



WILDPOLAND Trip report

Winter Mammals, 18 - 24 January 2014

*7 day mammal watching tour
in the Białowieża Forest and Biebrza Marshes*

*Text and photographs by
Łukasz Mazurek*



Tour Leader:
Łukasz (Lucas) Mazurek

Participants:
Sabine (D), Francoise (NL), Régis & Vanessa (FR), Jeremy (USA)

Wildlife:
18 mammal and 43 bird species recorded, full checklist on page 7

Day 1, Saturday 18th Jan - Arrival

All the flights were on time so after arriving at Warsaw airport we boarded our brand new Opel Vivaro minibus and were soon on our way to Białowieża. It has gotten dark quickly and we did not encounter any wildlife on the way.

About 4 hours later we checked in at a lovely guesthouse Wejmutka which was packed with people as there was a classical guitar concert going on in the dining room. After about 1 hour the concert was over and we had a gorgeous dinner, followed by coffees and home made cake as well as introduction to the itinerary and the Białowieża Forest.



Day 2, Sunday 19th Jan - Białowieża

Temp. -14 C that feels like -20 C, strong eastern wind, clear sky.

We met down for a quick tea and/or coffee and were on our way into the forest still before sunrise. The first sighting of the tour was a herd of about **10 Red Deer** feeding at a small meadow on the side of the road. Bison were absent at the first two sites we visited so we came back to the edge of the village and went by foot through the forest to a small glade where **2 Bison** bulls were quite tame and gave us great views in a dramatic scenery of snowfall.

After a substantial breakfast we were back on our way to the forest for a longer walk. We didn't get very far as **3 Bison** were spotted at the village edge - just where we searched for them at dawn. During the walk, **2 Bullfinches** gave us great views, we also had a **Black** and **2 Middle Spotted Woodpeckers** as well as several **Jays** and **Nuthatches**. At some point we saw **3 Roe Deer** feeding slowly in the forest and while we were



watching them, we found a **Bison** sleeping at the edge of a distant glade.

After some time we arrived at a scenic flooded and frozen forest where two large **Beaver lodges** looked very fresh and used but the animals didn't show and we couldn't find any fresh tracks.

While we had our lunch sitting on a huge log at a crossroads of forest tracks, a **Sparrowhawk** flew by. On our way back, Réguis have spotted a female **Bison** near the track and once again we had some great views.

In the evening, we had a yet another walk near the Belarus border through a boreal forest where Lynx and Wolf have been spotted in the past, but saw no wildlife apart from



several Red, Roe Deer and Wild Boar footprints. After dinner we went on a 1,5 h drive through the forest but again saw no wildlife.

Day 3, Monday 20th Jan - Białowieża

Temp. -12 C that again feels like -20 C, same strong eastern wind, clear sky.

Once again we were out early morning and had good views of at least **7 Bison** at the National Park edge. After breakfast we took a drive through the forest and saw **2 Red Deer** - a hind with a fawn that gave us long and great views right in front of our bus.



We had a great walk in a picturesque and quite an old forest, saw plenty of **tracks of Wild Boar, Pine Marten, Hare, Bank Vole** and also **Wolf footprints**. The highlight of this walk was a sighting of an adult **White-tailed Eagle** flying over a glade where we had our lunch.

In the afternoon we transferred to the north of the forest and saw the total of **21 Bison** in 3 different herds at the edge of the forest as well as **2 Wild Boar**. Everybody truly enjoyed watching the first and largest of herds where two bulls were fighting in a play and the overall scenery was just beautiful. Six **Red Deer** and some **Buzzards** were spotted by the group as we drove back and we had a brief view of a **Goshawk** with a Domestic Pigeon right in front of our bus.



Day 4, Tuesday 21st Jan - Białowieża to Biebrza

Temp. -12 C that again feels like -20 C, wind slowed down, again no clouds at all.

This early morning we went on a 5 km hike that resulted in finding the **tracks of a pack of Wolves** with urine marking and pooh. Quite exciting. Birds seen on this walk included **Hawfinch, Goldcrest, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Long-tailed Tit**.

