

# Poland in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

27 January - 4 February 2007

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Report compiled by Sinclair Dunnett  
Images by Elizabeth Seakins (tour participant)



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## Overview

In mid-January the UK media were busy with reports of the unseasonably mild weather in Moscow; a friend in eastern Czech Republic had also been telling me how the fields were brown and the skies grey.

The situation was much the same in Poland until the third week of January when, happily, snow at last fell, a foot of the white stuff in the east of the country. Bison which had been widely dispersed and difficult to locate returned to their hefted areas in the forest. Frustratingly, a few days later another 8" fell, covering all existing tracks. The temperature rose in the latter part of the trip, with a partial thaw. With 2' of snow in places there was no danger of all the snow going, but it did make driving on the forest roads extremely difficult. My thanks to those who gave me shoves a few times!

Mammals: The itinerary re-designs of 2006 worked well again, with good views of two score of Bison in the western part of the Borecka forest. Other mammals seen by the entire group included Elk; Red & Roe Deer; Wild Boar. Red Fox, Brown Hare and Red Squirrel were other mammals observed by at least some of the group.

## Day 1

**Saturday 27 January 2007**

14-22°F. 6" & more of lying snow; some heavy snow showers en route.

Clients for this trip came by train (four) and flights from Manchester (one, LOT) and London, Heathrow (seven, BA). We were all assembled by 1230 and left Okecie soon after. The first hours of the drive were in daylight and we reached the lodge of Żabie Oko near Jesiorowski at 1930 hrs, having stopped for victuals and a coffee break en route

## Day 2

Sunday 28 January 2007

19-24°F Sunny periods, snow showers. Usable light by 0700, dark about 1700hrs.

We left the lodge at 0850 and arrived at our rendezvous in the western part of Puszcza Borecka at 0925. 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. Good views were obtained of >40 Bison.

We returned to the lodge for lunch at Noon. After lunch we 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. The area was extremely quiet in regard to wildlife, tracks of Brown Hare being the main feature.

After the tour we stopped for hot drinks at "Hotel Eva Braun" and then returned to Żabie Oko for a pork & pike dinner. Birdlife was not a prominent feature of today's outings, Yellowhammer and Buzzard being the most notable species

## Day 3

Monday 29 January 2007

Brilliant sunshine, clear. Some snow had fallen overnight. Temperatures ranged from 11 °F (Żabie Oko, morning) down to 5°F (deep in Puszcza Romincka, afternoon).

We left Żabie Oko about 1000hrs and headed east for Goldap where three clients rented cross-country ski equipment. Some shopping in the town, then we had our lunch at the ski-centre restaurant.

The race of Jackdaw in Poland (*Corvus monedula monedula*) has more grey than the ones we normally see in the British Isles (*C. m. spermologus*). Numerous Jackdaw in the town square were a pleasant feature; this lively bird, with its bright, pale eye is often taken for granted.

Our 20-mile drive to Żytkiejmy - our base for the next four nights – was enlivened by five Roe Deer near a farm, beautiful against the snow in brilliant sunshine. We arrived about 1500 hours and after getting installed in our rooms made a quick excursion to the "Wolf Meadow" in the north of the forest so clients could assess the high seat there and decide if they wished to do an all-night vigil. On our way through the forest three fine Red Deer ran across one of the trails.

## Day 4

Tuesday 30 January 2007

Brilliant sunshine, clear. More snow had fallen overnight. Temperatures at lodge ranged from 24°F (morning) to 13°F (2200hrs). Clear night, with brilliant gibbous moon. Last night's snowfall was 6"-8", on top of what was already lying there was up to 2' of snow in places.

I left the lodge at Żytkiejmy about 0740 to tension the tyre chains but found that in this deep snow I was working at the limit of the vehicle's capabilities, especially with no load. Having extricated myself from one

difficult situation I then slid off the (forest) road at a bend in my haste not to be late back at the lodge. . . . The clients set off on foot about 0930 and I joined them about 1000hrs with Romek, our friend and guide for many years in Puszcza Romincka. After the introductions we headed north towards the Russian border.

The forest was stunningly beautiful in the snow; it was just unfortunate that the second big dump of snow had covered all existing spoor of wild animals. On our way back nine clients had a walk towards a Beaver area and the three skiers set off towards the lodge, where we all arrived about 1230. Birds here included Great-spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, and a variety of tits.

At 1500hrs we left for the forest again and high seats. Elizabeth, Emma-Anne and Neil 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. The other nine clients were distributed over four high seats and we collected them after dark. One seat had seen several Roe Deer; another, a solitary hind; and a third, nine Wild Boar. The last *ambona* had been the most successful, with a party of five Boar (two adults and three young) and both Red and Roe Deer.

## Day 5

Wednesday 31 January 2007

Wed 23 °F at 0730, rising to near freezing later in the morning and thawing as darkness fell. Snow had started falling again about 0530. Overcast most of day. 2200hrs, fresh snow falling from south.

