

## TRIP REPORT

### WINTER BISON SAFARI & WOLF TRACKING 22-25 JAN 2016

4 DAY MAMMAL WATCHING TOUR  
IN THE BIAŁOWIEŻA FOREST



TEXT BY ANDRZEJ PETRYNA, PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDRZEJ PETRYNA & MARTYN SIDWELL

TOUR LEADER: ANDRZEJ (ANDREW) PETRYNA

PARTICIPANTS: DEBORAH, LIDIA, MARTYN, MATTHEW (UK)

WILDLIFE: 10 MAMMAL AND 36 BIRD SPECIES RECORDED, FULL CHECKLIST ON PAGE 5

## DAY 1, FRIDAY 22 JAN - ARRIVAL

TEMP. -2° C, CLOUDY, SNOWING

After a drive across Warsaw from the hotel to the airport, our team was completed. We headed to Białowieża, passing Warsaw streets covered with a thin layer of snow. Some Jackdaws, Hooded Crows, Rooks and Magpies were flying around.

During a lunch stop out of Warsaw we saw **3 Roe Deer** and some hovering **Buzzards** (one seemed to be **Rough-legged Buzzard** from the distance) in the open fields behind the road.

The Białowieża Forest welcomed us with a real winter - ca. 25 cm of fresh snow cover and a temperature of -8° C. Excellent dinner was a good finish of the drive, with "Bison" (Żubr) beer around the cosy fireplace.



## DAY 2, SATURDAY 23 JAN - BIAŁOWIEŻA FOREST

TEMP. -7°C, CLOUDY WITH SOME SUNSHINE IN THE AFTERNOON

Before breakfast we went out to the north of the village to check the meadows around the Strict Reserve. Probably this area was a scene of wolf hunting some days before, and still here are some remnants from wolf table somewhere in the forest, because there were several Rooks circling around. Some Rooks chased a **White-tailed Eagle** out of the forest. The **Eagle** stayed in the tree for a long time. Looking for Bison we found two big herds of **Red Deer**. The first **Bison** were met at the edge of forest near the next village - **5 bulls** of different age.



After breakfast at our family-run hotel, tasty as usual, we took our packed lunches and thermo bottle and drove to the meadows near the northern limit of the forest to look for better views of Bison. The weather has cleared up very nicely. After a picturesque forest road drive in a Christmas card scenery, we found a small group of **4 bulls** far in the field, then at a next stop we met a **herd of almost 30 Bison**. On a way to the next place we found **3 Wild Boars** near the road, quite small and obviously not sure what to do next. After a while they crossed the road and disappeared in the forest.



After lunch at a watching tower at the edge of meadows we decided to drive back into the middle part of the forest. Before we entered the forest for the last walk, suddenly a **huge Bison** went out from the forest onto the main road ca 50 m in front of us. It stopped for a while, but we were too astonished to prepare ourselves to take good photos.

We went out from the forest in full Moon scenery, and finished this very cold evening at a very atmospheric local restaurant with hot drinks and Bison Grass Vodka (Żubrówka) shot, of course.

Tasty and generous dinner was waiting for us at our hotel.



## DAY 3, SUNDAY 24 JAN - BIAŁOWIEŻA FOREST

TEMP. -11° C, HAZY

Before breakfast we watched some interesting birds around the bird feeder in the hotel garden, with **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, **Bullfinch** and **Mistle Thrush**.

After breakfast we met our local guide, Irek, and went to visit the Strict Reserve of the National Park, the core area of the **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. Just before we entered the Reserve, we found some **Wolf tracks** at the side of the road and a **Wolf dropping** in the middle of the road. Unfortunately, fresh, dry and soft snow didn't allow us to find the really good footprints to take a photo.



Then we spent some hours in a special part of the Białowieża Forest - the Strict Reserve. Irek gave us an exciting lecture on natural forest life in crisp cold air. We added **Red Squirrel** and **European Hare** to our mammal list.



A little bit frozen, we had excellent Polish "pierogi" for lunch and were ready for the next visit to the forest.

On our way to **Wolf territories**, we met some **Bison** at the edge of forest. One of them was a **single old bull** we managed to get quite close to him. After a while we went back to the forest. Just at the beginning we had good but short view of **White-backed Woodpecker**, one of the rarest of European woodpeckers. The trail we planned to walk was covered by deep fresh snow, which is difficult to find footprints of any animals, so we moved to another part of **Wolf area**. In this part of forest we found plenty of different footprints, e.g. **Fox**, **Pine Marten**, **Raccoon Dog**, and plenty of different angulates. Finally, after 1 km walk, we found **footprint of big male Wolf**, ca 12 cm long. We followed the

footprints for a longer time, then we gave up because of darkness. I howled, but we got no answer from Wolves. Pity!

