

The Netherlands in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd – 27th February 2026



Barnacle Geese



Ferruginous Duck



Red Squirrel



Middle Spotted Woodpecker

Tour report by Tom Breerton



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Summary

During our five days, we were able to explore a diverse mix of coastal, wetland, farmland, heathland and woodland habitats across two of the Netherlands most acclaimed regions for birding, Zeeland and Flevoland. Over this period, we witnessed an incredible spectacle of huge numbers of ducks and geese. Vast flocks of Barnacle, Dark-bellied Brent, Greylag, Greater White-fronted and other geese were particularly impressive, and made a real audiovisual spectacle. This was a tour marked by diversity, with an impressive 128 bird species recorded. Amongst many highlights were Hen Harrier, White-tailed Eagle, Smew, Bufflehead, Ferruginous Duck, Long-tailed Duck, Whooper Swan, Lesser White-fronted and Red-breasted Geese, Pygmy Cormorant, Spoonbill, Avocet, Spotted Redshank, Black-necked Grebe, Slavonian Grebe, Lesser and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, Great Grey Shrike and Hawfinch.

Day 1

Monday 23rd February

Folkestone – Schipgatduinen, Koksijde – Zeeland

Cold, mostly cloudy, with a moderately strong westerly wind, 6°C

We assembled in Folkestone and drove the short distance to Eurotunnel terminal, where we managed to get an earlier departure than planned. Everything went smoothly, and we were soon on our way, travelling by minibus through northern France. We broke the journey in Belgium, stopping at Schipgatduinen, Koksijde. The dune nature reserve here supports a small breeding population of Crested Larks, which had been seen recently, along with a Snow Bunting flock, but in the overcast and windy conditions we were out of luck. The next stop was for a sandwich lunch at a service station in Belgium, where we added House Sparrow (a surprisingly uncommon bird given we were in such urbanised countries on this holiday). We continued eastwards toward The Netherlands.

We reached Zeeland, an area of islands and peninsulas south-west of Rotterdam, late in the afternoon. We were surprised to see several White Storks, already back on their breeding grounds, along this section of the journey. We stopped at Veerse Meer, a large brackish lagoon, where we had superb views of Black-necked Grebes swimming close to the shore, an obliging Common Redshank and two Common Ringed Plovers. More distantly, we could see Red-breasted Mergansers on the water.

We drove a short distance north to the small polder, Neeltje Jans, looking for Little Gull, which was not to be seen, but Harbour Seals were numerous, along with the odd Grey Seal and several obliging Dark-bellied Brent Geese. In diminishing light, we stopped south of Reneese on the Schouwen-Duiveland polder at an area of marshland, which supported flocks of Barnacle Geese and a ringtail Hen Harrier.

Early in the evening, we arrived at our cosy accommodation for the night, the Hotel Klotje in Renesse, situated on the north coast of Schouwen-Duiveland. Before an enjoyable three-course dinner, there was time for a drink in the hotel bar, or a swim in the hotel pool. After dinner, we completed the customary checklist of the day's wildlife sightings, which on this occasion spanned four countries!

Day 2

Tuesday 24th February

Zeeland – Nunspeet

Mild and mostly cloudy with a light southerly wind, 9°C

Most of the group were up early for some pre-breakfast birding, and we left the hotel at 7.40am to drive a short distance to Broewersdam, a coastal dune site on the causeway to Schouwen-Duiveland. There was much of interest here, including Purple Sandpipers and Sanderlings on the rocky shoreline. Offshore, there were fine drake Long-tailed Ducks, hundreds of Common Scoters, 75 Eiders, Red-breasted Mergansers, six Goldeneyes, and several Slavonian, Black-necked and Great Crested Grebes, plus two Red-throated Divers.

After breakfast, we checked out of the hotel and collected lunch items from a nearby supermarket in the village, then drove south east to Flauwers en Wevers Inlagen, a wetland reserve with various pools and marshy fields. A first scan of a flock of Barnacle Geese produced a Red-breasted Goose: an excellent find by one of the group. We encountered lots of fantastic marshland birds over the morning, including larger numbers of Wigeons, Teals, Lapwings and Golden Plovers, over two hundred Avocets, twenty Spoonbills, Great Egret, Snipes and a Spotted Redshank. On the larger pools there were four species of grebe (including both Black-necked and Slavonian for easy comparison), while a drake Greater Scaup added further interest. On the passerine front, two Shorelarks seen in recent weeks could not be located, but ample compensation came in the form of a flock of twenty-one Twites, showing extremely well at times and making their characteristic jangly call.