The overnighters returned with Romek about 0745 having seen a Red Fox about dawn. Clear talon marks of Erne were visible in the snow, as were wing indentations while the great birds were flapping to take off.

At 0900 nine clients and Piotr left on horse-drawn sledges for the bridges at Stańczyki. Emma-Anne and I drove the public road to Stańczyki and Emma-Anne joined the sleighs for the return journey; Barbara, Emlyn and Fiona skied back to the lodge.

At 1500hrs we left the lodge for high-seating. Barbara & Robert went for an all-night at the wolf meadow, entering the large hide about 1530hrs with blankets, food, hot drinks and night-glasses.

## Day 6

Thursday 1 February 2007

Freezing to 23 °F. Clear later for forest feast..

Today we made our usual dawn outing through the forest, departing at 0700 and driving to pick up Barbara & Robert. With the temperature on the edge of a thaw, driving was extremely difficult. I saw a Blackcock perched in a birch by the side of the road, not observed by any clients; but I was glad to see this, my first Black Grouse in Poland in at least ten years. We also had some Wolf tracks and droppings.

After breakfast we visited Beaver lodges near the road to Wizajny.

After lunch two clients went high-seating and were rewarded with seven Boar. At the Wolf meadow high seat three clients saw a stag and Buzzard.

Roger went for a long walk towards Bludzie, returning directly to the forest feast site; Ernlyn and Fiona went skiing; and four rested.

About 1800hrs we assembled for the "forest feast" by the bonfire by the frozen lake. This started off partially overcast but the cloud soon dispersed, giving us a stunningly beautiful snow-covered lake and forest lit by the near-full moon.

## Day 7

**Friday 2 February 2007**

Overcast most of day. 24°F in morning rising to about freezing during day, a degree or two below freezing in evening. Full moon rising at Kuwasy Lodge.

We loaded up the luggage and left the lodge at 1030, driving east and then south. After forty minutes in Suwaiki we continued south, stopping for lunch by the road, and arrived at Kuwasy -on the edge of the Red Marsh - as darkness fell

## Day 8

**Saturday 3 February 2007**

Steady thaw with temperature a degree or two above freezing most of day, overcast with some sunny periods, clear at night with fine moon.

We left with our local guide, Artur Wiatr, at 0900, and drove to the entrance to Czerwone Bagno. As Artur had warned us, the conditions - with deep snow still at the sides of the road and slush on the actual tracks made driving extremely difficult and we decided not to try to reach the sand ridge by vehicle.

The group then continued on foot and were rewarded with the best spoor of the trip, including good tracks of Wolf; Elk, Red & Roe Deer; and Lynx. Two Elk were seen by some of the party. Waxwing flew off but did not give a good view.

We arrived at the lunch bonfire spot where a cook was waiting us with hunters' stew, 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 good views of Elk, on both the outward and return journeys; twelve in total, including an excellent view of a mother and calf. Here too we had good views of a flock of Waxwing, and at least four Roe Deer

## Day 9

**Sunday 4 February 2007**

Clients out before breakfast had views of Red Fox and Eagle. We loaded up the luggage about 0900 and started our drive to Warsaw. Coffee break in Lomza about 1100hrs and an hour's stop for lunch at 1230. We reached Warsaw in good time, took the four clients catching the train to their hotel in central Warsaw, and all others to Okecie Airport by 1500hrs in good time for the flights to London and Manchester

