

# Poland's Primeval Forests

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 7 May 2012

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Report compiled by Richard Bashford



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## Summary

This popular tour takes in one of the most famous wildlife destinations in Europe – Białowieża Forest. Although a comfortable drive from Warsaw airport, we had some serious road works to contend with to get out of the city. But once we did, we started to see the countryside we'd come for.

## Day 1

**Friday 4th May**

Cloudy but bright, calm with heavy rain shower mid afternoon.

LHR to Warsaw (arriving 10.45). Drive east via lunch stop and bird watch at Dojlidy Fish Ponds (16.45-18.00), arriving at Białowieża Hotel Wejmutka at 19.45.

After leaving the city environs we stopped off for lunch before arrived at Dojlidy Fish Ponds. As soon as we got out of the bus we saw some stunning Whiskered Terns, then some Black Terns and then a Little Gull. After we'd enjoyed calling Penduline Tit and Red-necked Grebes, we looked back to see the terns had been joined by some White-winged Black Terns too! Tomasz then tried a place for Little Crake and we did very well with a few sightings, most a few feet away. With a nearby Savi's Warbler singing, we didn't know where to look. Dinner and the hotel beckoned so we started back to the bus. However, as an added treat, the black clouds tracking us came to life and we got a good soaking before we reached the bus! On balance, we agreed the area was worth getting wet for! We got to the hotel pleased to change our cloths and enjoy a fine wholesome dinner.

## Day 2

**Saturday 5th May**

Rain shower early am but sunny and warm for remainder of the day.

06.00-08.00 Walk from hotel around park pre breakfast, north with stops, through forest to Siemianówka Reservoir 11.30-13.15 and lunch. Afternoon, various forest stops until 18.30.

We'd arranged to meet on the doorstep of the hotel at 6am but some were out an hour earlier! Whether it was being kept awake by Thrush Nightingales or excitement of "getting out there" is hard to say! But the group had collectively seen White-backed Woodpecker, Barred Warbler and even Beaver before our walk at 6am. As a group and with so much to see, we took around half an hour to walk fifty metres! But in that half an hour, we enjoyed our first Icterine Warbler, Wryneck, Grey-headed Woodpecker and lots of Hawfinches. Further into the town park we managed to see Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Collared Flycatcher and Thrush Nightingale. Back for breakfast before setting out for the day...

Our first port of call was to be Siemianówka Reservoir but we had a few stops en route. First was for a Lesser Whitethroat feeding of flies in a spider web about two metres away from the bus, the next for a less than obliging White-backed Woodpecker. Better was the perched Red-backed Shrike and the fly by Black Woodpecker which a few of us managed to see. But it was on to the north side of the reservoir for some great birds - Large numbers of Great White Egrets, a couple of Whooper Swans, Marsh Harriers and finally a White-tailed Eagle soaring high. Another eagle later was a little lower but still a long way away enjoying the warm weather. Among the range of water birds were various terns, Purple Heron, Ruff, some great butterflies – Clouded Yellow and Swallowtail, reptiles and amphibians including a Fire-bellied Toad, Sand Lizard and Grass Snake. A perched Goshawk was a treat as we ate our picnic.

Afterwards we headed back to the forest stopping off for Ortolan Bunting. Tomasz impressively stopping by the actual tree where one was singing! Over several later stops, we saw a fabulous Nutcracker, Wood Warblers, and White-backed Woodpecker. Tomasz was lucky enough to see a Bison but despite a few minutes searching, we couldn't find it again – fairly typical at this time of year. But now it was time to head back for a freshen up before our dinner of lamb and potato dumplings.

