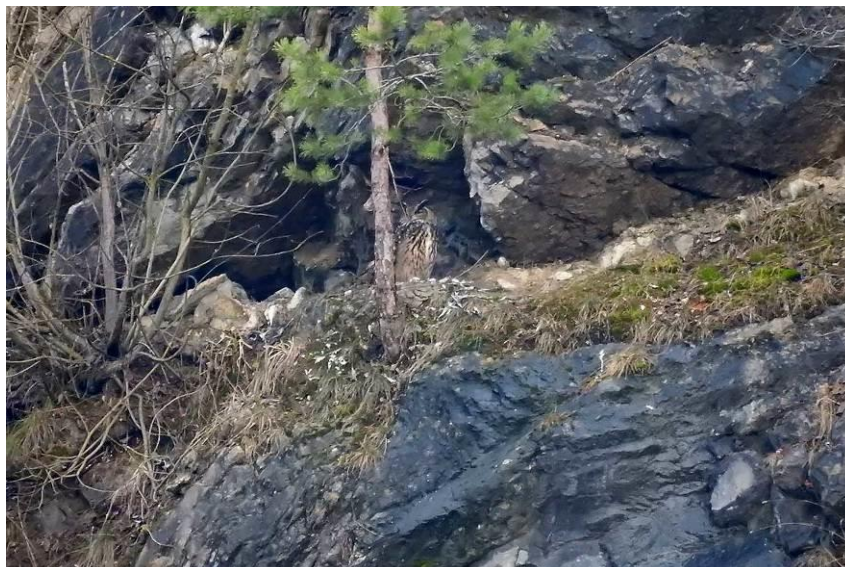


# Belgium in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

23 - 26 February 2017

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Eagle Owl in quarry



River Ourthe in the morning

Report and images compiled by Gerald Broddez



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

## Day 1

Thursday 23rd February

### UK – Lille – Brugge

After travelling by Eurostar from the UK, the group was met by Gerald on arrival at Lille. We drove to Oostende for lunch, stopping en route at Westouter. It was very windy when we arrived and we only found several Yellowhammers and a Skylark seeking shelter on the ground.

A short drive took us to Oostend on the Zwaaiikom. Here, in stormy conditions, we found a large group of Little Grebes, as well as some Pintail, Avocet, 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 up smaller numbers of Greylag, White-fronted and Canada Geese.

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 Plovers, some in summer dress, Curlew and Lapwing were common in the meadows. A Kingfisher flew by, followed by Peregrine and Stock Dove, and Hares were plentiful.

We had a typical Belgium diner in a local restaurant to finish our first day.

## Day 2

Friday 24th February

### Brugge – Gent - 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. A pair of Peregrine was seen flying around the Onze-lieve vrouw church on which they breed.

It was midday when we arrived at Blokkersdijk. It was still windy, but the sun came out so we had lunch by the lake. A bit of scanning produced three Greater Scaup, many Gadwalls, Goosander, a male Reed Bunting and several Buzzards.

After our picnic lunch we drove south towards the Ardennes, stopping en route by the river Ourthe which added Great Egret and Muskrat to the list. We scanned the nearby quarry for the resident Eagle Owl and found the bird sitting in the open, giving excellent telescope views. When it was almost dark, the mighty hunter decided to start to call and fly around, putting on a real show!

We arrived at our charming and warm hotel (log fire going strong) with just enough time for a quick freshen up before a wonderful dinner.

## Day 3

## Saturday 25th February

### Hautes Fagnes

Before breakfast we had a short walk to the river below the hotel. A couple of Beaver and Muskrats decided to show themselves really well, at one point swimming below the bridge on which we were standing. Several Siskin, a Nuthatch, Green Woodpecker, Fieldfare and Redwing were additions to the list.

After a great and varied breakfast, we made our way to Belgium's highest point, stopping en route for a Dipper perched on a rock before a great waterfall. Once on the higher parts, we had a short walk in the Fens with snow making the whole area very picturesque!

We stopped at the information centre for another walk, followed by lunch. We had several groups of Crossbills flying overhead and excellent sightings of several Tit species, including Willow and Coal Tits.

We then drove to the Wanne area. En route we stopped for our first Great Grey Shrike and close up views of Crested Tit and Firecrest. Once at the site, we quickly found more Great Grey Shrikes perching on the top of dead trees, allowing great telescope views as we were watched by Roe Deer. A short walk then took us to a few tiny patches of beech forest. Here a couple of Black Woodpeckers put on a great show for us. Large groups of Brambling and Chaffinch allowed great views.

