

ORNITHOLIDAY'S TOUR TO BELARUS
Europe's Last Great Wilderness

26 April – 04 May 2014



Leaders: Gabor Orban and Richard Coomber

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A Personal Diary

I've just returned from co-leading a thoroughly enjoyable Ornitholidays' tour to Belarus with Gabor Orban, and although one wouldn't go there for a gastronomic experience, birdwise it was great! We began at Belovezhskaya Pushcha, whose ancient forests are one of the great places in Europe for woodpeckers. The forests were full of singing Wood Warblers and we found Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagles and Collared Flycatcher. Signs of Wild Boar were everywhere and we watched a small herd of European Bison. After two days exploring we moved east to visit fishponds, where migrants included over 50 Bewick's Swans, several Whooper Swans, White-winged Terns, and a party of 20 Common Cranes that passed over as we watched wildfowl and shorebirds. The next morning found us drooling over a Great Grey Owl on its nest with the off-duty bird perched nearby. The final base of the tour was Turov, where hundreds of Ruff were passing through on migration. One evening we kept a respectful distance at a Great Snipe lek sufficiently early to see the birds well through the scopes in good light. The Beloe fish ponds were great for White-tailed Eagles and we saw Smew there too. Azure Tits were a sought-after delight, described in one field guide as looking fluffy, they were more than just a Blue Tit without the yellow, for they were larger, and they did look fluffy! Add to this the other wildlife, which included 20 species of butterfly and you'll see why Belarus was so good and why it is a popular Ornitholidays' destination. I'd love to lead another tour there. *Dear Nigel.....*

Saturday, 26 April

Most of the 2014 Ornitholidays party to Belarus met up at Heathrow's Terminal 1 on a damp morning for the first leg of our journey to Minsk; a mixture of old friends and new faces. Our Austrian Airlines flight to Vienna was 35 minutes late leaving and although some of that loss was recovered en route we were still left with a rush through the sprawling maze of Vienna Airport to reach our connection gate in time. Outside the weather was even more abysmal than it had been in London, so there was no chance of seeing any birds even if we'd had the time.

The onward flight left just after 10 am, just a few minutes later than scheduled. On arrival at Minsk the formalities went smoothly and our luggage soon appeared on the carousel. Outside were Gabor, our guide, and Andrea, his wife. Then a collective purchase of Belarusian roubles was made – just under €100 makes one a millionaire in this country!

We were soon loaded aboard the minibus with János, our driver, and met Hilary, the remaining party member who had come out from the UK ahead of the group. Then we headed south-west on a motorway that crossed vast fields, some with crops and others bare, recently ploughed and rolled. Birds were at rather a premium, but eventually we saw most of the commoner corvids, Western Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzards, Northern Lapwing and the ubiquitous Common Starling. After 90 minutes or more we stopped at a roadside rest area for the picnic prepared in advance by Gabor and Andrea. Rooks were after scraps and a pair of Peacock Butterflies engaged in a nuptial display flight.

Pressing on we eventually turned off the motorway onto more rural roads, where some of the cottages and farm buildings looked really old and quite picturesque with apple blossom on the trees outside. Bird sightings picked up, with Barn Swallows, Common Ravens and Eurasian Hoopoes being amongst the species noted. Eventually we reached Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park, and once checked-in we drove the short distance to the hotel blocks - they are still state run and perhaps have changed relatively little from the days of the previous regime!

Drinks and dinner were appreciated, and then to bed, for with such an early start we were tired little boys and girls!

Sunday 27 April

Rain at times, sunny periods. 15°C

What a brilliant first whole day in Belarus! Some were out before breakfast seeing familiar species such as Black Redstart and Blackcap, but the star bird was a Black Woodpecker seen at point blank range by Richard M before the rest of us were out – such a shame his camera overslept!

After breakfast we set off to the forests and marshes of Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was seen well as we awaited the arrival of Anton, a local guide, near the park gate. After driving just a few kilometres we turned off along a dirt track taking us deeper into the forest, where before long we stopped and set off on a three-hour walk that took us around the outside of a square kilometre. Under leaden skies we were soon watching a pair of Middle Spotted Woodpecker and their nest hole and had seen the first of a number of Wood Warblers, Collared Flycatcher, Hawfinch and Marsh Tit with varying degrees of success before the light rain became heavier and we decided to implement Plan B – go back to the bus and drive further afield in the hope of seeing European Bison. We'd hardly gone more than a few hundred yards, and the rain ceased and Plan A was back in pole position again. From then until we finished the walk the clouds rolled away and we enjoyed the sunlit forest where hornbeam was by far the most abundant species of tree. Small wonder we had come across Hawfinches. With birds such as Common Chaffinch, European Robin, Winter Wren and more Wood Warblers singing the chorus, the woodpeckers were on percussion with great views of White-backed for some of the party walking with Anton as they followed up a sighting of Eurasian Treecreeper. Some had a fleeting glimpse of a Black Woodpecker disappearing away amongst the trees and we all enjoyed great views of a Three-toed Woodpecker.

