

The Birds of Brandenburg & Berlin

Naturetrek Tour Report

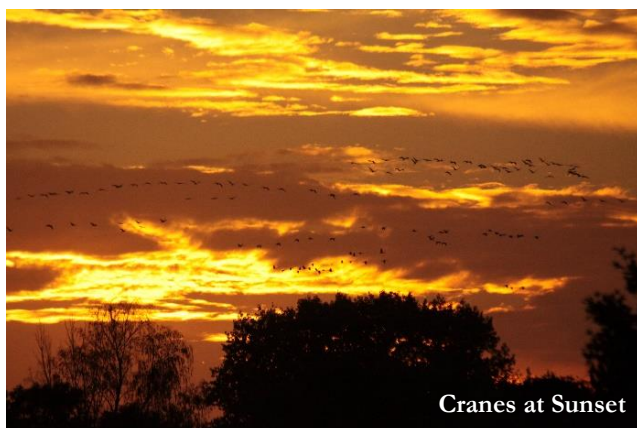
2nd – 6th October 2020



Great Grey Shrike



Coypu



Cranes at Sunset



Hen Harrier

Report compiled by Andy Smith and Alison Steel.

Photos courtesy of Alison Steel.



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Summary

During the autumn the Brandenburg region, to the west of Berlin, plays host to vast flocks of migrating birds from more northerly breeding grounds, which stop off here to refuel before continuing their journey south. There was a lovely autumnal feel to the area, with the leaves in varying stages of colour change on the trees and a mostly dry few days. Near our hotel in Semlin there was a lake where geese spent the night, Coots gathered in large rafts and Bearded Tits could be found in the reed beds. Driving past fields we would come across large flocks of feeding Greylag, White-fronted, Bean and occasionally Barnacle Geese. Common Cranes were also very much in evidence, with their noisy, trumpeting calls. We spent a couple of evenings watching in fascination as huge numbers of them flew through the sunset to land in the fields nearby to roost, arriving in seemingly never ending waves. However, the highlight for many was being able to observe some of the last breeding population of Great Bustard that remain in this region.

Day 1

Friday 2nd October

Overcast with sunny breaks and a cool easterly breeze.

We arrived at Berlin Tegel Airport in the mid- afternoon and after collecting our minibuses we headed off through the Berlin traffic. Soon enough we were clear of the city and out into the open, rolling Brandenburg countryside. Wildlife noted along the way included the only White Stork of the trip, our first Common Cranes, several Kestrels and Common Buzzards, a couple of Red Kites, a few Ravens, lots of Hooded Crows and a very neat Red Squirrel.

We arrived at our comfortable guest house in the quiet little village of Semlin in good time to settle in before dinner. Some of the group took a short stroll along the nearby lakeshore in the closing stages of the afternoon and saw a few Great Egrets and Grey Herons, several Mute Swan, some Great-crested Grebes and a handful of Black-headed Gulls.

Day 2

Saturday 3rd October

Sunny and warm with scattered cloud and an easterly breeze.

A Black Redstart on the guest house roof was a good start to the day, before, with breakfast completed, we headed off westwards towards the famous Gulpe See. We drove through a pleasant patchwork of open arable and pasture fields, areas of mixed woodland and picturesque villages. The countryside seemed full of wildlife and we made a number of stops en-route. A large flock of geese feeding in some roadside stubble fields included all three common local species, Tundra Bean, Siberian White-front and Greylag and we were able to appreciate their diagnostic features both on the ground and in flight and to hear the differences in their calls. Beyond the geese were a couple of hundred Cranes (a taste of things to come!) whilst a Rough-legged Buzzard put in a brief appearance over a distant line of trees.

A little further on we screeched to a rapid halt to get a better look at a mighty White-tailed Eagle sitting in a pasture close to the road. A fine adult, it was being mobbed by a Common Buzzard and took to the wing at our arrival. Pursued by its comparatively diminutive tormenter it flew powerfully to the cover of some nearby trees.