## Species lists

### Birds

|    | Common name              | Scientific name             | January 2007 |    |    |    |    | February 2007 |   |      |   |
|----|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|----|----|----|----|---------------|---|------|---|
|    |                          |                             | 27           | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 1             | 2 | 3    | 4 |
| 1  | Mute Swan                | <i>Cygnus olor</i>          |              |    |    | √  |    |               | √ | √    | 2 |
| 2  | Mallard                  | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>   |              |    |    |    |    |               | √ |      | √ |
| 3  | Eurasian Sparrowhawk     | <i>Accipiter nisus</i>      |              |    |    |    | √  |               |   |      |   |
| 4  | Common Buzzard           | <i>Buteo buteo</i>          | √            | √  | √  |    |    |               | √ | √    | √ |
| 5  | White-tailed Eagle       | <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i> |              |    | √  | √  |    | √             |   | √    | √ |
| 6  | Black Grouse             | <i>Tetrao tetrix</i>        |              |    |    |    |    | √             |   |      |   |
| 7  | Common Pheasant          | <i>Phasianus colchicus</i>  |              |    |    |    |    |               |   |      | √ |
| 8  | Feral Pigeon             | <i>Columba livia</i>        | √            | √  | √  |    |    |               | √ | √    | √ |
| 9  | Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i>    |              |    | √  | 3  |    |               |   | √    |   |
| 10 | Waxwing                  | <i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>  |              |    |    |    |    |               |   | 20+  |   |
| 11 | Redwing                  | <i>Turdus iliacus</i>       |              |    |    |    |    |               | √ |      |   |
| 12 | Fieldfare                | <i>Turdus pilaris</i>       |              | √  |    |    |    |               |   | 20+  |   |
| 13 | Willow Tit               | <i>Poecile montana</i>      |              |    |    |    | √  | √             | √ |      |   |
| 14 | Coal Tit                 | <i>Periparus ater</i>       |              |    |    | √  | √  |               |   |      |   |
| 15 | Great Tit                | <i>Parus major</i>          |              |    |    | √  | √  | √             | √ |      |   |
| 16 | Blue Tit                 | <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>  |              |    |    | √  |    |               | √ |      |   |
| 17 | Eurasian Nuthatch        | <i>Sitta europaea</i>       |              |    |    | √  | √  | √             |   | √    |   |
| 18 | Eurasian Treecreeper     | <i>Certhia familiaris</i>   |              |    |    |    |    |               |   | √    |   |
| 19 | Eurasian Jay             | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>  | √            |    | √  |    |    |               | √ | √    | √ |
| 20 | Eurasian Magpie          | <i>Pica pica</i>            | √            | √  | √  |    |    | √             | √ | √    | √ |
| 21 | Eurasian Jackdaw         | <i>Corvus monedula</i>      | √            | √  | √  |    |    |               | √ | √    | √ |
| 22 | Rook                     | <i>Corvus frugilegus</i>    | √            |    | √  |    |    |               | √ |      | √ |
| 23 | Hooded Crow              | <i>Corvus cornix</i>        | √            |    | √  |    | √  |               | √ |      |   |
| 24 | Common Raven             | <i>Corvus corax</i>         |              |    | √  | √  |    | √             | √ | √    |   |
| 25 | Common Starling          | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>     |              |    |    |    |    |               |   | 4    |   |
| 26 | House Sparrow            | <i>Passer domesticus</i>    |              |    | √  |    |    |               |   |      |   |
| 27 | Eurasian Tree Sparrow    | <i>Passer montanus</i>      |              |    |    | √  |    |               |   |      |   |
| 28 | Chaffinch                | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>    | √            |    |    |    |    |               |   |      |   |
| 29 | Common Crossbill         | <i>Loxia curvirostra</i>    |              |    |    |    | √  | √             | √ |      |   |
| 30 | European Greenfinch      | <i>Carduelis chloris</i>    |              |    |    | √  | √  |               | √ |      |   |
| 31 | Eurasian Siskin          | <i>Carduelis spinus</i>     |              |    |    |    |    |               |   | 100+ |   |
| 32 | European Goldfinch       | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>  |              |    | √  |    |    |               |   |      |   |
| 33 | Common Bullfinch         | <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>    | √            |    |    | √  | √  |               | √ |      |   |
| 34 | Yellowhammer             | <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>  |              | √  |    | √  | √  | √             | √ | √    | √ |

## Mammals

|    | Common name            | Scientific name            | January 2007 |     |    |    |    | February 2007 |   |    |   |
|----|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|-----|----|----|----|---------------|---|----|---|
|    |                        |                            | 27           | 28  | 29 | 30 | 31 | 1             | 2 | 3  | 4 |
| 1  | Brown Hare             | <i>Lepus europaeus</i>     |              | S   |    |    |    | S             |   |    |   |
| 2  | Red Squirrel           | <i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>    | W            |     |    |    |    | S             |   |    |   |
| 3  | European Beaver        | <i>Castor fiber</i>        |              | S   |    | S  | S  | S             |   |    |   |
| 4  | Gray Wolf              | <i>Canis lupus</i>         |              | S   |    |    |    | D             |   | S  |   |
| 5  | Red Fox                | <i>Vulpes vulpes</i>       |              |     |    | 1  | 1  |               |   | 1  | 1 |
| 6  | European Common Weasel | <i>Mustela nivalis</i>     |              |     |    |    |    |               |   | S  |   |
| 7  | Lynx                   | <i>Lynx lynx</i>           |              |     |    |    |    |               |   | S  |   |
| 8  | Wild Boar              | <i>Sus scrofa</i>          |              |     | 4  | 14 | √  | 7             |   | S  |   |
| 9  | Red Deer               | <i>Cervis elaphus</i>      |              |     | 3  | √  | √  | √             |   |    |   |
| 10 | Roe Deer               | <i>Capreolus capreolus</i> |              |     | 5  | 3  |    | √             |   | 4  |   |
| 11 | Elk [Moose]            | <i>Alces alces</i>         |              |     |    |    |    |               |   | 14 |   |
| 12 | European Bison         | <i>Bison bosasus</i>       |              | >40 |    |    |    |               |   |    |   |
| 13 | Striped Field Mouse    | <i>Apodemus agrarius</i>   |              |     |    |    | 1  |               |   |    |   |
| 14 | Pine Marten            | <i>Martes martes</i>       |              |     |    |    |    | S             |   | S  |   |