

Poland in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

19 - 27 January 2008

Report compiled by Sinclair Dunnett



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David Parmee
Gill Parmee
Sue Bloska
Kath Weston
Stuart Cook
Ros Cook
Charles Jones
Helen Ingelbrecht
Meg Croxford
Denise Scarrott
Jo Meintjes

Overview

The lack of snow and frost was particularly disappointing; at least we had little rain. Nevertheless we had excellent Wolf one night, and the itinerary re-design of 2006 worked well again, with good views of over 40 Bison in the western part of the Borecka forest.

Other mammals seen by all (or most) of the group included Elk; Red and Roe Deer; Wild Boar. Brown Hare and Red Squirrel were other mammals observed by at least some of the group. A curiosity was a newt of unidentified species which was seen on our last night, at the Red Marsh.

Day 1

Saturday 19th January

Several degrees above freezing; foggy at times; some heavy rain

The flight was on time (1140) and all formalities were completed quickly within the airport. We left Okęcie at noon and reached the lodge of Żabie Oko.

Day 2

Sunday 20th January

Just above freezing most of the day, just below freezing from late afternoon. Mostly overcast, brief sunny periods. Dry.

We left the lodge at 1010 and arrived at our rendezvous in the western part of Puszcza Borecka at 1100. Our forest guide was waiting for us with his 4x4 and a tractor/trailer kitted out with basic seats, so the whole group could enter the forest together. No wild Bison seen but we studied the four in the enclosure.

We returned to the lodge briefly and then drove west to the Wolf's Lair, the Nazi HQ in East Prussia where the assassination attempt on Hitler took place in July 1944. Our usual enthusiastic (and slightly eccentric) bunker guide Chester was there to conduct us round the site; this was also our lunch stop.

Birds seen today included Bullfinch, Goldfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Buzzard and a distant view of a White-tailed Eagle. Roe Deer were also observed.

Day 3

Monday 21st January

Temperature hovered about freezing all day. Mostly overcast, some mist early on

We left the lodge at 0745, rendezvoused with the tractor/trailer in the western part of Puszcza Borecka at 0815. Group went in two parties and all had excellent views of >40 Bison. We tried to "string" a White-backed woodpecker, but the light mist made positive identification difficult.

We returned to Żabie Oko for breakfast at 1000hrs, finally leaving at 1130. We had a short stop in Goldap for shopping in the town, then on to our base for the next four days – Żytkiejmy.

We had lunch at Żytkiejmy at 1400hrs and left the lodge at 1500 for the "Wolf Meadow" in the north of the forest. Four clients – Sue Bloska; Ros and Stuart Cook; and Kath Weston – stayed out all night and had repeated views of Wolf:

1655hrs:	2 Wolves
1745-1800hrs:	4 Wolves
1810hrs:	2 Wolves (Tawny Owl heard)
0200hrs:	1 Wolf
0350-0405:	3 Wolves
0510hrs:	1 Wolf

Behaviour observed included playing and scent-making.

Day 4

Tuesday 22nd January

First definite frost of trip, windscreen covered at 0700. Full moon.

Collected the four from the Wolf Meadow at 0740, back to lodge for breakfast. We set off at 0920 with Romek, our friend and guide for many years in Puszcza Romincka. After the introductions we headed north towards the Russian border. We visited one of the Kaiser Wilhelm II memorial stones and a number of beaver areas to view cut trees, dams and lodges. Ponds were frozen, there had obviously been a hard frost for sometime before our visit.

At 1500hrs we left for the forest again and high seats. Ben, Charles and Denise had elected for an all-nighter at the "wolf meadow" and entered the large hide about 1530hrs with blankets, food, hot drinks, night-glasses and image intensifier.

Six other clients were distributed over three high seats and we collected them after dark. No sightings of wolves, though we got a glimpse of a Polecat after picking up the party near Bludzie.

Day 5

Wednesday 23rd January

Some snow overnight, temperature a few degrees below freezing most of day. A little snow fell after lunchtime

We set off at 0700hrs and saw four Roe Deer on our way to pick up the overnights, who had seen little apart from a Roe Deer. We got back to the lodge about 08.20 having seen little more. We left again at 0945 for a walk in the forest along a sand-ridge, till noon...then went to the shops at Żytkiejmy.

A minor advantage of the lack of snow was that it made “woodpecker workshops” much more obvious. Clients commented on the numerous cones lying under certain birch trees by the main forest road; Banf and Dahlstrom informed us these would be favourite trees, with a suitable cleft for a woodpecker to wedge a cone to pick out the seeds before dislodging it to the ground below and repeating the process. Fresh cones appeared quickly today on top of the light snow which had fallen; these “workshops” seemed so active it was surprising we’ve never seen a woodpecker working at one.

Good views of four Roe Deer east of the lodge at lunchtime. At wolf meadows we saw one small unidentified carnivore; 2 Roe Deer, seven or more Wild Boar, and a long view of a fine stag. Just east of the lodge, in the evening, we saw – at different times – a total of five Red Deer, Wild Boar; and a Red Fox.