At the Gulpe See we walked along the shore and visited a large open hide and saw lots more geese (including several smart Barnacles), dozens of Great Egrets, a good range of dabbling ducks, some Dunlin and a few Ruff, a Peregrine and three more White-tailed Eagles. Two of the eagles were perched in trees on the far side of the lake, their huge size apparent even at great distance but one was actively hunting, flying around the lake and causing regular bouts of panic amongst the geese and ducks.

Walking back to our vehicles through the lakeshore woods we found a nice range of woodland birds including Marsh and Crested Tits, Nuthatches, Goldcrests, a Common Treecreeper and a superb Lesser Spotted Woodpecker which hung around for a good long time. After a picnic lunch in the sunshine on the edge of the woods and a surprise Red-backed Shrike by the old wooden windmill at the lakeside village of Preitzen we returned to the buses and drove across country to Linum.

We stopped for a welcome cup of coffee en-route and arrived at Linum in perfect time for the arrival of the Cranes. Over the next hour or so we were treated to one of the most wonderful wildlife spectacles we had ever experienced, as wave after wave of these mighty birds came bugling in to join the increasing throng. At times the sky was full of them and the sight and the sound was fantastic! Looking out across the distant fields you could see a carpet of grey as many thousands of the birds stood around preparing for the night. Amazingly, amongst such vast numbers, the birds were all invariably in family units within the group, no matter how big the flock; a pair of adults with one, two, or very occasionally three, rusty headed youngsters. Through the clamour of the adult birds trumpeting calls we could sometimes pick out the high pitched wheezy squeaks of the juveniles.

A small murmuration of Starlings, a big flock of Lapwings and a constant stream of Tree Sparrows coming into their roost in a nearby thicket added further interest but eventually, as the sun set, we returned to the bus and headed back to Semlin. It had been a long but hugely rewarding day.

Day 3

Sunday 4th October

Sunny and warm with some scattered cloud and SSW breeze.

This morning we headed into Bustard country and at our first stop near the hamlet of Senzke we enjoyed immediate success with the amazing sight of around 40 Great Bustards, virtually all mature males, about 300 yards from the road in a ploughed field. They seemed fairly unconcerned by us and we had superb views of them as they rested and socialized with each other. They were majestic indeed and with the sun behind us we were able to appreciate both their formidable size and the subtle and intricate beauty of their plumage. At one point one flew in to join the flock; with its huge size and powerful wingbeats it presented a very impressive sight! Tearing ourselves away we moved on towards the village of Buschow where we found another flock of at least 20 birds, this time mostly females and youngsters. These were harder to see as they were well hidden in an area of tall crops but they ably demonstrated how even a bird as large as a Great Bustard can conceal itself very well in relatively minimal cover. Further entertainment here included a smart Great Grey Shrike hunting along the field margin, a trio of Stonechats, several Yellowhammers and a confiding little flock of Corn Buntings.

We stopped for our lunch at a large wooden tower hide overlooking a vast area of rough grassland near the village of Garlitz. Here there were dozens of Roe Deer, a Fox out hunting voles and a fantastic range of raptors. In addition to the ubiquitous Common Buzzards, Red Kites and Kestrels we saw three Hen Harriers, a Merlin, another White-tailed Eagle and perhaps best of all, a much anticipated Rough-legged Buzzard.

Driving on through Rathenow town we spent the late afternoon exploring the River Havel flood-meadows between the villages of Parey and Gulpe where we found some distant flocks of Greylag and Bean Geese and enjoyed good views of a Kingfisher, another Great Grey Shrike, an Osprey and a number of bizarre-looking Coots. Happy with all this we made the short drive back to Semlin and concluded another satisfying and enjoyable day.

Day 4

Monday 5th October

Overcast, still and cool with some rain in the afternoon.

This morning we headed off eastwards towards Linum again. A couple of short woodland stops en-route brought us a nice little range of birds including Crested, Marsh and Willow Tits, Goldcrest, Nuthatch and Short-toed Treecreeper. At both sites we heard Black Woodpeckers but unfortunately they remained distant and unseen. Approaching Linum towards the end of the morning we encountered large flocks of Cranes out feeding in fields next to the road and enjoyed some really fantastic views of them.