After breakfast we met Arek, our guide to the Strictly Protected Area of the National Park - the UNESCO World Heritage site and a Biosphere Reserve. Arek was very knowledgeable and extremely enthusiastic (as always!) and apart from enjoying our time in the reserve, we had seen dozens of huge, centuries old trees and quite a number of birds. Everyone had a good view at a **White-backed, Middle and Greater Spotted Woodpeckers**, while **Bullfinches, Mistle Thrush and Wren** were a bit more difficult to spot.



Back at our guesthouse, we had a delicious traditional Polish lunch of home made pierogi (dumplings stuffed with cabbage and wild mushrooms) and we hit the road towards Biebrza Marshes. On the way, we have spotted **4 Roe Deer** in the fields and **2 Foxes** at a road side. Our guesthouse in the Biebrza - Leśniczówka Biebrzańska had reported frozen water pipes earlier this day so we were rebooked to the next door Dwór Dobarz in the same village with no problems.

Day 5, Wednesday 22nd Jan - Biebrza Red Bog Area

Temp. -11 C that finally feels like -11 C, -7 in the sun at midday, wind gone, again no clouds at all.

This early morning we went on a drive in the Elk/Moose winter habitat. The first 2 Elks were spotted at the forest edge just as we left our hotel yard. After about half an hour of slow drive through a picturesque forest and **several Roe Deer seen**, we have found

another **Elk**, this time feeding just at the side of the road and a yet another one a bit further on. Satisfied, we came back for breakfast.

Later, we have driven north to the Red Bog area with a short stop at the National Park HQ. The weather was gorgeous and we had another great day tracking mammals. Visitors are allowed to walk into this reserve but few get the permission to drive in so far. Plenty of footprints were seen today, including **Red and Roe Deer, Wild Boar, Racoons Dog, Pine Marten, American Mink, Weasel, Hare** and the highlight of the day - tracks of **a pack of Wolves**. For about 1 hour we have followed ca. 2 days old tracks of **at least 3 Wolves**, found their resting and rendezvous places as well as numerous territory marking signs.



We had our lunch at one of the most beautiful viewing platforms in the whole area, surrounded by kilometres of forests, marshes and undisturbed silence. On our way back, Régouis has spotted **2 Wild Boar** and everyone enjoyed the view.

Birds seen this day included **White-tailed Eagle, Grey Heron, Black Woodpecker, Marsh Tits, Nuthatch and Waxwings**.

Day 6, Thursday 23rd Jan - Biebrza Southern Basin

Temp. -24 C in the morning to -18 C at midday, no wind or any clouds, just very cold.

This night the temperature dropped down significantly and the remains of open waters froze, which worried us since we counted on finding Beavers and Otters there. After an early breakfast we drove south towards the frozen marshes of Biebrza and Narew rivers. The first several sites we visited were indeed completely frozen and the only sign of water mammals were Otter's and Beaver's old footprints and remnants from feeding frozen in the ice. Birds were abundant, though, as we have spotted a **Great Grey Shrike**, plenty of **Yellowhammers, Siskins, House and Tree Sparrows**.

We decided to search closer to the main river channel hoping for any open water and our decision soon proved to be a good one as we saw an **Otter** feeding very near and

everyone had perfect views for almost half an hour. Lunch was eaten at a farmers' place in a lovely village of Brzostowo just at a river side and apart from hot teas and coffees the lady brought us freshly brewed hot cabbage stew for free and insisted that we all try. Yes, it was delicious :).

After lunch we continued our search for mammals and saw one more **Otter** a bit further away, a total of **5 Foxes**, **5 Roe Deer** and a **Beaver** swimming across the river. At some point the **Beaver** tried to come out of the water right in front of us as we stood in silence hoping to see it again! It was also exceptional to hear **one other Beaver** munching the twigs as we stood over his lodge.



Few more birds were spotted in the afternoon: **2 White-tailed Eagles**, several **Mute** and **Whooper Swans**, **Goldfinches**, **Wren**, **Common Buzzard**, **Sparrowhawk** and a single male **Redpoll** in a flock of **Siskins**. On our way back for dinner it was already getting dark and we have seen **2 Elks** feeding just at a road side. The road was busy so we turned back after a while and saw one more so **3 Elks** in total.

After another hearty Polish dinner we had a vote on the plans for our last morning the next day. The choices were going back for Beavers and Otters or trying the Elk safari once again. It wasn't an easy decision and after some turmoil, the Elks have won.

Day 7, Friday 24th Jan - Biebrza to Warsaw

Temp. -28 C in the morning to -13 C at midday, wind came back, still no clouds.

