

Belgium in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

29 February – 3 March 2016



Hotel les Tilleuls



Barnacle Goose



Short-eared Owl



Winter landscape

Report & images compiled 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

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Participants: Gerald Broddelez (leader) with three Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 29th February

St Pancras - Lille - Bruges

The tour started at St Pancras International Station where group members caught a morning Eurostar service to Lille. We met Gerald at Lille and then drove to Koksijde for lunch. A short stroll through the dunes produced our first target for the day - a nice male Crested Lark, showing off its crest and singing loudly. On the beach we found several groups of Sanderling, Common and Great Black-backed Gulls and Oystercatcher, and offshore Common Scoter.

A short drive took us to Oostend were, on the Zwaaiikom, we found a Red-necked Grebe among the many Great Crested and Little Grebes, as well as Goldeneye, Turnstone and Redshank.

Late afternoon was spent in the Uitkerkse Polders. Here we quickly found several groups of Barnacle Geese, and by scanning through them picked out smaller numbers of Greylag, White-fronted, Canada and Brent Geese, and a single Bean Goose. Not bad! A nearby lake held a good selection of waterbirds and among the highlights here were several Pintail and larger numbers of Wigeon, Gadwall and Teal. Golden Plover, some in summer dress, and Lapwing were common in the meadows until disturbed by two Short-eared Owls which put on a great show for us. They flew by and sat on the ground in full telescope view for long periods - just beautiful!

Day 2

Tuesday 1st March

Bruges – Ghent - Ardennes

After breakfast we had an appointment with our local guide. In two hours she gave us a brief but very interesting look into the history of the city.

It was midday when we arrived at Wondelgem, on the outskirts of Ghent. Here we visited a lake bordered by reed beds. The lake itself held several Gadwall that allowed close views, but it was a group of smart Penduline Tits (of the Caspian race) that kept us entertained for the next hour. They came to within a few metres of us and we had the chance to study them closely and compare the differences between the males and females.

After our picnic lunch we drove south towards to the Ardennes, stopping en route by the River Ourthe where we added a nice Dipper to the list. We scanned the nearby quarry for the resident Eagle Owl and, to our surprise, the first bird we saw was a Black Woodpecker flying overhead! It was almost dark before the mighty hunter decided to start to call and finally show itself. We had fantastic views in the telescope as the bird perched on a high ridge and continued calling.

We arrived at our charming and warm hotel (log fire going strong) just in time to freshen up before a wonderful dinner.

Day 3

Wednesday 2nd March

Hautes Fagnes

Before breakfast some of us had already seen Nuthatch and Red Squirrel at the feeders, and breakfast was interrupted first by a flyby Great Egret and then a Red Kite!

Unfortunately the weather had changed a little overnight, so we walked the trails in the nearby forests in liquid sunshine. Woodpeckers were keeping a low profile, but from a viewpoint we saw several Buzzards, Yellowhammer, Nuthatch, Goldcrest, and finally several Hawfinches both perched and in flight.

On our way to Belgium's highest point a Raven flew by. Once on the higher parts, the snow made the whole area look very picturesque. We stopped at the information centre for lunch and were duly rewarded with excellent sightings of Willow and Crested Tits out in the open and giving great views.

After a scan from the highest point of Belgium, we drove to the Wanne area. Once at the site we quickly found several Great Grey Shrikes perching on the top of dead trees, allowing great telescope views. A short walk then took us to a few tiny patches of Beech forest but the wet and cold conditions did not inspire a lot of birds or mammals to show themselves. On the way back to the hotel we passed through a real snow blizzard!

Day 4

Thursday 4th March

Ardennes – Lille – London

We spend the morning in the forests in the Famenne area. The overnight snow had changed the whole scenery into a real wintery landscape. Very scenic but hard work! Walking the extensive Beech and Oak forests, we finally had brief views of a Middle Spotted Woodpecker, and more Hawfinches were found which perched for us all to see well.

A short ride took us westwards. After checking quite a few Common Buzzards we found our quest; a Rough-legged Buzzard that had been resident here for a while. We had good telescope views of this rare bird in flight, hovering and perched. In the fields Skylarks were common, and we saw Great Egrets and more Hawfinches.

After our last picnic it was time to drive back to Lille where we said goodbye to Gerald. We then boarded our train back to London where another great trip ended.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps griseygena</i>	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabilis</i>	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>
White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	Eurasian Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus medius</i>
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	Common Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>
Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>
Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Rough-legged Hawk	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haemantopus ostralegus</i>	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Common Raven	<i>Corvix corax</i>
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montefrigilla</i>
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Common Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.