Before the rain had set in Wally found a very fresh footprint in damp earth, which was identified as Wolf by Gabor and confirmed by Anton. It was so fresh that the animal had passed through the area just a few hours before, certainly after last night's rain. Signs of Wild Boar digging around roots and amongst the leaf litter were everywhere, but the only mammal to be actually seen was a Red Squirrel. In places the forest floor was covered with Wood Anemones with violets scattered amongst them. Some plants such as May Lily and Lily-of-the Valley were still in leaf, whilst Spurge Laurel was already over.

A good picnic lunch awaited our return to the bus. Afterwards we headed off to a new area, where a large lake was surrounded by reed beds with forest once more beyond. Three Hobbies, freshly returned from wintering in sub-Saharan Africa, were chasing dragonflies and eating them on the wing as well as having a go at one or two of the local Western Marsh Harriers. In the opposite direction Gabor spotted three Common Cranes and as luck would have it, they came our way. In fact they all but passed overhead! Out on the lake was a smart drake Common Goldeneye and his duck. Gabor doesn't always use playback to bring birds in, for it was his whistle that had a Grey-headed Woodpecker flying around us! Next up was a distant adult White-tailed Eagle perched in a bare tree, alone initially but soon to be joined by another higher in the same tree. Below the eagles, but out on the lake was a pair of Black-necked Grebes and as the Hobbies continued to pursue their dragonfly prey a Great Bittern boomed from the depths of the reed beds.

We then walked along the lakeside road for the next kilometre or so until it reached an area of wooded swamp and alder carr. Before the lake was lost from view we had cracking views of another perched White-tailed Eagle, made even more memorable for after it took off it too came almost overhead! Gabor pointed out the song of Firecrest and the calls of Hazel Grouse as we neared the waiting bus and Green-veined White and Orange-tip were added to the butterfly list.

Driving on further we eventually reached a long meadow surrounded by forest and there at the far end was a small herd of European Bison. As soon as we disembarked their heads were up and they were watching, but let us approach much closer before they finally turned tail and ran off into the forest behind them. Common Skylarks sang over the meadow and Anton heard a Eurasian Wryneck, but it was not seen. Over another part of the extended meadow hunted a ring-tailed Hen Harrier and a Lesser Spotted Eagle circled with a Common Buzzard. A Yellow Wagtail was also seen in the area, but the last interesting bird was a bit further on was when a Common Snipe was perched up on top of a dead snag.

On the way back to the hotel it started raining and although the chosen return route was hoped to produce mammals only Julian saw two Wild Boar. Our evening was completed with dinner and the checklist.

Monday, 28 April

Misty before breakfast, overcast for the morning, becoming brighter with sunshine during the latter part of afternoon. 17°C during afternoon and quite chilly before breakfast.

Most of the party turned out for a pre-breakfast walk at 6.15 am with Gabor and myself, along some of the tracks in the area of the lodge, but not before we had a brilliant two-bird scenario that involved males of both Common and Black Redstarts in a small fenced area, with only one being seen at a time and contradictory identifications being made. We walked through pines initially, but as the ground became swampier more deciduous trees appeared. Many of the bird species encountered singing were those we had seen yesterday including Wood Warbler. There were several Willow Warblers in fine voice and a Chiffchaff was singing in one of the damper stretches of forest. The sound of frogs was everywhere, most likely to be Marsh Frogs, but one that we photographed as a Common Frog looked like a Moor Frog when I checked the Collins field guide.

There were good views of Crested Tit today and in response to the play-back of Eurasian Pygmy Owl calls, both Blue and Long-tailed Tits appeared. We had the tour's first Yellowhammers feeding along the edge of the track and as we watched a distant Eurasian Pygmy Owl gave a brief tantalising call and then fell silent. Further on we had two attempts to see Eurasian Wryneck on both the outward leg and then later on our return when the best views were to be had. The only other woodpecker seen on the walk was a responsive male Black Woodpecker.

After breakfast we set off on a drive to the south, stopping from time to time on the way when something was seen. The first highlight was for an excellent view of a Lesser Spotted Eagle on the ground in a roadside field, first from the bus and then scope views after it flew to perch on a bushy tree in the edge of the forest beyond. The same stop produced a perched adult White-tailed Eagle, but it wasn't as close as yesterday's good sighting. Western Marsh Harriers were seen on the journey, but we were to have good views of two migrating male Montagu's Harriers that were quartering fields and the verges as they passed through the area. A Red Fox was seen with varying degrees of success, but we all had good views of a Great Grey Shrike perched on a telegraph wire. Also seen were Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Northern Goshawk, but by only one or two party members.

Gabor knew an area near the old village of Zelessie where we stood a chance of seeing Greater Spotted Eagle. It was a huge area of bushy swamp surrounded by forest and over the wetland displayed a dozen or perhaps more Common Snipe in the air at any one time. We even had a Green Sandpiper display overhead. A Savi's Warbler reeled but wasn't seen and a Grey-headed Woodpecker flew across the road repeatedly, never to stop in view once.

We had our picnic at a picnic area a few miles away, where the Western Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard and Barn Swallows that passed over were probably migrants. A Holly Blue was an addition to the list.