Day 6

Thursday 24th January

-3°C in morning, some snow fell, thawing later. Overcast most of day

Walk in lodge area 0845-0930hrs. Various tits; main feature was a good prolonged view of Middle Spotted Woodpecker. Left lodge at 0940 for Stanczyki, all clients walked the 5km or so back to lodge, visiting turpentine trees en route.

Left lodge at 1530hrs. Some clients witnessed 13 Boar and two deer. Six clients (including myself) at the wolf meadow saw nothing of interest, save Ravens flying off noisily.

Day 7

Friday 25th January

All snow had gone overnight, temperature a degree or two above freezing most of day. Some bright sunshine, chill wind later

We loaded up the luggage and left the Żytkiejmy at 1035, driving east and then south. After fifty minutes in Suwaiki for shopping we continued south, stopping for lunch at a roadside restaurant, and arrived at Kuwasy -on the edge of the “Red Marsh” – Czerwone Bagno – by 1600hrs.

Day 8

Saturday 26th January

3°C in morning, higher in day. Overcast much of day; dry in morning, rain from lunchtime onwards.

Our local guide, Lukas Artur Wiatr, briefed us at the map in the lodge at 0900, and we then drove to the entrance to the “Strict Reserve” portion of Czerwone Bagno. Several Roe were spotted.

A fallen tree across the road was soon dealt with by eager volunteers and the saw I always carry on this trip; the next fallen tree was lighter and could just be pushed off the road.

Denise spotted the first Elk of the trip, standing about 50 yards from the road in birches, making viewing difficult; still, it raised our spirits.

We reached the parking area shortly after 1000 and were out on foot till just after noon, enjoying the driest part of the day. There was excellent spoor in the sand, including good tracks of Wolf; Elk, Red Deer; and Wild Boar.

At the first viewing platform Lukas quickly picked up White tailed Eagle in flight and an Elk several hundred yards out. Initially we could see only ears, then the face of a cow Elk. After some time she moved left and we could see her calf; eventually we could see the full bodies of both animals, but little of the legs. They gave us excellent telescope views for >20 minutes.

Lukas analysed various aspects of the spoor, and especially Wolf scats, showing the difference between that of a low-ranking individual (lots of hair in the dropping; it had got the worst part of the kill) and soft, pungent droppings from a high ranking individual which has feasted on the flesh and inner organs.

On the way back, Lukas took them on a board-walk over a raised walk; I saw a dozen Waxwings which flew off before I could attract the group.

We arrived at the lunch bonfire spot where ladies were waiting us with hunters' stew, Wild Boar and Red Deer sausage and lots of other goodies.

After lunch we had a short stop at the lodge and then headed towards Grajewo and east to the Czar's Road. In the Pine-Juniper woods we had views of five Elk on the outward journey. Two of these – a cow and a large bull – were in view with good light for almost 25 minutes.

We made a short stop at the Dwór Dobarz Lodge and then returned in failing light, getting a brief silhouette of a large Elk, brining our total to nine for the day, including some excellent views.

During dinner, a client – I think David Parmee – came to table and said he has seen a lizard in the covered vehicle passageway. It was in fact a newt, so far unidentified...

Day 9

Sunday 27th January

The day started slightly below freezing, then above freezing

We loaded up the luggage about 1000 and started our drive to Warsaw. Coffee break in Lomza at 1120hrs, and an hour's stop for lunch at 1240. We reached Warsaw in good time, took two clients who were staying on to their taxi, and all other to Okęcie Airport by 1510hrs in good time for the flight to London.

Species lists

Birds

H – Heard only

	Common name	Scientific name	January								
			19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	1					2	√		
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>							√		
3	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	√					√		√
4	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>								1	
5	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		1		1				3	
6	Hazel Grouse	<i>Bonasa bonasia</i>			1						
7	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	1								1
8	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			H	H					
9	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>					1				
10	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>					1				
11	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>						1			
12	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1				1			1	1
13	Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>				10+					4
14	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>									2
15	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	1								3
16	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	1			1		1	√		
17	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>				√	√	√		√	
18	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	1			√	3	3		√	1
19	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	1			1	1	H		1	
20	Common Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>				1					
21	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			√	√	√	√	6	√	√
22	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		√	√		√			√	√
23	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	√	√							√
24	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	√								
25	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	√	√							√
26	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		√	20+		√	H		√	√
27	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>									4
28	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>				√					
29	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>					20+	20+			
30	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	1								
31	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		20+			2				
32	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>						20			

Mammals

H – Heard only

G – Seen by Guide only

	Mammals	Scientific name	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	1								1
2	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>				G	√				
3	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>			4+	4+					
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>					1				
5	European Polecat	<i>Mustela putorius</i>			1						
6	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>					10+		13		
7	Red Deer	<i>Cervis elaphus</i>					11				
8	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		3	2	1	10		3	5	
9	Elk (Moose)	<i>Alces alces</i>								9	
10	European Bison (Wisent)	<i>Bison bosasus</i>			47						

Additional Species

	Additional Species	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Bat sp		√							
2	Newt sp									√

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