

# Poland in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

19 - 26 January 2013

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Report compiled by Sinclair C Dunnett

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Tour Leader:	Sinclair C Dunnett	Naturetrek Leader
	Piotr Moszkowski	Local Guide
Participants	Mary Eagleson	
	Karin Meier	
	Tony Norris	
	Steve Perrins	
	Estelle Standing	

## Weather

This trip had the sharp, frosty weather we wanted, and also some of the most beautiful snowscapes I've seen in almost thirty years of visits to Poland. The last 5-6 inches of snow must have fallen in conditions of almost total stillness - no wind at all - and had formed curious shapes such as dunces' caps on the top of fence posts.

## Wildlife

The whole group saw > 60 Wisent [European Bison] plus > 20 Red Deer at Puszcza Borecka and had excellent views of Elk on from the Czar's Road. Puszcza Romincka gave us all excellent views of Wild Boar, a dozen or more at least once, and as usual, Roe Deer. We saw Red Fox most days. Wolves were heard howling across the border in Russia, though sadly not eyeballed by us - see below!

## Day 1

**Saturday 19th January**

As forecast, 4" or more of snow fell over much of the south of England, leading to the cancellation of our flight out of Heathrow at 08.20am. Instead we left by a flight at 1520 hrs. We were met at Warsaw by our local guide, Piotr Moszkowski, and driver, Andrej Dudi. We drove north-east, stopping for a meal after about one-and-a-half hours driving, finally reaching the lodge near Jesiorowsk in the early hours where we went to bed immediately...

## Day 2

**Sunday 20th January**

Snow had fallen overnight; sharp frost most of day

We breakfasted 0830 and left the lodge at 1000, arriving at our rendezvous in the western part of Puszcza Borecka before 1045. Our forest guide was waiting for us with his 4x4 and a tractor/trailer, kitted out with basic seats. We drove a few kilometres and all saw > 60 Wisent, both sexes and a wide variety of ages. More than 20 Red Deer were also observed, all hinds and followers.

We 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 eccentric) bunker guide Chester was there to conduct us round the site; this was also our lunch stop.

## Day 3

Monday 21st January

### Frost

A bird walk before breakfast yielded Hooded Crow, Jay, tits, and many Goldcrest. We left Zabie Oko at 1000 and travelled east through the large forest of Puszcza Borecka, then stopping en route for shopping. The central square here gave its usual good views of the northern race of Jackdaw. We continued east to Zytkiejmy and lunched at the home of Romek, our friend and guide for many years in Puszcza Romincka. We made the short drive beyond the village to Zytkiejmy Lodge, our base for the next four nights, and got installed in our rooms. We left the lodge to be installed in various high seats, and were extracted 1730-1800 hrs. Tony and Steve had had prolonged views of Wild Boar and Roe Deer, the rest of us had not fared so well.

## Day 4

Tuesday 22nd January

### Hard frost, brilliant sunshine

We set off at 0900 with Romek for the "Wolf Meadow", an area near the Russian border where historically, we have had success with Wolf. A young White-tailed Eagle flew along the forest at the western margin of meadow, not far from the avenue of Red Oaks leading to the Russian border. We visited one of the Kaiser Wilhelm II memorial stones and a number of Beaver areas. At 1515hrs we entered the forest again. Estelle went to the ambona [high seat] where Tony and Steve had done well the day before, the other four clients elected for the large ambona at the Wolf Meadow. All clients were extracted 1730-1800 hrs, having seen little, but heard a little more.

## Day 5

Wednesday 23rd January

### Sharp frost

At 0930 we left by two horse-drawn sledges, making our way along the moraine ridge marking the south edge of the last glacial advance. We turned back towards the Bludzie road and a welcome bonfire where a bottle of Zubrow Wodka appeared. We spent some considerable time here before remounting the sleighs and continuing through the forest. After lunch Steve elected to do an all-nighter at the Wolf Meadow. Before darkness fell he had prolonged views of Red Fox, after darkness he heard crunching from the stream which he took to be Otter. Other clients went to "conventional" high seats and were rewarded with considerable boar activity.