With the weather beginning to look as if it would improve Gabor was keen to have another attempt to see Greater Spotted Eagle, so we retraced our route and we were scarcely outside the minibus when two were passed overhead! Great timing. Soon after one was watched circling with a White-tailed Eagle, an interesting comparison. Next up was to see the Thrush Nightingale singing vigorously from the roadside bushes, and with a little encouragement from Gabor we did! A lifer for several of the party including Les. We then had another, and better, sighting of one of the Greater Spotted Eagles as it circled closer, eventually passing over the road and drifting away.

Our next birding area was at Zelessie, which had been raised to the ground during the Second World War and then rebuilt, but since then people have left, leaving some of the traditional wooden buildings to deteriorate. It was interesting to see that most had wells in their gardens. A pair of White Storks was nesting on a prominent pole, allowing us to photograph this iconic species and also to add Tree Sparrow to our lists as they were lodging in the bottom of the nest. We explored an area of pine forest just beyond the village

where Wild Boar had been active around the trees, but it was a lack of birds and an abundance of mosses that encouraged us to return to the minibus and begin the drive back to the lodge at Belovezhskaya.

Following an early dinner and the checklist some of us went for a walk at dusk to try and see rodding Woodcock but none were seen, although it was a fine, but chilly evening. Mars and Venus shone down from above, Noctule Bats and a smaller species hunted overhead, a distant Great Bittern was heard amongst the chorus of Marsh Frogs. We found a European Tree Frog, whose padded toes found a good grip on Dave's beard – no one had a camera, but we all had a good laugh! Thus ended another excellent day in the area.

Tuesday, 29 April

Hot and sunny throughout the day with clouds increasing during afternoon. 25°C p.m.

Birding around the lodge before breakfast added Lesser Whitethroat and Coal Tit to our growing lists, whilst Juliet caught up with Eurasian Nuthatch and Dave discovered that Pied Flycatchers were using one of the nest boxes nearby. Our breakfast venue wasn't open this morning, so we had the meal nearby in a café, where similar fare was produced, but the tea and coffee came towards the beginning of the meal and not at the end!

Soon after 9 am we hit the road on our transfer to Sporovo. What a difference the sunshine makes! Birds en route included at least two more Great Grey Shrikes, a Lesser Spotted Eagle, Yellowhammers and the usual harriers. One roadside stop added a Corn Bunting and a Northern Wheatear both on the roof of an old barn. At another we found ourselves stopped beside a tree where a pair of Fieldfares were feeding young in a nest near the top of the broken trunk. Over the next few miles two or three other Fieldfares were noted as we drove along.

Our route took us through the town of Berjova where we stopped outside a splendid church to view a collection of military hardware displayed beside a memorial on one side of a large circular plaza in front of the church's entrance. Flowerbeds surrounding the plaza were densely planted with for-get-me-nots in full bloom at this time of the year. Thanks to Alan's translation we learned that the memorial was erected in tribute to the 11 servicemen from the town who died during Russia's ill-fated exploits in Afghanistan from 1979-89. Will our service personnel receive the same recognition?

By late morning we had arrived at the extensive state run fish ponds at Selec and there we enjoyed some excellent birding in the warmth of the spring sunshine. Early on we came across Edible Frog and Map Butterfly, the latter so named from the patterning on the underside of its wings. Some of the ponds held more birds than others and the one we watched for the remainder of the morning, and beside which we enjoyed another picnic prepared by Andrea, might have been named Swan Lake, for it hosted at least 52 Bewick's Swans and four Whoopers! Scattered across the surface were duck and in addition to the ubiquitous Mallard were a number of Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, three smart drake Garganey and single drake Tufted Duck and Common Goldeneye. There were gulls too – mostly Black-headed with two Common Gulls, a few Yellow-legged Gull, or rather one assumed that the larger ones were all Yellow-legged until Juliet noticed that two had pink legs, for they were European Herring Gulls, here perhaps at the eastern side of their breeding range.

Migration was taking place with a party of White-winged Terns passing through without hesitating, a flock of some 20 Common Cranes spiralling above us, several Black Storks including three together at one point and what might have been a passage of Great Egrets, although they might easily have been local birds. Shorebirds found on the muddy margins of various ponds included a number of Ruff, the males of which were beginning to colour up around their heads and necks, Wood Sandpipers, Common Greenshanks, Common Sandpipers and single Black-tailed Godwit and Spotted Redshank.

Amongst the passerines seen were Gabor's first Red-backed Shrike of the year, Sedge Warblers and a Common Stonechat, although the latter was a 'leader only' bird. Common Ravens were common, once in the company of a sub-adult White-tailed Eagle that passed us much closer than the group of eight circling adults over the edge of the forest beyond the fish ponds.

We had butterflies too – Map, Peacock, Holly Blue, Green-veined and Small Whites and another smaller white that never landed was one of the Wood Whites, perhaps the recently described Real's Wood White, but separating the two requires dissection and examination of the genitalia and even Dave's Swiss Army knife wasn't up to the job! And then there was also a very large Edible Frog that crossed the track in front of us.