We worked our way back to Broewersdam, checking out the agricultural fields en route for birds of prey, geese and wild swans, and seeing several Brown Hares, which are common in this area. Back at Broewersdam, we had a late lunch and scanned the sea, getting good views of Purple Sandpiper, Sanderling, Turnstone, Goldeneye, Common Scoter, Eider and Red-breasted Merganser.

After lunch we began our journey eastwards, passing lots of birds in the roadside fields, with Oude-Tonge being particularly productive: we saw three species of egrets (Cattle, Great and Little) in close proximity. We arrived at our hotel in Nunspeet, central Netherlands, just after 6.00pm. After checking in and a little downtime, we did the daily checklist of sightings, and then had an excellent three-course dinner.

Day 3

Wednesday 25th February

Nunspeet – Flevopolder

Warm and sunny with a light south-westerly wind, 16°C

A morning walk around the hotel grounds and surrounding mixed woodland before breakfast was superb, and yielded good views of Crested Tit, Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper and Marsh Tit, along with more routine woodland birds such as Goldcrest, Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

After breakfast we drove onto Flevopolder, the biggest artificial island in the world, created by land reclamation at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first stop was the north-west shore of Flevopolder at Pampushaven,

an area of sheltered water bodies adjacent to the Ijmeer Lake. It did not take long to spot our target species, a Bufflehead, a very rare winter visitor to Europe. It breeds in Alaska and Canada and migrates in winter to southern North America, though the more remote possibility of this bird being an escape couldn't be ruled out. The bird was diving frequently for food, but we got excellent scope views, and nearby Tufted Ducks provided a valuable comparison. A female Greater Scaup was also present in the Tufted Duck flock, and we had several sightings of White-tailed Eagles, plus a Reed Bunting.

From here, we drove a short distance to the Westkapelsche Kreek, near Almere. Our first stop at this reserve was unproductive, but taking a second trail through wet scrub to the creek, we soon picked up the Ferruginous Duck which had been frequenting the area for its second winter. We got absolutely fantastic views of this attractive bird, distinguished by its piercing silver eyes and rich chestnut plumage.

Next up was Natuurpark Lelystad, a nature-rich recreation area set up in the 1970s, which has come to play a role in breeding and reintroduction programmes for endangered species. The chief focus of our trip was to see the Pygmy Cormorant, a rare though increasingly-seen bird in western Europe, which had taken up residency over the last two winters.

The park contained a large amount of open water bordered by dense cover, with numerous hiding places for wetland birds, so we became a little concerned about seeing this bird! There were lots of birds to see, though, including the first Smew of the holiday. We saw an obliging Whooper Swan close up, and had good views of Short-toed Treecreeper. We had lunch at a picnic bench, from where further Smeews could be seen. After lunch we eventually saw the Pygmy Cormorant, with the help of a Dutch birder. We took a circular route back to the car park, picking up a Willow Tit en route, which gave excellent views. A drake Mandarin Duck was a further highlight.

In the afternoon, we visited various viewpoints over the famous Oostvaardersplassen nature reserve, first being Uitkijkheuvel De Grote Praambult, which affords panoramic views over the central part of the pools and grazing marshes, then moved on to various points along the northern boundary overlooking more pools, wet scrub and vast reedbeds. On the reserve, we could see several feral and wild large herbivore species that are helping to shape the ecosystem in a more natural way, including Heck Cattle, Konik Ponies and Red Deer. A Red Fox was an additional mammal species. This proved to be a good area for raptors, with sightings of several White-tailed Eagles and Marsh Harriers, and two Hen Harriers. Some impressive counts had been made over the day, including twenty-six Smeews and 110 Great Egrets. As dusk fell, several Red Deer were close by in the reedbed.

Day 4

Thursday 26th February

Houtringe – Flevopolder – Nunspeet

Mostly sunny with a light south-westerly winds, 15°C

We had an early breakfast and were on the road by 8.30am, and heading west. We spent the morning at Houtringe, a protected historic country estate with parkland and mature woodland, not far from Utrecht. This is known to be a good area for woodpeckers, with five species resident! It was an excellent morning for birding, with really good views obtained of both Middle and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. Of the five, only Black Woodpecker eluded us, though we only heard Green Woodpecker. There were lots of finches in woodland areas, including excellent views

of Hawfinch. Several Rose-ringed Parakeets and Marsh Tits were also present. We had great views of a Goshawk flying through the forest; we had previously heard it calling on and off in the distance. On the mammal front, we had superb views of a Red Squirrel, whilst a Common Toad was also found. The morning ended with hot drinks and (for some) cake at Bezoekerscentrum Koetshuis Beerschoten, a café in the grounds of Houdringe.