## Day 6

Thursday 24th January

### Sharp frost

Romek extracted Steve from the Wolf Meadow at 0730. Over breakfast at the lodge he told us that shortly after the moon set (c.0530) some Wolves started howling to the north, over the border in Russia. Ironically, two other guests at Zytkiejmy Lodge saw Wolf this morning from their car, not far from the Wolf Meadow!

Others (and myself) did a circular walk west of the lodge, past the trees which used to be tapped for turpentine. We continued west on foot to a large beaver-dammed lake.

In the afternoon Mary went for a walk in the village and its environs, the other four clients were distributed over three ambony, two yielding good results. We all assembled shortly after 1800 hrs for the “forest feast” by the bonfire by the frozen lake. This alfresco meal is much appreciated, and later two clients elected to walk back to the lodge in the moonlight.

## Day 7

Friday 25th January

### Frosty

We loaded up the luggage and left Zytckiejmy at 0845, driving east and then south with stops at the “tri-point” where Poland, Lithuania and Russia come together, and Suwalki, the main centre for the far north-east of Poland. We continued south to Grajewo and then east before turning south again on the Czar’s Road. Karin spotted a single Elk in the Pine-Juniper woods shortly before we arrived at Dobarz.

We got ourselves installed at Dwór Dobarz, one of many fine new accommodations which have sprung up in Poland since the collapse of communism. After lunch we returned to the mini-coach and slowly cruised the Czar’s Road, but with no further view of Elk. We did however have prolonged, close views of a Red Fox close to the road as he worked with his lunch. We were initially unsure what his meal was, after he obligingly turned it over a few times and dragged it we realized it was the head and one foreleg of Roe Deer, plus of course the bits in between. Was the Fox scavenging the remains of a kill made by Wolf . . . or even a Lynx?

## Day 8

Saturday 26th January

### Hard frost

Our 0700 pre-breakfast outing was delayed by some 35 minutes; the hard overnight frost had waxed the diesel in the fuel filter. The lodge obligingly provided us with tea and coffee while we waited for Dudi to sort the problem, one of a number of hospitable gestures during our short stay. Once on the road we were rewarded with a close view of a cow Elk and her last year’s calf. We loaded the luggage after breakfast and started our drive to Warsaw. A half-hour into the drive Steve spotted a “. . .large animal . . .” which turned out to be a bull Elk only yards from the road, amongst lots of small trees. He was with a second Elk which was more difficult to see in the swamp trees. We reached Warsaw in good time, so as a bonus Piotr took the clients on a short driven tour of Warsaw followed by almost two hours on foot in the Old Town before we headed to the airport and our several destinations of Bern, Gdansk, and London.

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## Species Lists

### Mammals (H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	January								
			19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>				R					
2	European Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>				S					
3	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>				S		H			
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			✓	✓	2	4	4		
5	European Polecat	<i>Mustela putorius</i>				S					
6	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>						H			
7	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>			5	H	11+	19			
8	Red Deer	<i>Cervis elaphus</i>		20+							
9	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓	2	4+	9	✓	7	8	
10	Elk (Moose)	<i>Alces alces</i>							2	4	
11	European Bison (Wisent)	<i>Bison bosasus</i>		60+							

### Birds

1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓				50+		
27	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>									✓
2	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>									✓
3	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>			✓	✓					
28	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>									✓
4	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓						✓
5	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		✓		✓					
6	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>					✓				
7	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓		✓			
8	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			12+						
9	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			
10	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montana</i>			✓						
11	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>				✓	✓				✓
12	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
13	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			
14	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓					
15	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
16	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>			✓						
17	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			✓						✓
18	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>									✓
19	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>		✓	✓						✓
20	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓						✓
21	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>									15
22	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓								✓

	Common name	Scientific name	January								
			19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
23	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	✓		3						
24	Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>	✓					60			
25	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	✓		✓					30	
26	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓						