

# The Netherlands in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

16th – 20th February 2026

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Bufflehead with Tufted Ducks



Red-breasted Geese with Barnacle Geese



Long-eared Owl



Short-eared Owl

Tour report by Matt Collis



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Tour participants: Matt Collis (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

## Summary

The Netherlands remains one of Europe's premier winter birding destinations, combining immense densities of wildfowl and geese with outstanding infrastructure and accessibility. Over five days, we explored a classic cross-section of Dutch winter habitats: the windswept North Sea coast of Zeeland, the vast reclaimed wetlands of Flevoland, and the open heathlands and mixed woodlands that punctuate the interior.

Although strong winds were a defining feature of the week, perseverance paid off. The tour delivered superb goose encounters, including Red-breasted and Lesser White-fronted Goose, impressive concentrations of Smews, multiple White-tailed Eagles, and an unforgettable communal roost of Short-eared Owls. A surprise Nearctic vagrant in the form of a female Bufflehead added extra excitement, while heathland birding produced quality woodland species including Crested Tit, and an excellent Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on our final morning. The tour couldn't have concluded better, with a remarkable encounter with Long-eared Owls in a small roost being our final Dutch birding delight.

The Netherlands in winter is never quiet; skies are filled with geese, raptors quarter endless reedbeds, and sea ducks ride the heavy swells. This tour offers the chance to be thrilled by both diversity and spectacles, both of which we encountered on this fabulous tour.

## Day 1

**Monday 16th February**

### Rotterdam – Zeeland: Brouwersdam

Much of our first day was dedicated to arrivals and transfers from Rotterdam Station, before we travelled south-west toward our base in Renesse, Zeeland. The province of Zeeland, defined by its tidal inlets and North Sea barriers, is a classic starting point for winter birding in the Netherlands, and we wasted no time in making our first stop at the renowned Brouwersdam.

Conditions were immediately testing, as powerful winds swept across the dam, drawing windsurfers. Nevertheless, scans of the sheltered sections produced an encouraging start. Numerous Common Scoters rafted offshore alongside Goosanders, Goldeneyes and Eiders. In something of a surprise, no divers could be located despite persistent searching, but a stunning drake Long-tailed Duck more than compensated, showing beautifully among the scoters and providing one of the day's standout moments.

Closer in, a small group of Black-necked Grebes associated loosely with Great Crested Grebes, offering useful comparisons in size and structure. The rocky margins held busy flocks of Purple Sandpipers, Sanderlings and Turnstones feeding energetically between gusts, while Ringed Plovers picked delicately along the shoreline. Though weather-limited, the afternoon provided a fitting introduction to Dutch coastal birding: dynamic, windswept and full of promise. With heavy rain closing in, we ended our day and retreated to the hotel.

## Day 2

Tuesday 17th February

### Zeeland: Strijen

This was another day of strong winds, making seawatching challenging once again as we returned to Brouwersdam in hope of locating divers. Despite thorough scanning, none was found, but three Slavonian Grebes feeding relatively close to shore provided excellent views, alongside further good numbers of Common Scoters, Red-breasted Mergansers and Eiders powering through the swell.

A switch inland to freshwater pools proved especially productive. Here we assembled a good wader list, including Spotted Redshank, Dunlin, Golden Plover, Curlew, Lapwing and Avocet. Although not giving the best views, three Spoonbills stood resting against a bank.

A visit to a local goose hotspot delivered one of the tour's early highlights, with two Red-breasted Geese located among a substantial flock of Barnacle Geese. We also paused to view a small mixed group of introduced Greater and Chilean Flamingos; they made an incongruous sight in this part of Europe, and were a delightful addition before lunch.

Lunch itself brought an unexpected bonus when a Kingfisher appeared and perched immediately outside our window, affording prolonged and remarkably close views. The afternoon was spent at Strijen, which was dominated by vast goose flocks and raptors. Among thousands of Greater White-fronted and Barnacle Geese, we located a flock of Lesser White-fronted Geese, which are never easy to find given the sheer number of birds. Brown Hare and several raptors, including two Hen Harriers (one adult male), Marsh Harrier and Sparrowhawk rounded off a superb day.

## Day 3

Wednesday 18th February

### Flevoland: Oostvaardersplassen – IJsselmeer

Another very windy day was largely spent exploring the various corners of Oostvaardersplassen, one of Europe's most important wintering sites for waterbirds and raptors. We spent the morning in one of the hides, which produced no fewer than six White-tailed Eagles: they actively chased and harried each other. Another Hen Harrier was seen too. We also located a flock of Whooper Swans in one of the pools viewed from the northern road bounding the site. Among the more common ducks (Gadwall, Pochard and Tufted Duck) were significant numbers of Smews, with at least forty birds seen over the day. We also explored a few areas around the neighbouring IJesmeer, successfully locating both Greater Scaup and a genuine vagrant Bufflehead (a female).

