

# Belgium in Summer

Naturetrek Tour Report

1 - 5 July 2017



Purple Emperor



White Stork nest



Muskrats

Report and images by Gerald Broddelez



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Tour participants: Gerald Broddelez (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

## Summary

A keen group of nature lovers had a great time identifying the approx. 40+ species of butterflies, 20 species of dragonflies and damselflies, seeing and hearing a good selection of birds, and had some fantastic mammal encounters in just a few days! Accommodation in charming local hotels with excellent food and great picnics were much appreciated by everyone and made an important part of the success of this trip. Finally culture was not forgotten with a visit to Brugges and reminders of the Second World War (WW11) spread all over the Ardennes.

### Day 1

Thursday 1st July

#### UK - Lille - Brugge

After a Eurostar journey from the UK, we were soon on our way to Brugges. After checking into our hotel and picking up David, we drove north to the Zwin Nature Reserve where we were looking at the large variety of waterbirds. White Storks were seen at eye level from a viewing tower near the entrance. The nest with their chicks was only metres away allowing fantastic views. We then walked up onto the dyke from where we had great views over the wetland.

On the sandy beaches and the small islets in the lagoon we saw several waders in summer plumage including Redshank, Curlew, smart Avocets, many Oystercatchers, several smart Little Egrets and a large group of beautiful Spoonbills. Many gulls and terns were breeding on the islets including several pairs of smart Mediterranean Gulls, several Herring and Black-headed Gulls, Common and Little Terns and many Cormorants.

After this we had a short stroll through the saltbush vegetation and although it was warm, we all had good views of Reed Bunting, male Linnet, Stonechat, Whitethroat, displaying Meadow and Tree Pipits, and singing Sedge Warbler and Skylark.

Back at the carpark we found a few damselflies and our first butterflies. After a good afternoon we drove back to the hotel where we had a great meal at a local restaurant and discussed our plans for tomorrow.

### Day 2

Friday 2nd July

#### Brugge – Antwerpen – Diel - Rendeux

After breakfast we met with a local guide who gave us a two-hour interesting history tour of the city.

We then drove to Blokkersdijk, a large lake surrounded by reedbeds and famous for its large wildfowl concentrations. Here we took our picnic lunch by the lake. By carefully scanning of the lake we found large numbers of Tufted Duck, Common Pochard, Gadwall, Mute Swans with young, several Spoonbills and a Marsh Harrier.

After lunch we drove to Diel. Here we spent a good part of the afternoon looking for dragonflies and more.

With the sun shining a good part of the time we found 16 species including Small Emerald, Ruddy and Scarlet Darters, Dainty and Red-eyed Damselfly, Scarce Chaser and Norfolk Hawker. Surprise of the day however was a Bittern that Nigel found at the edge of the reed bed; a rare breeding bird and always hard to see. Golden Orioles kept us entertained in the wooded parts. Butterflies included the rare Map, several skippers, Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell.

We then drove to the Ardennes and after freshening up, had a wonderful dinner at our charming hotel, with great views over the valley.

## Day 3

Saturday 3rd July

### Rendeux – Botrange - Eupen – Rendeux

A pre-breakfast walk had us testing our bird song skills, with Marsh Warbler singing in the open and Icterine Warbler singing in the dense bushes among the many highlights.

After a good breakfast we drove to the plateau of the Hautes Fagnes and had a walk along a nice patch of forest. Tracks of Wild Boar were everywhere, and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Ringlet and Gatekeeper butterflies gave excellent views.

Our next stop at the viewpoint of Botrange (Belgium's highest point at over 2000 feet!) provided great views, displaying Tree Pipits and a Stonechat.

In a large firebreak we found several Purple-edged Coppers, more Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, dozens of Ringlets and several Small and Large Heaths. Another firebreak held several Red-backed Shrikes. We checked for Dipper along one of the many fast-flowing streams and found a bird in the middle of the stream.

After our picnic at the visitors centre we drove to the Wanne area, stopping unexpectedly en route to watch a pair of Muskrat with young feeding in the clear waters of a small stream just at our feet giving great photographic opportunities!

We then drove to the river and waited for the Beavers to appear. Unfortunately a Boy Scout camp was set up nearby so the Beavers kept a low profile, but Banded Demoiselle and White-legged Damselfly perched on the reeds nearby made up for it.

We then visited one of the quarries for Eagle-Owl. It took 10 seconds of searching to locate the first owl! We had great telescope views of a single bird first, followed by two more which showed really well in the telescope. A sight well celebrated back at the hotel with some local beer and wine!

## Day 4

Sunday 4th July

### Rendeux – Han –Lavaux -Nismes

A pre-breakfast walk to the river finally produced the long awaited Beaver. A single mammal gave outstanding views as it swam under the see-through bridge on which we were standing. A great start to the day!