Time flies and we had to move on to the nearby Sporovo Reserve, which is a RAMSAR site, a wetland of international significance. Last year the water levels were so high that with two feet of water above the boardwalk the trek out across the marsh was impossible, but this year the water level was at least one foot below the boardwalk. To reach the walkway we crossed a river by a wooden one-man power ferry – Gabor! Marsh Frogs were calling and a Great Reed Warbler sang from the feathery top of a dead reed. The first 100 metres was through a bed of dead phragmites stems, after which the landscape opened up into a sedge-covered marsh interspersed with willow bushes. We hoped to find Bluethroat and perhaps Aquatic Warbler here, but all we found was a male Montagu's Harrier and a Large Tortoiseshell butterfly.

Before leaving the area entirely we returned to the minibus and drove to an area where the road overlooked another part of the huge reserve. Out amongst some small willow bushes Meadow Pipits teased us and when I did spot an Aquatic Warbler perched low down on a Carex stem it disappeared as soon as Gabor confirmed the i.d. and before anyone else could see it – curses! Over the next half hour or so it failed to reappear. Belarus is the stronghold of the species that has declined markedly to the west in countries like Hungary, where it now might well be extinct. It was a long, hot wait with little reward as black clouds built up steadily. Gabrielle had a Large Tortoiseshell examine her binoculars and she also pinpointed a Green Hairstreak when it flew across the road to land on a pine tree. Julian added a Speckled Wood to the list, which totalled 12 species of butterfly today alone.

We still had to reach our hotel some 30 minutes' drive away in the town of Belaaziorsk, and once there we had an hour to settle in and freshen up before dinner. Tonight's dinner included a treat – delicious vanilla ice cream that was just so smooooth!

Wednesday, 30 April

Another fine day, with cloud building up again in afternoon. 20°C

After breakfast we loaded the minibus and trailer and began the long drive towards Turov, but thankfully there was some excellent birding en route, beginning with a stop to visit a park that was administered by the Belovezhskaya Park, although it was miles away. There were target birds and the best came first, when we were taken on a forest walk with two local guides to see the nest of a Great Grey Owl. After about almost a kilometre we stopped and there just a few trees away from the track was a large nest with the domed head of the female owl showing above the rim. Wonderful, even if we couldn't see the whole bird. Then a few minutes later one of the guides found the off-duty male perched against the trunk of another tree only 20-30 metres away! He was magnificent with amazing views through the scopes and some excellent photographic opportunities. After watching us with huge yellow eyes he soon realised that we posed no threat and returned to dozing. On the walk few other birds were seen, but butterflies included Map Butterfly, Dinky and Grizzled Skippers, Brimstones, Wood White sp, Green-veined Whites and two pairs of mating Short-tailed Blues.

Next we visited a clearing in the forest that attracted dozens of Maps, whites, Brimstones and at least six Green Hairstreaks. But that wasn't what we were there for as it was in the territory of a pair of Black Woodpeckers and in response to playback we had numerous views of the male in flight and at rest, although those views were usually too brief to permit scope views. Then we moved on to another area that we hoped would produce a Eurasian Pygmy Owl; it called back once, but otherwise we had to content ourselves with watching Treecreeper, Wood Warbler, Marsh Tit and so on, all species attracted by the owl's calls. It was a shame that we never got to see the real thing!

Another owl awaited us near one of the colourful cemeteries, a woodland burial ground in fact. A pair of Long-eared Owls had chosen to nest in a wicker basket placed in a tree for that very purpose, but alas all we could really see were the ear-tufts. We tried another angle, but it wasn't much better and then when some of us returned to the original viewpoint the off-duty bird flew away in great haste from a tree right beside us! So near and so fast away.

That was basically it for the birding today for having said farewell to the guides we headed off to enjoy our picnic by a lake several kilometres away and by the time we came to eat we were well into the afternoon. The lake held a few Mallard and a Great Crested Grebe. Once replete we reboarded the bus and pressed on towards our hotel at Turov, some three and a half hours driving time away. The drive passed many kilometres of coniferous and mixed forest and between huge fields on the way. It was all very flat or slightly undulating at best.

It was gone 7 pm by the time we reached our hotel and settled into the rooms, but there was some time to relax or explore locally before assembling for the short walk to a nearby (and privately run) restaurant, where the food and drinks were most welcome.

Thursday, 01 May

Fine and sunny. 23°C

With our hotel close to the river it was not surprising that a number of the party were out before breakfast exploring the new surroundings. The air was full of the noise of Black-headed Gulls and terns breeding on a marsh on the edge of town, but it was too far, or perhaps inaccessible, so it turned out that we all explored the fields and river accessed by a footbridge not far from the hotel.

There were plenty of birds ranging from Ruff and Wood Sandpipers along the edge of the river, where they were not disturbed by numerous fishermen, to a variety of terns, although none were particularly close. Yellow Wagtails were newly arrived on territory and looking very smart in their fine plumage. Reed Buntings and Tree Sparrows were also seen well, but a distant Eurasian Golden Oriole could only be heard. Richard tracked down a calling Eurasian Wryneck just along from the hotel. Other new birds for the trip included Common Redshank, Black Tern and Common Sand Martin.