Other good birds included Goosander, a flock of White Storks, a brief Water Rail, a second calendar-year Caspian Gull, and no fewer than three Great Grey Shrikes. We ended our day rather spectacularly, visiting a local village where up to eighteen Short-eared Owls have randomly set up roost. During our visit, we managed to spot ten birds, including eight in a single tree, and one settled in long grass very close to the roadside viewing point. It was an incredible and extremely unusual gathering, which we enjoyed hugely.

## Day 4

Thursday 19th February

### Flevoland: Utrechtse Heuvelrug & Almere

The day was divided between further exploration of wetlands around Almere, and a longer walk across heathland in the Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park. Drizzle and persistent wind continued to test us, particularly in the morning, and, despite concerted effort, Black Woodpecker eluded us. However, we were compensated with excellent views of Short-toed Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Marsh Tit, and the always sought-after Crested Tit. Nuthatch and Blackbird were also spotted along the trails.

Returning to Almere, we added Common Snipe while we had lunch, before we visited Lesserplassen. The arguable highlight here was fantastic views of Smews, which swam remarkably close to the hide. We also had an adult White-tailed Eagle pass overhead, a Goshawk heard calling from nearby woodland, and a particularly large flock of two hundred Shoveler feeding in one flock.

We ended the day overlooking the main expanse of Oostvaardersplassen, when thousands of Barnacle and Greylag Geese filled the skies at dusk. Red Foxes hunted across the marshes, while Konik horses and Red Deer grazed calmly below perched White-tailed Eagles. The scale and atmosphere of the reserve at sunset provided a truly fitting finale.

## Day 5

Friday 20th February

### Dodeweg & departure

With a shorter final day before our mid-afternoon return to Rotterdam Station, we focused our efforts on nearby heathland and mixed pine woodland, to target a handful of species still missing from our list. Persistence was required, and we were rewarded in style when a lively flock of Long-tailed Tits brought with them a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. The bird showed exceptionally well, lingering long enough for prolonged views as it crept along slender branches.

After further patience and some active searching, we encountered an even more glorious sight; a small roost of four Long-eared Owls tucked high in the tops of dense pine trees. Remarkably unconcerned by our presence, they allowed us to admire them at length through the scopes. Their cryptic plumage blended beautifully with the surrounding bark, and spotting each bird in turn became a rewarding exercise.

Beyond these two magical highlights, we enjoyed further views of Short-toed Treecreeper, Goldcrest and several other common woodland passerines moving through the trees. It had been an excellent last morning to mark the end of the trip.

Our lunch was spent reflecting on a week of vast goose flocks, dramatic eagle encounters and unforgettable owl spectacles. Soon after lunch, we made our way back toward Rotterdam, said our goodbyes, and departed with wonderful memories from our winter tour in the Netherlands.

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## Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I = introduced	Common name	Scientific name	February 2026				
			16	17	18	19	20
	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓	✓			
	Red-breasted Goose	<i>Branta ruficollis</i>		2			
	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>		✓	✓	✓	
	Lesser White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>		9			
	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>			13		
	Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓	✓	✓	
	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓	✓		
	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓	✓	
	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>			2		
	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓			
	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	✓	✓			
	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	1				
	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>			1		
	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	✓		✓	✓	
	Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>			✓	✓	
	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		2	✓	✓	
	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓	✓			
	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Feral Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓	✓		
	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			✓	H	
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓		
	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>					
	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>		3			
	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	✓	1			
	Greater Flamingo - I	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>		20			
	Chilean Flamingo - I	<i>Phoenicopterus chilensis</i>		50			
	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓			
	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓			
	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓	✓	✓	

I = introduced		February 2026				
		16	17	18	19	20
Common name	Scientific name					
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓			
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓			
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓	✓	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓			
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>		2			
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓	✓			
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	✓	✓			
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓			
Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>	✓	✓			
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓		✓	
Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>			1		
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓			
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		4	6		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		✓			
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓			
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓		
Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>				H	
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		2	1		
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		1			
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>			✓	✓	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>					4
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>			10		
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				H	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		1			
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>					1
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓	✓	✓
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rose-ringed Parakeet - I	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>		✓			
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>			3		
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>			✓		
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				1	
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			✓	✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓		
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H		
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓		✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓	✓	✓
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			H	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

I = introduced	Common name	Scientific name	February 2026				
			16	17	18	19	20
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓	✓	✓
	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			✓		✓
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			✓	✓	✓
	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓			
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			✓		✓
	Dunnoek	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			✓	✓	✓
	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓		
	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>			1		
	Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			✓	✓	✓
	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			✓		
	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				H	
	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				H	✓
	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				✓	✓
	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			✓	✓	✓

## Mammals

Common name	Scientific name
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>
Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
Konik Pony - I	<i>Equus ferus caballus</i>
Heck Cattle - I	<i>Bos taurus</i>
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>
Bank Vole	<i>Myodes glareolus</i>