

The Birds of Brandenburg & Berlin

Naturetrek Tour Report

10 - 14 October 2016



Hawfinch by Dominic Sargent



Common Cranes by Dominic Sargent



Coypu by Tom Mabbett



Great Bustards by Dominic Sargent

Report compiled by Tom Mabbett
Images courtesy of Dominic Sargent & Tom Mabbett



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

Tour participants: Tom Mabbett (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Summary

We enjoyed a superb few days exploring the Brandenburg region and its array of avian delights, with countless thousands of birds seen in this superb area. We enjoyed White-tailed Eagles, Rough-legged buzzards, Hen Harriers, Great Bustards, fields full of Bean and White-fronted Geese not to mention around 50,000 Common Crane! It was a great few days with lots of fun along the way.

Day 1

Monday 10th October

Everything went smoothly with meeting up, and we made our way for the 1hr 30 minute journey from the airport to our hotel in Semlin. We arrived with just enough time for a quick walk from the hotel to look over Hohennauener See, which is a large lake a very short walk from the hotel. At dusk here we saw our first White-tailed Eagle, putting up a flock of Black-headed Gulls while Water Rail and Bearded Tits were heard. We then enjoyed our first meal at the restaurant and discussed plans for the following day.

Day 2

Tuesday 11th October

While Tom bought supplies, those keen to get out before breakfast were rewarded with great views of two perched White-tailed Eagles down at the lake and a Chiffchaff singing nearby.

We all enjoyed breakfast after appreciating the local Black Redstarts on the restaurant roof, and were soon heading to Gülper See for our first trip out. On the way we stopped to watch our first Rough-legged Buzzard which unfortunately moved away rather quickly, while a flock of around 40 Corn Bunting were more obliging and a Merlin came in to take one in a flash! Two Common Cranes were the first of the many to come.

Continuing on, we were again pulling over, this time to appreciate a cracking Hen Harrier very close to the road with a fine male nearby before reaching the lake. Here we walked through a small patch of forest to a large hide and, on opening the shutters, we saw two White-tailed Eagles sitting on the water's edge. We had excellent views and watched many Great Egrets here, with a huge flock of around 100 Cormorant and a selection of wildfowl, including Teal, Wigeon, Pintail and Shoveler with a single Shelduck, also seen.

Walking alongside the lake, we spent some time with a large tit flock and had excellent views of Crested Tit, Treecreeper, many Goldcrests and two rather flighty Firecrests, with Marsh Tits and Nuthatch also seen. Stopping to view the lake from another angle, we spent most of the time watching two Goldcrests who tumbled from the trees fighting and eventually sat exhausted on the grass in front of us. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was busy feeding on a dead branch nearby.

We had our picnic underneath a windmill by the lake and then drove to Linum stopping to watch our first grounded geese in the form of a few Bean, White-fronted and Barnacle Geese. Just north of the area around Linumhorst the highlight was having fantastic views of two Rough-legged Buzzard. One was hovering regularly over a rough field, showing all the key features so everyone was happy with its identification, while a flock of 40 Fieldfare were also spotted.

With the evening approaching, we then positioned ourselves to watch the Cranes coming to roost on and around the nearby fishponds and marvelled as around 50,000 birds streamed overhead. Line after line of these brilliant birds just kept coming from the horizon. The sight and sound is really very special. This was interspersed with skeins of Bean and White-fronted Geese adding to the atmosphere. Suitably wowed by this “must see” spectacle we headed back to the hotel for dinner.

Day 3

Wednesday 12th October

This morning we drove to a nearby hide before breakfast to scan for any wildlife, and in quite soggy conditions, a Great Egret, Fox and a few small skeins of geese were our only reward. On the drive back we did find around 100 Bean Geese close to the road but even as we got out of the van very quietly, they all took to the skies, with the exception of a few which we enjoyed in the scope.

Following our buffet breakfast and plenty of hot drinks we were out again and headed to the core Great Bustard area near the village of Garlitz. With the rain falling, we stopped at some excellent mixed woodland and went for a fairly sheltered walk in the woods. It was a pleasant walk and we knew we were close to Hawfinch with three birds flying overhead but not perching for us. On returning to the van, Jane pointed to a bird on top of a large conifer which was indeed a cracking female Hawfinch. We had superb views of her in the scope and soon noticed a smart male close by. We appreciated these most highly prized of finches before they dropped down into the woods to feed.

Continuing on, we encountered a large mixed finch flock out on the open farmland and we all spent time scanning through them and to see what the flock held. We found around 200 Chaffinches with at least three smart Bramblings, a few Yellowhammers and Skylark and Linnet.

With everyone looking out for Great Bustard, it wasn't long until we spotted some very close to the road! We quietly got out of the van and had really superb views of 56 birds! They were female birds with what appeared to be some young males. Adult males and females stay in separate flocks in winter and this showed that. A few Stock Dove were seen here, and after watching these impressive birds, we warmed up with a coffee.