After breakfast we set off for a day's exploration of the area, probably not travelling more than about 10 kilometres in any one direction. The flood plain near the local ringing station was our first stop. All three marsh terns were seen – Black, White-winged and Whiskered – as they beat up and down the stretch of Pripyat River by which we stood. From time to time we saw both Little and Common Terns as well. From the village behind us a Eurasian Hoopoe was calling. There were more Ruff here, including males in their splendid breeding plumage 'lekking' to their smaller females. There were a number of other shorebirds including Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, both Common Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers and then as we were re-boarding the minibus Les found a Temminck's Stint, but unfortunately it had disappeared by the time we all tried to see it.

Leaving Dave behind to enjoy a day's photography, we drove away from the river to explore a beautiful stretch of forest in search of Red-breasted Flycatcher. It was a beautiful area. Hardly had we walked any distance when a large owl was disturbed from trees near the track, but it disappeared so quickly through the trees that none of those who glimpsed it were unable to get a positive i.d. Further on we enjoyed views of an active male Red-breasted Flycatcher as Wood Warblers sang in the background as they did in so many places along the trail. Birdwise it was relatively quiet. On reaching a beautiful area of swamp and trees bathed in sunshine we found Grey-headed Woodpecker and a Common Chiffchaff was carrying a feather to an unseen nest site. Soon after, as we walked further on, the familiar calls of a raptor heralded the abrupt and brief appearance of a Northern Goshawk as it flew through the trees and away into the depths of the forest passing barely 20-30 metres away from us – no chance of getting the bins on that one! A soaring Black Stork over the area was probably the only other bird of note.

The swamps produced the first good dragonfly sightings of the tour with Four-spotted Chasers hawking up and down over the water and emergent vegetation and patrolling and pairs of White-faced Darter being seen well too! At our turn around spot a few hundred yards further on an enormous pine tree had a couple of local bee-hives attached to the trunk 10 metres or so above the ground. They were massive and made from hollowed tree trunks, so getting them in situ would have been no easy matter. Apart from signs of Wild Boar's diggings the only notable mammal sighting was of old Lynx scats in the middle of the track.

Botanically the spring flowers were more advanced here with both Lily of the Valley and May Lily in flower and the Wood Anemones now over. Chickweed-wintergreen and Asarabacca were new for the trip.

By the time we returned to the minibus it was time for lunch, so at a nearby clearing in the sunshine Gabor and Andrea produce another picnic. Brimstones and Small Whites flittered here and there and a Large Tortoiseshell was seen briefly as it passed through the area after the meal. There was a Collared Flycatcher about and the Long-tailed Tits watched as we prepared to leave later in the afternoon were the white-headed subspecies found in this part of Eastern Europe. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was heard drumming in the distance.

After lunch we walked along a track into the forest that led through a long stretch of hazel woodland, but no Hazel Grouse though, to a swampy area similar to those we had visited this morning – another beautiful setting. In a nearby tree was the nest hole of a White-backed Woodpecker, that last week had been feeding young. We waited and we waited and then waited some more. Had the young flown, or perhaps the nest had been predated by a Pine Marten? We'll never know. The only woodpecker seen was a Greater Spotted and the only raptor was a displaying Lesser Spotted Eagle.

From the forest we returned to the floodplain of the Pripyat River, where we were back amongst Ruff and marsh terns, although several Eurasian Oystercatchers were perhaps one of the least expected shorebirds! A Peregrine or two were seen, no doubt attracted by the abundance of avian food in the area. At another site, on the other side of the river we watched several Grey Herons flying to roost, but there was little else of note and we headed back to the hotel before having dinner at 7 pm this evening.

Friday, 02 May

A fine day, but with a chilly breeze. 3°-18°C

The promise of a fine sunrise disappeared as a bank of cloud spread across from the west, but by breakfast that had passed through and we enjoyed another fine day, although there was a distinct chilly edge to the wind. Those out before breakfast saw much the same species as yesterday with the addition of Corncrake being heard, but not seen and a Peregrine causing unrest amongst the wader flocks. Perhaps it had killed a male Ruff that we learned later had been ringed by the local ringing station last year.

We set off after breakfast for an area which we were to explore from the top of a high flood bank a few kilometres from Turov. The bank protected the arable land from the waters of the flood plain. Poplars, willows and alders limited the views out over the marshy flood plain that was dotted with clumps of similar trees, willow scrub and ponds.

It was the site for Azure Tit and as the last of the party reached the top of the bank, having topped up their water bottles, donned anoraks etc, it came as a surprise to learn that the vanguard had already had great views! As we waited for a reappearance we had great views of a lone Willow Tit, with its matt black cap, whitish cheeks and pale wing panel too. They seem to be rather 'bull' necked as well, for unlike Marsh Tits, Willows excavate their own nest holes. Anyway seeing the Azure Tits was a higher priority and after we walked further along the flood bank it wasn't long before we all had excellent views of this beautiful bird, here on the western edge of its range. It really was a beaut, more than just a Blue Tit with the yellow replaced by white. It was an altogether bulkier bird, described in one of the field guides as looking 'fluffier'! During the rest of the morning we had several more views of the mobile pair (or were there two pairs?) along that section of the bank.