After breakfast the morning was spent in the Famenne area. Here we spent time in the beech and oak forest looking for woodpeckers and woodland birds. We were quite successful with great views of Middle Spotted Woodpeckers playing hide and seek, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Black Woodpecker. Several Bullfinches were feeding in the low bushes, and Short-toed Treecreepers were calling all over the place, finally showing themselves well.

We also scanned the area from different viewpoints before driving to Lavaux for the rest of the afternoon. En route we found more Red-backed Shrikes that perched nearby and several Buzzards overhead. After picnicking we explored the area and found many butterflies including Marbled White, smart Wood White, Clouded Yellow, large Silver-washed Fritillary and the rare Violet and Sooty Coppers. We also saw a few Fragrant Orchids still in flower.

Next we explored some mixed beech forests and with the weather improving found more butterflies including Purple and Ilex Hairstreaks, Lesser Marbled Fritillary, more Marbled Whites, several White Admirals and best of all Purple Emperor perched on the road flashing its purple wings. What a great selection! A Golden Oriole was fluting away in the distance.

We then continued on to Nismes. Here we checked in to our hotel and then went out and visited one of the reserves near town. A short walk in the extremely dry meadows produced a few Marbled Whites, singing Yellowhammer, Green Woodpecker and a Turtle Dove.

## Day 5

Monday 5th July

### Nismes – Trelon – Lille - UK

The morning was spent in the mixed Beech and Oak forests along the Belgian/French border. Here we walked along a nice path looking for wildlife. Roe Deer crossed our path, Lesser Marbled Fritillary and Ringlet were common, and Brown Hawker and Broad-bodied Chaser were new for the list. As it warmed up more butterflies became active and best for us were several White Admirals, Purple Emperor and the rare Lesser Purple Emperor showing well. Great Spotted Woodpeckers were everywhere, accompanied by Short-toed Treecreeper, Nuthatch and several species of Tit.

After our last picnic in the forest with Honey Buzzard overhead, it was time to drive back to Lille to catch our Eurostar train back to the UK.

We all agreed that it had been a great trip with many good birds, good numbers of dragonflies, excellent butterflies, some nice mammal sightings and great company.

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## Species Lists

### Birds

Great Crested Grebe, <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Little Grebe, <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Cormorant, <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Little Egret, <i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Grey Heron, <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Eurasian Bittern, <i>Botaurus stellates</i>
White Stork, <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Eurasian Spoonbill, <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Mute Swan, <i>Cygnus olor</i>	Greylag Goose, <i>Anser anser</i>
Egyptian Goose, <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	Common Shelduck, <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Eurasian Wigeon, <i>Anas penelope</i>	Mallard, <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Gadwall, <i>Anas strepera</i>	Northern Shoveler, <i>Anas clypeata</i>
Eurasian Teal, <i>Anas crecca</i>	Common Pochard, <i>Aythya ferina</i>
Tufted Duck, <i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Red Kite, <i>Milvus milvus</i>
Western Marsh Harrier, <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Eurasian Sparrowhawk, <i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Northern Goshawk, <i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Common Buzzard, <i>Buteo buteo</i>
European Honey Buzzard, <i>Pernis apivorus</i>	Common Kestrel, <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Common Pheasant, <i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Common Moorhen, <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot, <i>Fulica atra</i>	Eurasian Oystercatcher, <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Pied Avocet, <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	Common Ringed Plover, <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Northern Lapwing, <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Whimbrel, <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
Eurasian Curlew, <i>Numenius arquata</i>	Common Redshank, <i>Tringa totanus</i>
Green Sandpiper, <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Common Sandpiper, <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Mediterranean Gull, <i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>	Black-headed Gull, <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
European Herring Gull, <i>Larus argentatus</i>	Lesser Black-backed Gull, <i>Larus fuscus</i>
Sandwich Tern, <i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	Common Tern, <i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Little Tern, <i>Sternula albifrons</i>	Common Wood Pigeon, <i>Columba palumbus</i>
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon, <i>Columba livia</i>	European Turtle Dove, <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove, <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Eurasian Eagle-Owl, <i>Bubo bubo</i>
Common Swift, <i>Apus apus</i>	Common Kingfisher, <i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Black Woodpecker, <i>Dryocopus martius</i>	European Green Woodpecker, <i>Picus viridis</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker, <i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Middle Spotted Woodpecker, <i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>
Eurasian Skylark, <i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Sand Martin, <i>Riparia riparia</i>
Eurasian Swallow, <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Common House Martin, <i>Delichon urbica</i>
Tree Pipit, <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Meadow Pipit, <i>Anthus pratensis</i>
White Wagtail, <i>Motacilla alba</i>	Grey Wagtail, <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White-throated Dipper, <i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	Eurasian Wren, <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Dunnock, <i>Prunella modularis</i>	European Robin, <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Common Stonechat, <i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Common Blackbird, <i>Turdus merula</i>
Song Thrush, <i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Mistle Thrush, <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Marsh Warbler, <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	Melodious Warbler, <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
Icterine Warbler, <i>Hippolais icterina</i>	Eurasian Blackcap, <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Garden Warbler, <i>Sylvia borin</i>	Common Whitethroat, <i>Sylvia communis</i>
Willow Warbler, <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Common Chiffchaff, <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Goldcrest, <i>Regulus regulus</i>	Common Firecrest, <i>Regulus ignacapillus</i>
Marsh Tit, <i>Parus palustris</i>	Willow Tit, <i>Parus montanus</i>
European Crested Tit, <i>Parus cristatus</i>	Eurasian Blue Tit, <i>Parus caeruleus</i>
Great Tit, <i>Parus major</i>	Coal Tit, <i>Parus ater</i>
Long-tailed Tit, <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Eurasian Nuthatch, <i>Sitta europaea</i>