We carried on our way and had lunch at the Great Bustard research centre where five more birds were spotted in nearby fields and another Rough-legged Buzzard was well spotted by Dominic. Following lunch we had a scan from a large tower hide to get a feel of this vast open area and enjoyed a Kestrel with prey, a very pale Common Buzzard and Tree Sparrow showing very well.

We headed back around the Gülper See on the way home, and before reaching there got out and scanned through a field full of geese and Cranes. We had great views of Bean and White-fronted Geese with fewer Greylags. A brief stop at Gülper See resulted in witnessing a dramatic Peregrine hunt with a bird stooping in from height and powering low across the water through the wildfowl. Spectacular. A White-tailed Eagle also came past very close, and a couple of Tufted Duck were noted on the water.

We finished the day by returning via Gülpe to the hotel, and went on to have excellent views of two Great Grey Shrikes, while a Merlin was seen hunting and then perched for a long time with Hen Harriers floating around

nearby. A wonderful scene. It was an excellent end to the day and we headed back with a brief stop to watch a Coypu out on the bank, feeding.

Dinner was enjoyed once more with discussion about what we had seen and what we were hoping to see the following day.

Day 4

Thursday 13th October

Today we went for our pre-breakfast walk down to the lake and witnessed some amazing behaviour as a White-tailed Eagle was repeatedly trying to take a Bean Goose. The goose was cut off from the flock and sat on the water, and whenever the eagle stooped to take it the goose dived under the water like an oversized Eider! This went on until the eagle eventually gave up, after getting soaked in an over enthusiastic stoop, and the goose flew back to the flock! We enjoyed large numbers of geese as they left this roost site and watched Starlings lifting from the reed bed to head off to feed.

After breakfast we travelled to the North of Gülper See and went for a walk along the lake seeing Reed Buntings, Snipe, a distant Marsh Harrier and stopping to look at some Beaver-felled trees.

The fields near here were covered in geese and we enjoyed at least 600-700 White-fronted Geese and around 100 Bean Geese, with a handful of Barnacles. One unusual White-front was a coffee colour all over. Two White-tailed Eagles were sat in a field nearby.

After a coffee/hot chocolate stop in Kuhlhausen we headed for the Linum fishpond complex. Before getting there, we stopped to get even closer views of geese, with around 30 Barnacle Geese seen plus close-up Bean and White-fronted Geese.

We had our picnic lunch at the fishponds and while it was being prepared, those who went off birding had great views of a Marsh Harrier and a range of wildfowl. After lunch we went for a walk around this excellent habitat, watching our only Red-crested Pochard of the tour, including a fine male, together with Little Grebe while three Bearded Tits showed briefly. We had more tantalising views of the Bearded Tit from a nearby tower, and continuing on, stopped to look at a Penduline Tit's nest, and a Siskin in an Alder. A Kingfisher dashed away over a larger pond and, as the afternoon was moving on, we completed our circular walk and went to position ourselves for the Crane spectacle from a different spot.

We watched many hundreds of Crane very close to the road and enjoyed seeing the family parties, with the young birds easily picked out. We then moved to what turned out to be the perfect spot as it got to roost time, and tens of thousands of birds streamed low over our heads for the next hour or so. It was a fitting finale for our final evening and eventually we dragged ourselves away, once again blown away by the sheer number of birds and noise.

Day 5

Friday 14th October

Today we began the day, once again, with a walk down to the lake before breakfast. Here we enjoyed the scene and came close to some Bearded Tits, with a drake Goldeneye flying low across the water.

After breakfast and checking out we went for a walk along another section of the lake near to our hotel. We enjoyed some hedgerow birds which included three Hawfinches, Redwing overhead, and another White-tailed Eagle before we continued on.

As the sun was coming out for the first time, we finished our birding here with another short walk near the lake and through some excellent woodland. We enjoyed close views of Nuthatch and near a reedbed we heard the “pinging” of Bearded Tits getting louder and louder. There were eight birds directly overhead and we enjoyed prolonged views of this rare sight as they kept getting higher and higher before drifting away.

We ended up in a lovely meadow in super conditions and watched and listened for woodland birds, in particular woodpeckers, with signs of Black Woodpecker obvious. We didn't find any woodpeckers but Gerry made an excellent find in the form of three Crossbills in a nearby small tree. We had excellent views of both male and female birds, before returning to the van and heading for the airport.

We made it to the airport in plenty of time and those extending their holiday in Berlin headed on their way. It had been a fantastic few days with a wonderful range of species seen and some species in simply spectacular numbers.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!



White-fronted Geese by Dominic Sargent

Species Lists

Birds

Despite the less than ideal weather conditions the birding was still superb with a great range of species were seen. We spent time really appreciating everything we encountered and taking in the wonderful spectacles and sheer numbers of birds here. A total of 94 species were seen with two species (Water Rail and Long-tailed Tit) heard only during the week. There were many highlights and the sightings are summarised below.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*: A few seen.

