk along the main dyke. On the lake we found a good selection of waterbirds that included Tufted Duck, Pochard, Wigeon, Goldeneye, Great Crested Grebe and Great Cormorant. A distant perched White-tailed Eagle was seen through the telescope, and several Great White Egrets were feeding along the reedbeds. A patch of forest gave us our first views of Crested Tit, Marsh Tit, Jay and Short-toed Treecreeper. We also had close flyby views of two adult and two juvenile White-tailed Eagles.

We had lunch at the old windmill and were briefly interrupted with sightings of buzzards and a mixed group of tits. We then drove north-east and stopped at some freshly cut cornfields. Here we spent the rest of the afternoon watching thousands of Common Cranes and geese until late afternoon when they flew off to their roost site. The noise and sheer numbers of birds had to be seen and heard to be believed! We found many young birds among the adults and it was great to see them so close to the road. In the telescopes we could study all the details of these smart birds.

Also a flock of the white-headed form of Long-tailed Tit made an appearance, Green Sandpiper and Common Kingfisher were feeding in a small stream, while a flock of Raven was feasting on a dead Roe Deer. Just as we planned to leave a young male Wild Boar appeared and started chasing the cranes! A great finish to a wonderful day.

## Day 3

Wednesday 14th October

### Nennhausen – Linum

Weather: dry morning, rainy spell in the afternoon and evening. This morning we drove to the Nennhausen area where we quickly found our quest for the morning. A group of nine Great Bustards, mainly young birds and females, were feeding quite close to the road allowing excellent telescope views. In a field nearby we found a flock of Stock Doves and our first Rough-legged Buzzard.

We then drove some of the backroads in the core bustard area and scanned from the many observation towers. Elegant Hen Harriers, both males and females, gave good views both in flight and perched in the fields. Buzzards were extremely common, and small flocks of Skylark and Lapwing were present.

After our picnic lunch inside one of the larger hides we drove to the north of Linum, the cranes core roosting area. While waiting for the cranes to arrive we were entertained by a couple of Foxes. Then one flock after another came in: sometimes only a few, sometimes hundreds at a time. Some came in close, low overhead while others were seen in the distance. For the next hour we watched and listened to this exceptional spectacle. A flyby Black Woodpecker was an extra and unexpected bonus. The official count for the evening (made by the local Crane group) was circa 60-70,000 Common Cranes, and about the same number of geese!

## Day 4

Thursday 15th October

### Semlin – Havelberg

Weather: liquid sunshine most of the day. A short walk after breakfast took us to the Semlin See. A group of Black-headed Gulls, single Common Gulls and a White-tailed Eagle were spotted by the lake. In the trees we had good views of Short-toed Treecreeper and Nuthatch.

After this we visited the large polders near Gulpe. Despite the weather conditions we quickly found a Great Grey Shrike perched overhead. Time was then spent scanning through the thousands of Bean and White-fronted Geese for something unusual - and we found two Barnacle Geese. We then drove to Havelberg for a short visit of this historic town and/or a warm drink.

Late afternoon was spend in one of the larger hides by the Gulper See waiting for cranes and geese to come in to roost. Only a few cranes showed, but several thousand geese flew in from all sides, landing in the middle of the Lake to spend the night.

## Day 5

Friday 16th October

### Brandenburg – Berlin

Weather: overcast. After breakfast and checking-out we said goodbye to Semlin and drove back to Berlin Tegel Airport. We arrived just before noon and in good time for the flights home, or to transfer to the city centre for those staying on a few extra days to explore this wonderful city.

We all agreed that it had been a great trip with lots of fantastic crane and geese encounters, many other good birds such as White-tailed Eagle and Great Bustard, some excellent mammal sightings, and great company.

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## Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			12	13	14	15	16
1	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			✓		
2	Tundra Bean Goose	<i>Anser serrirostris rossicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	Taiga Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis fabalis</i>		✓			
4	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons albifrons</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>				✓	
7	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	✓	✓	
8	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>		✓		✓	
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
10	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓			
11	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓		✓	
12	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓		✓	
13	Tufted Duck	<i>Anthya fuligula</i>		✓		✓	
14	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓		✓	
15	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓		✓	
16	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis.</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	1	4	1	3	
22	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			✓	✓	
23	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
24	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	✓				
25	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
27	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>			9		
28	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
29	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓		✓	
30	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
31	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓			
32	Green Sandpiper	<i>tringa ochropus</i>		✓			
33	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓		✓	
34	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓		✓	
35	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓		✓	
36	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓	
37	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓		
39	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓		
41	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓		✓	
42	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓		
43	Black Woodpecker	<i>Picus martius</i>			✓		
44	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	
45	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		✓	✓	✓	
47	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			12	13	14	15	16
48	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
49	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>	✓				
50	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓			
51	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓			
52	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
54	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
55	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	✓				
56	Sky Lark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
57	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓		✓	
58	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignoratus</i>		✓			
59	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓			
60	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓	
61	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓		✓	
62	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
63	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	
64	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>				✓	
65	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓			
66	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>				✓	
67	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓		
68	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>				✓	
69	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
70	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
71	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓		
72	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓		
73	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓	✓	
75	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓		✓	
76	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓		✓	✓	
77	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓	✓	
78	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓			
79	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>			✓		
80	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓	✓	
81	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓		✓		

## Mammals

1	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	1		3		
2	Coypu	<i>Myocastor coypus</i>	2			1	
3	European hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	1				
4	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Western Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	1	1			
6	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		1			