We stopped for lunch by the River Rhine near Linumhorst where we found a female Redstart, some excitable Hornets (!) and a meadow full of Great Egrets and Foxes (five!) hunting voles. From here we went on to nearby Linum Ponds where highlights included good numbers of Gadwall and Pochard, a couple of Kingfishers, single Green and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, a flock of white-headed Long-tailed Tits, dozens of Siskins and a confident Great Grey Shrike. At the end of the afternoon we returned to the Crane viewing area and once again marvelled at the glorious spectacle of thousands of these charismatic great birds flying in to roost.

Day 5

Tuesday 6th October

Sunny, cold and still first thing but overcast with some rain from mid-am.

Some Bearded Tits and a brief Goshawk by the lakeshore at Semlin first thing started the day in fine style before, with breakfast completed and all packed up, we set off for Tegel Airport. A short stop at Senzke for another look at the Great Bustards concluded our Brandenburg birding and from there it was a pretty straight forward drive to the airport. We arrived in good time, everything went smoothly and we all arrived safely back at Heathrow a couple of hours later.

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Species List

Birds (+ = approximate count; h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2020				
			2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
1	Tundra Bean Goose	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>		1000's	100+	100's	100+
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		1000's	300+	100's	100's
3	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>		100's	2+	100+	50+
4	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		10	1		
5	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	5	5	6	10	2
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		50+			
7	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		100+	10	100+	
8	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		200+			
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	15	30+	50	25	5
10	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		10			
11	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		50+		h	
12	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				50	
13	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		3		1	
14	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				3	
15	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	2	25	4	6	2
16	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	3	15	5	5	1
17	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	6	20	15	25	
18	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	1				
19	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i>		100's	50	30	1
20	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			1		
21	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1			
22	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>					1
23	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	1		4		
24	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	2	4	8	2	2
25	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		4	1		
26	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>		1	1		
27	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	10	20	50	10	5
28	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	11		60		80

			October 2020				
	Common name	Scientific name	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
29	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	5	2	170	100+	25
30	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	200	1000's	200	1000's	15
31	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		200	75	350	
32	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		15			
33	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>		3			
34	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	10	150	50	10	5
35	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		1			
36	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		100+			2
37	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		2			
38	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		1		8	1
39	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	50	25	25	15	5
40	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		1	2	3	
41	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			1h		
42	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1h		1	3	1
43	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>		1+1h		1	
44	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		2	7	10	1
45	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>				2h	1h
46	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			1h	1+1h	1h
47	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	8	8	20	7	2
48	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>			1	1	
49	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1			
50	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>			3	1	
51	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		1			
52	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	15	6	25	5
53	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	3	15	15	10	5
54	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		50	5	50	
55	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	50	50	50	50	20
56	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus Corone</i>		5	1	6	1
57	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	4	5	5	5	4
58	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		2+2h	1	2	
59	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		2		2	
60	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		5	2	6	1h
61	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		1		4	
62	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		8	10	15	8
63	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	h	10	10	15	5
64	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>				2+1h	
65	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		20	100+		2/3h
66	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			h	15	
67	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>			2	5+3h	8
68	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	5	20	30	30	
69	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1	1h	1+1h	
70	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		2	4	3h	1
71	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		5		5+3h	
72	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		2	1	3	1h
73	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		5	2	8	3
74	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		1		1h	
75	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		1	1	1+1h	1h
76	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	50	1000's	100's	1000's	5
77	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	2	2	4	5	2
78	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>			1+1h		
79	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		4	6	8	

			October 2020				
	Common name	Scientific name	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
80	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				1+1h	
81	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1h	1	5	2+3h	1+1h
82	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>				1	
83	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochuros</i>		2	5	6	
84	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			3	2	4
85	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		100's	50+	15	5
86	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		35	50+	50	20
87	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	1	8	30	10	1
88	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		10	15		1
89	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		12	20	15	
90	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			2	1h	
91	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>					1h
92	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				10	2
93	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		25	20		
94	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		25	40		
95	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>				1	
96	European Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		6		70	
97	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	2		8		
98	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	3	5	30	5	1
99	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				1+1h	