A pool close to where the minibus was parked held a pair of Common Terns from time to time as well as a small number of flighty Wood Sandpipers. Along the bank a male Golden Oriole was heard more than seen in the larger trees, a Common Whitethroat was seen, one of the few seen on the tour, and so was a Eurasian Hoopoe. Birds passing overhead included Great and Little Egrets, Grey Herons, Great Cormorants, White Storks and Western Marsh Harriers.

Walking in the opposite direction we were soon looking at a Penduline Tit's nest suspended from one of the outer branched of a bushy tree and swinging on the stiff breeze just above the remains of last year's nest.

After a few minutes we were rewarded with good views of the male for a minute or so before he flew off. In the reeds nearby a Great Reed Warbler sang and from the bushes lining the bank a Thrush Nightingale sang lustily.

Everywhere one looked there were dragonflies, although the variety seemed to be limited to just a few species: Downy Emerald, Hairy Dragonfly and Large Red-eyed Damselfly. Butterflies too flitted along the path – four whites – Large, Small, Green-veined and Wood, the latter having a penchant for dandelion flowers. The only blue was a Small Blue, being dwarfed by hyperactive and magnificent Swallowtails. Towards the end of our picnic lunch Gabrielle found two Small Coppers basking in the sun on the sandy soil. The blessing of the breeze was the mosquito activity was less than it might otherwise have been!

During the afternoon we returned towards Turov, stopping at the roadside overlooking a long pool at the flocks of Ruff that included many males sporting their fine ruffs of a great variety of colour combinations – just as long as it was one or two of the following black, chestnut, buff or white! We also saw a number of Wood Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwits and a Eurasian Coot that was feeding close to a Great Egret. Gabor found the best bird, a Terek Sandpiper, but it promptly disappeared and then when it was relocated it chose to fly off before the party could see this scarce local breeding species, so remaining a 'leader-only' bird and thus not making it to the list.

On the far side of Turov, close to the section of flood plain we had visited yesterday morning, was a small ringing station that specialises in marking the shorebirds that pass through the area in such large numbers. Although mist-nets are used to catch the birds, on a breezing day like today this is impractical and the cage traps come into their own. These are made of wire mesh and with entrances at ground level feeding birds walk in and can't find their way out. The ringer carries out regular rounds to collect any birds every 90 minutes and brings them back to the station to be processed. There the birds are ringed with a numbered ring that also bears the address of an institute in Minsk as well as a combination of three colour rings, the combination will identify any field observation to the site and year of ringing and if the number on a white flag ring can be read as well, then the individual bird can be identified too! Our timing was such that there were no birds in the hand to be seen, but Gabor gave a brief talk on the work of the station and pointed out that it is the most important ringing station in the country and that it is reliant on donations, especially from groups such as ours stopping by. Thank you for your contributions!

From there we drove a little further out of town and walked out along the flood bank and across the flood plain to witness the lekking of Great Snipe. Today it was hard to imagine that when Paul Rogers' came out with last year's Ornitholidays' party much of this was flooded and to see the snipe lekking on dry ground they only had to walk a few hundred yards from the bus, unlike this year when we walked a couple of kilometres or so. It was a wonderful experience however. Not necessarily the walk, but standing out there overlooking a few hundred square metres of grass, that really could almost have been any block of land for miles around. We were arrived just after 6 pm hours and the birds were already in situ and careful scanning with the scopes revealed, here and there, a beady eye watching us. We actually saw three or four birds fly in over the next hour or so, showing well their barred underwing pattern and barred underparts. They were calling and from time to time a bird would jump up in display. All this to attract a female! The last time I saw Great Snipe lekking was some 20 years ago in Poland, and that was an altogether different experience, for if I remember correctly we didn't get to the site until it was almost dark and could just see shapes, flashes of white tail feathers and hearing the birds, although the most enduring memory of that time was the mossies!! Here in Belarus we were watching them in broad daylight!

But it wasn't just the snipe that made the evening so special, it was the ambience, being out in the marshes with parties of Ruff and Wood Sandpipers flying to and fro, Garganey drakes chasing females, Black-tailed Godwits calling as they passed over display flighting above their territories, a distant White-tailed Eagle circling the edge of the plain as White-winged Terns fed over a pond that was largely hidden from view and finally a beautiful sunset as we walked back.

It was a great experience, albeit a chilly one that worked in our favour as the cold limited the mossie activity. We left while there was still light just after 8 pm and within the hour we had walked back to the minibus, driven back to town and were sitting at the dining table! A pity however that the starter was a salad and not

the lovely hot soup we'd had last night. As we were somewhat later with dinner than usual tonight, the checklist was postponed until tomorrow.

Saturday, 03 May

A fine morning, with cloud from lunchtime onwards. 5°-20°C

For those out before breakfast there seemed few Ruff and Wood Sandpipers this morning, but there were compensations for Juliet and Julian found the tour's first Marsh Sandpiper and also saw a Peregrine. Other shorebirds included Spotted Redshank, a Corncrake was heard and a Northern Lapwings' nest with four eggs was found.

After breakfast we headed for a delightful old village, with few modern houses, and there after a few minutes a pair of Syrian Woodpeckers responded to playback giving us great views perched in an apple tree in the garden of one of the aged village houses. A Black Redstart also posed well on the gable end of another old house.