Short-toed Treecreeper, *Certhia brachydactyla*  
 Red-backed Shrike, *Lanius collurio*  
 Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius*  
 Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica*  
 Carrion Crow, *Corvus corone*  
 Common Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs*  
 Eurasian Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*  
 European Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis*  
 Yellowhammer, *Emberiza citrinella*  
 Corn Bunting, *Emberiza calandra*

Golden Oriole, *Oriolus oriolus*  
 Common Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*  
 Spotted Nutcracker, *Nucifraga caryocatactes*  
 Western Jackdaw, *Coloeus monedula*  
 House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*  
 Hawfinch, *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*  
 European Greenfinch, *Chloris chloris*  
 Common Linnet, *Linaria cannabina*  
 Common Reed Bunting, *Emberiza schoeniclus*

## Mammals

European Rabbit	European Hare	Roe Deer
Red Deer	Red Fox	Beaver
Muskrat	Wood Mouse	Bank Vole

## Butterflies

Large White, <i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Small White, <i>Pieris rapae</i>
Green-veined White, <i>Pieris napi</i>	Clouded Yellow, <i>Colias crocea</i>
Brimstone, <i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	Wood White, <i>Leptidea sinapis</i>
Brown Hairstreak, <i>Thecla betulae</i>	Purple Hairstreak, <i>Quercusia quercus</i>
Illex Hairstreak, <i>Nordmannia ilicis</i>	Small Copper, <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
Sooty Copper, <i>Lycaena tityrus</i>	Violet Copper, <i>Lycaena hell</i>
Brown Argus, <i>Aricia agestis</i>	Chalk-hill Blue, <i>Lysandra coridon</i>
Common Blue, <i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	Purple Emperor, <i>Apatura iris</i>
Lesser Purple Emperor, <i>Apatura ilia</i>	White Admiral, <i>Limenitis camilla</i>
Peacock Butterfly, <i>Inachis io</i>	Red Admiral, <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Painted Lady, <i>Vanessa cardui</i>	Small Tortoiseshell, <i>Aglais urticae</i>
Comma butterfly, <i>Polygonia c-album</i>	Map butterfly, <i>Araschnia levana</i>
Silver-washed Fritillary, <i>Argynnis paphia</i>	Lesser Marbled Fritillary, <i>Brenthis ino</i>
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, <i>Clossiana selene</i>	Marbled White, <i>Melanargia galathea</i>
Meadow Brown, <i>Maniola jurtina</i>	Ringlet, <i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>
Gatekeeper, <i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	Large Heath, <i>Coenonympha tullia</i>
Small Heath, <i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	Pearly Heath, <i>Coenonympha arcania</i>
Speckled Wood, <i>Pararge aegeria</i>	Essex Skipper, <i>Thymelicus lineola</i>
Small Skipper, <i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	Large Skipper, <i>Ochlodes venatus</i>
Lulworth Skipper, <i>Thymelicus acteon</i>	Adonis Blue, <i>Polyommatus bellargus</i>
Mazarine blue, <i>Polyommatus semiargus</i>	Purple-edged Copper, <i>Lycaena hippothoe</i>

## Dragonflies & Damselflies

Small Emerald	Ruddy Darter	Scarlet Darter
Common Blue Damsel	Dainty Damsel	Blue-tailed Damsel
Red-eyed Damsel	Norfolk Hawker	Common Darter
Variable Damsel	Black-tailed Skimmer	Common Emerald Damselfly
Scarce Chaser	Banded Demoiselle	Beautiful Demoiselle
Large-red Damselfly	White-legged Damsel	Brown Hawker
Southern Hawker	Small Pincertail	