We then drove to Polder Arkemheen, west of Nijkerk, where a Lesser White-fronted Goose had been seen the previous day. We had lunch here overlooking the grazing marshes, with vast numbers of geese and ducks present, chiefly comprising Barnacle and White-fronted Geese, and Wigeons. Waders were also much in evidence, with sightings including a flock of over a hundred Black-tailed Godwits, over fifty Golden Plovers, and seven Ruffs. This proved to be an excellent area for Brown Hare, with forty-four counted!

Our final stop of the day was a large area of heathland at Spouder-en-Houtperveld. We walked the whole width of the heath, with the west end being most productive. Our target species, a stunning Great Grey Shrike, was located perching on small trees and bushes, and hunting. Also seen were a fabulous male Hen Harrier, our first Raven, Redwings and Yellowhammers of the holiday, and the customary Stonechats. Furthermore, a Woodlark sang distantly as dusk approached.

Day 5

Friday 27th February

Nunspeet – Boswachterij Dorst – Nieuwpoort – Calais – Folkestone

Warm with sunny spells, 16°C

We made a prompt departure at 8.30am, as we had a lot of ground to cover, to get back to Calais to catch the Eurotunnel late afternoon, allowing for a birding stop en route. Top on the list of targets for several of the group, and also for Tom, who had not seen this species on this holiday before, was Lesser White-fronted Goose. We stopped at the premier wintering place for this species, Oudeland van Strijen, a polder area south of Rotterdam, which contains extensive areas of wet, semi-natural grassland. The visit started well when Tom picked up a Red-breasted Goose in the distance in a mixed goose flock.

Armed with better information, we headed down a track towards one of the many Greater White-fronted Geese flocks. To our delight, we managed to locate *four* Lesser White-fronted Goose! They didn't hang around long, but everyone got onto them. It was a big moment for everyone, and signaled the end of the birding, and that it was time to drive onwards to Calais.

We made it in good enough time to Calais to catch a slightly earlier train to Folkestone. Once again, the Eurotunnel journey was quick, smooth and timely. All too soon, the holiday was over, and we were saying our goodbyes at Folkestone. It had been a superb trip, with enormous number of geese and other wildfowl, and some top-class European winter birding delivered.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026				
		23	24	25	26	27
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	6	✓			
Red-breasted Goose	<i>Branta ruficollis</i>		1			1
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	300	1200	✓	✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>		6	20	500+	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>			10		
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>			1		
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>		✓	✓	✓	
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>			1		
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>		1	1		
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		75			
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	✓	560			
Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>		1			
Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>			1		
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		6			
Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>			26		
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		✓	✓		
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	3	65	✓		
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	25	✓	✓	✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	1		✓	✓	✓
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>	✓	✓	✓		
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>		3			
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	6	25			
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		210			
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓	✓	50+	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		2			
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	1	✓			

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026				
		23	24	25	26	27
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				100+	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		25	1		
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	1	50+		2	
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>		1			
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		1			
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓	✓			
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>		11		7	
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	15	✓			
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓			
Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>		20+			
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓			
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		2			
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	1		2	
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>			1		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		20			
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		3			
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	2	6	110	✓	✓
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>		✓			
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	10	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1		1		
Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>				1	
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	1		2	1	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			3		
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>			10		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>				3+	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>				1	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓	✓	
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>				H	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1	1			
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>				3	
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>				1	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			3	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>					✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>				1	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>				H	
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			3	✓	
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			1	✓	
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>			1		
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓		✓	✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				H	

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026				
		23	24	25	26	27
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		1	10	✓	
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H		
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓		
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			1		
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			3		
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				1	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓	✓	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			✓	✓	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				3	
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>				6	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓		
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓		✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	2				
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	20	✓	✓	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			20	✓	
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>				3	
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓		H		
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			H	✓	
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		21			
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>				2	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		6	1	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			H	✓	
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>				2	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			1		

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026				
		23	24	25	26	27
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓				
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	3	10+		44	
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>				1	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			8		
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			1		
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓				
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	50+	✓			