After driving a few miles further we parked having just passed through another delightful village towards forest over which circled three Black Storks. Our walk recalled the first of the tour passing through an area of mature hornbeam beneath which grew Woodruff and Yellow Archangel. Gabor knew it as a site for White-backed Woodpecker, but on playback a Great Spotted came in immediately, followed soon after by a shy White-backed, but views of that species were not the greatest. The same area held Common Treecreeper and Spotted Flycatcher. In part our route followed an old logging road that Gabor said extended for some 20 kilometres through the forest making one realise what a vast tract of woodland we were in. Along the perimeter of the forest were Tree Pipits, Yellowhammers and a stunning male Whinchat. Butterfly-wise there were the usual whites and Brimstone, a rather worn Painted Lady and a pristine Queen of Spain Fritillary, both of which were additions to the list.

A picnic site on the banks of the Pripyat River was our next stop and as Andrea and János prepared the meal we walked along nearby tracks, where Thrush Nightingales sang loudly, but as usual remained unseen. Over the forest across the river soared an adult White-tailed Eagle and Western Marsh Harrier hunted over hidden marshes causing Common Redshank and Northern Lapwings to take to the air in alarm. A Common Gull and some terns flew along the river and it seemed strange to see an Eurasian Oystercatcher standing on the branches of a fallen tree across from the picnic site. Last year Paul's group had to go elsewhere as it was underwater with the river being at least three metres higher than today! There was one, and the last, new butterfly here – a freshly emerged Sooty Copper that was instantly identified by Julian.

By the time we reached the fish ponds at Beloe the sky was overcast and the chill to the wind had returned. The ponds attracted wildfowl, mostly Common Pochard and Common Goldeneye with a few Tufted Duck. We had to scan three or four ponds before we found the hoped for Smew and then it was just a pair and a lone male. Reeds and rushes around the margins of the ponds made it ideal breeding habitat for Great Crested Grebes for there were dozens of pairs scattered across the ponds and amongst them a pair or two of Black-necked Grebes. One pond was more or less dry, but the muddy margins of puddles that remained attracted a handful of shorebirds – Little Ringed Plover and Common and Wood Sandpipers. Stands of birches, alders and other trees separated some of the ponds from one another and as luck would have it we were very close to one such stand when some heavy duty drumming rang out. Without having to resort to playback we were soon enjoying sustained views of a male White-backed Woodpecker barely 50 metres away! There were a few raptors about – one or two Western Marsh Harriers and perhaps eight or nine White-tailed Eagles soaring over the surrounding forest or flying over the ponds, which disturbed the wildfowl. Five Whooper Swans took-off from one pond and headed away from the area.

Before we returned to the hotel we made a final stop overlooking the river near the ringing station on the outskirts of Turov, where an immature Little Gull hawked up and down along with a number of Black and White-winged Terns. A small flock of Dunlin added the last new bird to the list. There were certainly fewer Ruff this afternoon, but those who had missed this morning's Marsh Sandpiper were treated to two across the nearest stretch of water. The ringing team were doing the rounds and having removed a Common Ringed Plover and a Wood Sandpiper from one of their cage traps they realised what we had been watching – their

dingy been blown by the wind and drifting across the river! Thanks to his mobile phone the leader was able to call up an assistant to come to their aid.

We returned to the hotel to freshen up and start packing before dinner at the nearby restaurant.

Sunday, 04 May

A very wet start, becoming sunny in Minsk by the time we left for home.

Sometime after we returned from dinner last night the rain started and poured through the night. Had we not been going home today I guess we'd have been glad of our wellies! As it was we didn't get too wet loading the bags and by 6.25 am we were on the road, five minutes ahead of our anticipated departure time. For the most part we were on 'ordinary' roads, only joining a dual carriageway nearer Minsk. Our departure was so early that we took with us a picnic breakfast and were supposed to have had individual packs, but something was lost in translation along the way. At a services along the way we enjoyed coffee before pressing on.

We arrived at Minsk' airport in good time, but were delayed on the approach road when the police decided to check the vehicle's documents and tachograph. Once at the airport we used the time before the check-in opened to consolidate all our unspent roubles and exchange them at the bureau de change – a protracted experience that passed most of our waiting time. The formalities went smoothly and by the time our Austrian Airlines flight left soon after 13:35 the sun was shining. Almost one and a half hours later we landed in Vienna.

Shortly after 5.15 pm we were airborne once more on the last leg of our flight back to London. It was a fine evening by the time we reached London we were given a 20 minute city tour courtesy of air traffic control before we landed. Once we had landed it wasn't long before we were collecting our bags and saying farewell to one another and starting the last leg of our journeys.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Gabor and Andrea for putting together an excellent trip to a part of the world that in bygone days was part of the Soviet Union and still has a strong Russian feel to it. With a late spring migration in this part of the world and a particularly dry winter (we had all the rain at home!) birds were not always where they should have been, nor in the anticipated numbers, but nevertheless thanks to Gabor's local knowledge we saw some great birds and some wonderful habitats. Thanks also to János, our driver, who was always friendly and cheerful and never gave us cause for concern at any time during the tour, which was largely on empty roads. Thanks also to Alan for his help in translating and explaining the various signs along the way. Thank you all for coming on another enjoyable Ornitholiday, and for your help in various ways. I look forward to travelling with you again on another trip. Nigel's working on next year's programme, which will be Ornitholidays' 50th year – a long time in the travel business, so there will be plenty to choose from!