We finished our day in the same restaurant, repeating the menu, too. Our last dinner in Białowieża gave us a chance to try a local speciality - delicious potato cake.



## DAY 4, MONDAY 25 JAN - BACK TO WARSAW

TEMP. +1°C, RAIN

After the last birdwatching around our guesthouse and a hearty breakfast we headed to Warsaw. We reached the city (after a short coffee break on the way) just in lunch time. After lunch in one of numerous restaurants in the Old Town we had a walk around the Old Town, to see some historical buildings and the way they were restored after II World War disaster.

Full and happy we finished the tour downtown and everyone got dropped off where they wanted before dinner time.



## CHECKLIST

F - footprints  
D - droppings  
H - heard  
X - seen

### MAMMALS

Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	SUM
<b>European Bison</b> <i>Bison bonasus</i>		38	5		43
<b>Red Deer</b> <i>Cervus elaphus</i>		40	1		41
<b>Roe Deer</b> <i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	3	1	1		5
<b>Wild Boar</b> <i>Sus scrofa</i>		3	F		3

Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	SUM
<b>Wolf</b> <i>Canis lupus</i>			F, D		0
<b>Red Fox</b> <i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		F	1, D		0
<b>Raccoon Dog</b> <i>Nyctereutes procyonides</i>			F		0
<b>Pine Marten</b> <i>Martes martes</i>			F		0
<b>Red Squirrel</b> <i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>			3		3
<b>European Hare</b> <i>Lepus europaeus</i>			1		1
<b>Number of species:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>

## BIRDS

Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	SUM
<b>Mallard</b> <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		x	x		x
<b>White-tailed Eagle</b> <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		1			1
<b>Rough-legged Buzzard</b> <i>Buteo lagopus</i>	x				x
<b>Common Buzzard</b> <i>Buteo buteo</i>	x	x	x		x
<b>Common Kestrel</b> <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	x				x
<b>Black-headed Gull</b> <i>Larus ridibundus</i>				x	x
<b>Feral Pigeon</b> <i>Columba livia feral</i>				x	x
<b>Collared Dove</b> <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		x			x
<b>Great Spotted Woodpecker</b> <i>Dendrocopos major</i>		x	x		x
<b>Middle Spotted Woodpecker</b> <i>Dendrocopos medius</i>			x	x	x
<b>White-backed Woodpecker</b> <i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>			x		x
<b>Mistle Thrush</b> <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			x		x
<b>Redwing</b> <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	x				x
<b>Fieldfare</b> <i>Turdus pilaris</i>		x			x
<b>Blackbird</b> <i>Turdus merula</i>		x	x		x
<b>Goldcrest</b> <i>Regulus regulus</i>			H		1
<b>Great Tit</b> <i>Parus major</i>		x	x		x
<b>Blue Tit</b> <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		x	x		x
<b>Crested Tit</b> <i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		H			1
<b>Marsh Tit</b> <i>Poecile palustris</i>		x	x		x
<b>Nuthatch</b> <i>Sitta europaea</i>		x	x		x
<b>Treecreeper</b> <i>Certhia familiaris</i>			x		x
<b>Magpie</b> <i>Pica pica</i>	x	x	x		x
<b>Jay</b> <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		x	x		x
<b>Jackdaw</b> <i>Corvus monedula</i>	x				x

Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	SUM
<b>Rook</b> <i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	X				X
<b>Hooded Crow</b> <i>Corvus cornix</i>	X				X
<b>Raven</b> <i>Corvus corax</i>	X	X	X		X
<b>House Sparrow</b> <i>Passer domesticus</i>		X	X		X
<b>Tree-Sparrow</b> <i>Passer montanus</i>			X		X
<b>Chaffinch</b> <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		X			X
<b>Eurasian Linnet</b> <i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		X			X
<b>Greenfinch</b> <i>Carduelis chloris</i>		X	X		X
<b>Siskin</b> <i>Carduelis spinus</i>			X		X
<b>Bullfinch</b> <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		X	X		X
<b>Yellowhammer</b> <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		X	X		X
<b>Number of species:</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>36</b>

FOR FULL SIZE PHOTOGRAPHS, PLEASE VISIT OUR NEWS AT [WWW.WILDPOLAND.COM](http://WWW.WILDPOLAND.COM)  
OR OUR FACEBOOK PAGE: [WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/WILDPOLAND](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/WILDPOLAND)