Tundra Bean Goose *Anser fabalis rossicus*: Seen daily in large numbers c700 in a single flock.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*: Seen daily often with the other geese but in smaller numbers.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*: Seen daily and numbers similar to Bean Geese.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*: Seen in most large goose flocks in small numbers from c5 - 40 max.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: Seen daily.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: 1 seen at Gülper See.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: A few birds at Gülper See and Linum fishponds.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas Penelope*: A few at Gülper See.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: c40-50 at Gülper See.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: c50 at Gülper See.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*: A few seen at Gülper See.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*: c80-100 at Gülper see.

Common Pochard *Aythya farina*: c20 at Linum Fishponds.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*: c5 at Linum Fishponds.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*: Just 1 seen on Gülper See and a c15 at Linum Fishponds.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*: 1 seen flying over Hohennauener See by our hotel.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: 1 seen at Linum fishponds.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: Seen on most bodies of water.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Common and seen daily.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*: seen daily with c25 birds on Gülper see. Most common Heron.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*: Common, c60 in a large flock on Gülper See.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: A couple of sightings.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: Two birds seen with excellent views at Linum Fishponds.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*: Excellent prolonged views of both males and female birds.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*: A few seen.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: Seen daily and some superb views. One of the star birds of the holiday and amazing behaviour witnessed trying to take a Bean Goose.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*: c7 seen over the 3 days and some excellent views hunting near Linumhorst.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: Very common with many very pale birds.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*: 61 birds seen! Fantastic views of 56 birds near Garlitz then another 5 at our picnic site nearby.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: A few at the fishponds.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: Seen on most water bodies and a large raft on Hohennauener See.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*: Heard only several times.

Common Crane *Grus grus*: Simply spectacular to witness around 50,000 birds coming in to roost. The sight and sound makes it a very special experience indeed. Daily close up views feeding also.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: Common and seen daily, some large flocks of c100 seen.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: 4 seen at Gülper See.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: 5 seen at Gülper See.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*: A few on water bodies.

European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*: A few seen.

Rock (feral) Dove *Columba livia* 'feral': A small flock seen.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*: Only 2 birds seen flying over as we watched the Bustards.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*: Seen daily.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*: Seen daily.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: Brief views of two birds.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: A few seen one very well feeding.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: Heard and seen briefly.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Common, seen daily.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*: Excellent views of a female hunting and then perched for a prolonged period for scoped views.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: A super sighting as what looked to be a female came in from height and powered low over the wildfowl at Gülper See.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*: 2 seen very well. Always a treat.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: Seen and heard daily.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: Common.

Western Jackdaw *Coloemus monedula*: A few around Semlin

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: Seen only on day one when driving from the airport.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*: Common and seen daily.

Carion Crow *Corvus corone*: Vastly outnumbered by hooded. A couple seen.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*: A few seen.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Seen well.

European Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*: 2 birds seen well in tit flock at Gülper See.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*: Seen and heard.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*: Common.

Great Tit *Parus major*: Common.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: Heard but unfortunately not seen.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: Seen daily.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*: 1 flew up from in front of the hide at Gülper See then a small flock of c8 seen in field opposite the road here though unfortunately only by myself.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: Singing near the lake and seen briefly on final day.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Seen daily.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: Super sighting of 2 birds seemingly fighting and coming to the ground exhausted for scoped views.

Common Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*: 2 seen briefly in the tit flock at Gülper See.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: Heard and occasionally seen.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: Heard frequently and seen very well on final day.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*: Seen well in tit flock at Gülper See.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: Everywhere.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*: A few seen and heard.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*: c40 seen at Linumhorst perched in a tree top and flying over.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*: A few seen and more apparent on final day high overhead.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: A few seen.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: Just 1 seen flying over on final day.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: Heard and seen daily.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: Two around the restaurant with the male singing.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Seen daily.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: Seen well with 1 sizable flock of c50 birds. A few mixed in with House Sparrow just outside the hotel.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*: A couple in flight and just 1 along the shore of the Gülper See.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*: Heard and seen.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: Common, c150 in a flock we spent time scanning through.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*: At least 3 in finch flock with 1 fine male.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: Superb views of a male and female in the scope with 3 in flight on the final day.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: Excellent views of a pair feeding in a birch tree on the final day.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*: A few seen and heard but not many. c10 throughout.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*: Seen with the finch flock in small numbers

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostris*: 3 birds seen very well on the final morning. Both sexes seen.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: Just a few seen with c5 in flight.

European Siskin *Spinus spinus*: c10 seen in an alder and their flight call become ever more apparent as the days passed with birds moving.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*: Around 60 seen on the first day on wires and tree tops near Gulpe.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*: Seen daily with a few in the finch flock.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*: A few seen in reed bed on north side of Gülper see.

Mammals

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: 1 seen.

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*: 2 seen.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*: Seen every day and very common.

Coypu *Myocastor coypus*: 1 of these introduced animals seen very well feeding on the bank of a channel.

We saw many signs of Badger and Wild Boar and some trees felled and gnawed by Beavers.



Bean Geese (+White-front) by Tom Mabbett



Common Cranes by Tom Mabbett