## Day 3

**Sunday 6th May**

Warm and sunny for most of the day, brief hail shower mid afternoon, breezy but calmer evening. 05.00-09.00 Forest Core Area, Various forest stops until 16.30, dinner 17.30, Owling 18.30-21.00

Today was our trip to the Core Area. We met our guide, Eva at the gate at 5.30. Our first Whinchats sang here and we heard Grasshopper Warbler. In the Core Area we enjoyed an excellent walk with added value from Eva explaining about the history and ecology. Of course the birds were special too with Collared Flycatchers being the commonest of the four flycatcher species we saw before breakfast. The two Red-breasted Flycatchers were new in and singing well.

After breakfast we tried various places in the forest picking up a fabulous but flighty Barred Warbler, equally flighty Black Woodpecker and for most, fairly good views of Hazel Hen with a pair at the side of the road scuttling quickly into the trees but allowing us to see them creep slowly away. Another species which had been playing hard to get was Lesser-spotted Eagle. Tomasz explained that they were much rarer in the area due to a change of meadow management – something which was thankfully being addressed. However, his local knowledge came good after a couple of tries, with a fine Lesser-spotted Eagle flying and hunting at the edge of the village.

We'd opted for a slightly earlier dinner so that we could try for Pygmy Owl. We arrived at the site, not far from the town and managed to see Black Woodpecker well - very welcome after a number of fly-overs. Nutcracker and Crested Tit were also seen here. Tomasz tried Three-toed Woodpecker which responded and flew in. Unfortunately only a few managed to get on the bird before it left. With no Pygmy Owls calling, we tried another place. With dusk further on, we saw our first Woodcocks. Then at 8pm, we heard a Pygmy Owl. It took a while but after looking up into trees and walking around to view from different angles, we finally clamped eyes on it. It was quite dark but it was only a few metres away, allowing us to watch it through the telescope. With Cuckoos calling and the dusk chorus in full swing, we left the owl and returned to the hotel by 21.00. A great and atmospheric end to the day!

## Day 4

Monday 7th May

Cooler and cloudy but dry until 09.30. Drizzle until 13.00, calm.

06.00-09.00 Morning walk from hotel, pack up and forest stop 09.15-10.15, drive to Warsaw with lunch stop arriving at 16.15.

An early walk to the nearby Narewka gave us a few Beaver sightings and a Savi's Warbler reeling alongside the river channel. A Green Woodpecker called behind us. Later but still pre-breakfast we caught up with a perched pair of Grey-headed Woodpeckers.

We returned to have a larger than needed breakfast (complete with nice but filling apple pancakes – we finished those as well...), then got on the road by 09.15. We spent a last hour in the forest looking for Three-toed Woodpecker at last night's first stop, but they were not giving themselves up. We did see our first Crossbills here. But we were more than compensated by a very obliging Pygmy Owl who sat in full view for at least 40 minutes. These birds are wonderful but not guaranteed so we felt very lucky to have seen two. It had by now, started raining and we decided it was time to leave!

Driving west we saw a female Montagu's Harrier, White-tailed Eagle, a few Roe Deer and a Crane. A brief stop by the River Bug gave us a couple of Wood Sandpipers and a Redshank. Our packed lunch was eaten in a roadside restaurant with the understanding we spent a bit of money buying drinks. For some of us, that extended to buying large apple meringue cakes with cream and chocolate sauce! It was the polite thing to do...

By 14.15 we were on our way again and nearing Warsaw. Traffic near the city was as expected busy – no matter which road you took, but we arrived in perfect time for checking in at 16.15 where we said our thanks and goodbye to Tomasz and our very patient driver. A few hardy souls completed the checklist for the morning's sightings before boarding at 18.15 arriving at LHR at 20.40.

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## Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; h = heard only; LO = leader only)

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			4	5	6	7
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	6	1		
2	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	4			
5	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	30		
6	Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	h	h		
8	Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		40+		
9	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	2	10		3
10	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		2		
12	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	10	40	50	40
13	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	2	20		1
14	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		5		
15	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		50+		
17	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	10	45	2	2
18	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		30		
20	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		1		
22	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	1(lo)			
24	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		2		
26	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	8			
27	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	2			
31	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				1
32	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	3	10	2	1
33	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1	1
34	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		1		
36	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	6	2	3	4
37	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		2		1
39	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>			2	
42	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1			1
43	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	2			
45	Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>			2	
47	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>				1
49	Corncrake	<i>Crex crex</i>			1h	
50	Little Crake	<i>Porzana pusilla</i>	3			
53	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	h			
54	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	4	2		2
55	Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		10	1	7
59	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	7	10	4	2
60	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	40	40		
66	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				1
69	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>		8		2
71	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		1	1	
72	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>			5	
73	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		3	1	
74	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	25	75+		10

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			4	5	6	7
78	Yellow-legged (Caspian) Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>		30		
79	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	1			
80	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		5		
82	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	3			
83	White-winged Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	40	1		
84	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	3			
85	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	3	✓	✓	✓
86	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			10	h
87	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	1		2	4
90	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	h	3h	10	1
92	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			2h	
93	Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>			1	1
96	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	15	1		10
98	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		1		
100	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		1	2	
101	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		2	2	1h
102	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>		1	1	2
103	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>				1
104	Middle-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>		1	2	
106	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		3	5	1
107	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>		4		
109	Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>			1	
110	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	1			
111	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	1		1h	
113	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			1	
114	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	50	40	30	20
115	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>		20	3	10
116	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			3	
117	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			1	
119	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	1	5	5	7
120	Blue-headed (Yellow) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>			10	
121	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	2			
122	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		h	6h	1h
123	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			2	
124	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		4	3	
125	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>		5	5	3
126	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		1	1	
127	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	1	2	1	1
130	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>			5	
131	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	3	20	20	5
132	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	2	5	1	2
133	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			1h	
134	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		3	5	1
135	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			1	1
137	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	2	2		1

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			4	5	6	7
138	Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>			1h	
139	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	4	6	3	1
142	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	1	2		
143	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>		2		1
144	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		1		1
145	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>		3	3	
146	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		5	3	
147	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		7	10	3
148	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>			1	
149	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		6	5	1h
150	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	1	3	2	1h
151	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		3	3	
152	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		2h	2	
153	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>			2	
154	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>			4	1
155	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>		1	15	1
156	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		3	7	3
158	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>			2	
160	Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	3	1		
161	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montana</i>			1	
162	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			1	
163	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		10	5	5
164	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		2	1	2
165	Northern Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater ater</i>		h		
166	White-headed Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus caudatus</i>				3
167	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		2	4	
168	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			1h	
169	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		1	1	
170	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	1	1	1	1
171	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
172	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		2h	2	
173	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		1	2	
174	Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>		1	1	
175	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	5	1		5
176	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	3	1	1	2
177	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula soemmeringii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
178	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	30+			2
179	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
180	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	2	1	1	
181	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		10	5	10
182	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	1	✓	✓	✓
183	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	1	10	15	5
184	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	1	2	4	2
185	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	1	2	3	4
186	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	2	5	6	10
187	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		10	6	5

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			4	5	6	7
189	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			1	
190	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		1	2	
192	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			h	1
193	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		3	3	
194	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>		1		
195	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	2	4	2	2

## Mammals

1	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		1		
2	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>				3
3	European Bison	<i>Bison bonasus</i>		1 (lo)		
4	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>			3	
5	Bank Vole	<i>Clethrionomys glareolus</i>		1	1	
6	European Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>		1		1
7	Serotene Bat					
8	Nathusius' pipistrelle					

## Reptiles & Amphibians

Fire-bellied Toad

Grass Snake

Sand Lizard

Viviparous Lizard

Marsh Frog

Common Toad

Pool/Edible Frog

## Butterflies

Speckled Wood

Map

Peacock

Brimstone

Clouded Yellow

Orange Tip

Swallowtail

Green-veined White

Wood White

Common Blue

## Moths

Burnet Companion

Latticed Heath

## Dragonflies

Downy Emerald

Four-spot Chaser

Ruby White-face

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