We waited until dark hoping for owls to call before retreating to our charming hotel and another great dinner.

## Day 4

## Sunday 26th February

### Ardennes – Lille – UK

We spent the morning in the forests in the Famenne area. Walking in the extensive beech and oak forests, we found Hawfinches to be common, a pair of Bullfinch gave good looks, a pair of Raven was seen and heard calling overhead, and several Great Spotted Woodpeckers were found perched for all to see well.

After our last picnic in the field it was time to drive back to Lille, where we said thanks and goodbye to Gerald before returning to the UK, and another great trip ended.

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## Naturetrek Facebook

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## Species Lists

### Birds

Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*  
 Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*  
 Little Egret, *Egretta Garzetta*  
 Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*  
 Greater White-fronted Goose, *Anser albifrons*  
 Barnacle Goose, *Branta leacopsis*  
 Eurasian Wigeon, *Anas penelope*  
 Gadwall, *Anas strepera*  
 Eurasian Teal, *Anas crecca*  
 Common Pochard, *Aythya ferina*  
 Greater Scaup, *Aythya marilla*  
 Egyptian Goose, *Alopochen aegyptiacus*  
 Common Buzzard, *Buteo buteo*  
 Common Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*  
 Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*  
 Eurasian Oystercatcher, *Haemantopus ostralegus*  
 European Golden Plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*  
 Eurasian Curlew, *Numenius arquata*  
 Common Redshank, *Tringa totanus*  
 Common Gull, *Larus canus*  
 Great Black-backed Gull, *Larus marinus*  
 Common Wood Pigeon, *Columba palumbus*  
 Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon, *Columba livia*  
 Eurasian Eagle-Owl, *Bubo bubo*  
 Black Woodpecker, *Dryocopus martius*  
 Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos major*  
 Meadow Pipit, *Anthus pratensis*  
 Grey Wagtail, *Montacilla cinerea*  
 Eurasian Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes*  
 European Robin, *Erithacus rubecula*  
 Fieldfare, *Turdus pilaris*  
 Song Thrush, *Turdus philomelos*  
 Common Firecrest, *Regulus inoratus*  
 Marsh Tit, *Parus palustris*  
 Eurasian Blue Tit, *Parus caeruleus*  
 Coal Tit, *Parus ater*  
 Eurasian Nuthatch, *Sitta europaea*  
 Great Grey Shrike, *Lanius excubitor*  
 Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius*  
 Western Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula*  
 Rook, *Corvus frugilegus*  
 House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*  
 Brambling, *Fringilla montefrigilla*  
 Eurasian Siskin, *Carduelis spinus*  
 Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*  
 Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*  
 Great Egret, *Egretta alba*  
 Greylag Goose, *Anser anser*  
 Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis*  
 Common Shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*  
 Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*  
 Northern Shoveler, *Anas clypeata*  
 Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta*  
 Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula*  
 Goosander, *Mergus merganser*  
 Eurasian Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter nisus*  
 Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*  
 Common Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*  
 Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra*  
 Pied Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta*  
 Northern Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*  
 Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenia interpres*  
 Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*  
 European Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*  
 Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*  
 Stock Dove, *Columba oenas*  
 Eurasian Collared Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto*  
 Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*  
 European Green Woodpecker, *Picus viridis*  
 Eurasian Skylark, *Alauda arvensis*  
 White Wagtail, *Montacilla alba*  
 Dipper, *Cinclus cinclus*  
 Dunnock, *Prunella modularis*  
 Common Blackbird, *Turdus merula*  
 Redwing, *Turdus iliacus*  
 Mistle Thrush, *Turdus viscivorus*  
 Goldcrest, *Regulus regulus*  
 European Crested Tit, *Parus cristatus*  
 Great Tit, *Parus major*  
 Long-tailed Tit, *Aegithalos caudatus*  
 Short-toed Treecreeper, *Certhia brachydactyla*  
 Common Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*  
 Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica*  
 Carrion Crow, *Corvus corone*  
 Common Raven, *Corvus corax*  
 Common Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs*  
 Hawfinch, *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*  
 Eurasian Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

European Greenfinch, *Carduelis chloris*

Red Crossbill, *Loxia curvirostra*

Common Reed Bunting, *Emberiza schoeniclus*

European Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis*

Yellowhammer, *Emberiza citrinella*

## Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name	February			
			23	24	25	26
1	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	10			
2	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		2		
3	Muskrat	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>		2	2	
4	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	4		1	
5	Eurasian Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>			2	