This was the coldest night in Poland this winter so far with temperature dropping down to -29 C at the ground level in Białowieża. We had our morning teas and coffees and went on the Elk spotting drive. We were very lucky and everyone agreed it had been a good decision since we have spotted the total of **6 Elks** and **3 Roe Deer** very near and had an amazing time watching and photographing them. We also had a short walk in the forest that brought us **one more Elk**, this time a first year bull since it was still carrying tiny antlers, spotted by Régis, as usual :)



After the usual substantial breakfast we departed towards Warsaw but it wasn't the end of wildlife spotting. First of all, Réguis have found us **two adult White-tailed Eagles** perched up the trees just at the side of the road. They were quite tame and allowed for long observation. Later, two **Buzzards** and 4 more **Roe Deer** were seen on the way.

We arrived at the Warsaw main airport with plenty of spare time for everyone. Everyone agreed it felt weird after several days in such a wilderness and silence :).



Checklist

F - footprints

H - heard

C - common

MAMMALS

Species name		Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	SUM
European Bison <i>Bison bonasus</i>		7	28						35
Red Deer <i>Cervus elaphus</i>		10	8	F	F				18
Roe Deer <i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		3		4	11	5	7		30
Wild Boar <i>Sus scrofa</i>		F	2	F	2				4
Elk <i>Alces Alces</i>					5	3	7		15
Wolf <i>Canis lupus</i>				F	F	F			0
Red Fox <i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		F		2	1	5			8
Raccoon Dog <i>Nyctereutes procyonoides</i>					F				0
Eurasian Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>						2			2
Pine Marten <i>Martes martes</i>		F	F	F	F				0
American Mink <i>Mustela vison</i>					F				0
European Polecat <i>Mustela putorius</i>					F	F			0
Weasel <i>Mustela nivalis</i>					F	F			0
European Beaver <i>Castor fiber</i>	lodge					2			2
Red Squirrel <i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>					F				0
European Hare <i>Lepus europaeus</i>			F	F	F	F			0
Bank Vole <i>Clethrionomys glareolus</i>			F						0
Yellow-necked Mouse <i>Apodemus flavicollis</i>				F					0

Number of species: 0 7 7 10 12 7 2 18

BIRDS

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	SUM
035	Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>					1			1
039	Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>						50		50
039	Whooper Swan <i>Cygnus cygnus</i>					7			7
049	Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		30	20	4		4		58
075	White-tailed Eagle <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		1		1	2	2		6
089	Rough-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo lagopus</i>	1							1
091	Common Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i>		1	1		2	2		6
093	Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1				1			2
093	Northern Goshawk <i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			1					1
171	Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus</i>						C		0
201	Feral Pigeon <i>Columba livia feral</i>					C			0
225	Black Woodpecker <i>Dryocopus martius</i>	1			3				4
227	Great Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos major</i>			1					1
227	Middle Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	2		3					5
229	White-backed Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>			1					1
255	Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			1	1	1			3
255	Bohemian Waxwing <i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>				10				10
275	Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			1					1
275	Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i>		2						2
311	Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>			3					3
317	Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>		10	1	2	4			17
317	Coal Tit <i>Periparus ater</i>			1	H				1
317	Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		H	H		H			0
319	Crested Tit <i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			H					0
319	Marsh Tit <i>Poecile palustris</i>				1				1
321	Long-tailed Tit <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		H	4					4
323	Nuthatch <i>Sitta europaea</i>	5		3	H				8
325	Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i>		H						0
329	Northern / Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>						1		1
331	Magpie <i>Pica pica</i>			1	1	2			4
333	Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	5	1	2	5				13
335	Jackdaw <i>Corvus monedula</i>						C		0
337	Rook <i>Corvus frugilegus</i>						10	C	10
337	Hooded Crow <i>Corvus cornix</i>						10	C	10
337	Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>	10	20	5	3	6	6		50

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	SUM
343	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>				5	1	5		11
343	Tree-Sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i>						100		100
349	Common Redpoll <i>Carduelis flammea</i>						1		1
351	Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>						6		6
351	Siskin <i>Carduelis spinus</i>						120		120
355	Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	2	5	15	2				24
355	Hawfinch <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		3	1					4
373	Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	10	30	10		150			200
Number of species:		0	9	14	21	15	20	8	43

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