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July 2014

Itinerary and Weather

- 26 April** Early morning Austrian Airlines flight to Minsk changing in Vienna en route. Transfer to hotel in Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park on arrival in Belarus.
- 27 April** Birding in forest and by a lake during the day.
Rain at times, sunny periods. 15°C
- 28 April** Pre-breakfast bird walk, Birding during the day in Zelessie area.
Misty, then overcast; brighter pm 17°C
- 29 April** Transfer to Sporovo, birding at Selec fishponds and Sporovo Reserve en route.
Hot and sunny with clouds increasing pm 25°C
- 30 April** Transfer to Turov birding en route.
Another fine day, again cloud pm 20°C
- 01 May** Pre-breakfast birding and then birding in area of Turov during the day.
Fine and sunny. 23°C.
- 02 May** Pre-breakfast birding. Birding in Turov area during day and Great Snipe lek in evening.
Fine, but with chilly breeze. 3-18°C.
- 03 May** Birding in Turov area in morning, lunch by Pripyat River and further afield to Beloe fishponds pm.
5-18°C.
- 04 May** Early morning transfer to Minsk for Austria Airlines flight back to London, changing at Vienna en route.



Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Location	Abundance Scale (max. seen on 1 day)
1 2h means seen on	B =Belovezkaya Puscha N P & area	1 = 1 - 4
1day and heard	S = Sporovo Reserve	2 = 5 - 9
on 2 other days	T = Turov and area	3 = 10 - 99
		4 = 100 - 999
		5 = 1,000+

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Locations	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME	
Mute Swan	8	B S	T 3	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	
Whooper Swan	2	S	T 2	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	
Bewick's Swan	1	S	3	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	
Greylag Goose	1		T 2	<i>Anser anser</i>	
Mallard	8	B S	T 3	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	
Gadwall	4	S	T 3	<i>Anas strepera</i>	
Northern Shoveler	4	S	T 3	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	
Eurasian Wigeon	2	S	T 3	<i>Anas Penelope</i>	
Garganey	5	S	T 3	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	
Common Pochard	2		T 3	<i>Aythya farina</i>	
Tufted Duck	2	S	T 3	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	
Common Goldeneye	4	B S	T 3	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	
Smew	1		T 1	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>	
Hazel Grouse	-	1h		1	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>
Corncrake	-	2h	T	1	<i>Crex crex</i>
Little Grebe	1	S		1	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Black-necked Grebe	2	B	T	1	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	3	S	T	3	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Great Cormorant	3		T	3	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Great Bittern	-	2h B		1	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
Great Egret	4	S	T	3	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
Little Egret	1		T	1	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Grey Heron	5	B S	T	3	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
White Stork	8	B S	T	3	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Black Stork	4	S	T	2	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
White-tailed Eagle	5	B S	T	3	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
Lesser Spotted Eagle	5	B S	T	1	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>
Greater Spotted Eagle	1	B		1	<i>Aquila clanga</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	8	B S	T	3	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Hen Harrier	2	B		1	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	3	B S		1	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
Common Buzzard	5	B S		1	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	1	B		1	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Northern Goshawk	2	B	T	1	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
Common Kestrel	1		T	1	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Eurasian Hobby	1	B		1	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Peregrine Falcon	3		T	1	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Common Moorhen	1	1h	T	1	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot	3	S	T	1	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Common Crane	3	1h B S		3	<i>Grus grus</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	2		T	2	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Little Ringed Plover	3		T	1	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Common Ringed Plover	3		T	1	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Northern Lapwing	8	B S	T	3	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Dunlin	1		T	2	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Temminck's Stint	1		T	1	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
Common Sandpiper	6	S	T	1	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Terek Sandpiper	1		T	1	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	4	S	T	4	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Green Sandpiper	2	B S	T	1	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>

Common Redshank	3				T	3	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>
Spotted Redshank	4			S	T	2	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
Common Greenshank	3			S	T	1	<i>Tringa nebularis</i>
Marsh Sandpiper	1				T	1	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	4			S	T	3	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Great Snipe	1				T	3	<i>Gallinago media</i>
Common Snipe	7		B	S	T	3	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Ruff	5			S	T	5	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
Black-headed Gull	7		B	S	T	4	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Common Gull	2			S	T	1	<i>Larus canus</i>
European Herring Gull	1			S		1	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	2			S	T	1	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Little Gull	1				T	1	<i>Larus minutus</i>
Little Tern	3				T	2	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
Common Tern	5		B	S	T	3	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Black Tern	3				T	3	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
White-winged Tern	4			S	T	4	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
Whiskered Tern	3				T	3	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
Rock (Feral) Pigeon	5		B	S	T	3	<i>Columba livia</i>
Stock Dove	4		B	S		2	<i>Columba oenas</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	8		B	S	T	3	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	4			S	T	2	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
European Turtle Dove	-	1h			T	1	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Common Cuckoo	7	1h	B	S	T	1	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Great Grey Owl	1			S		1	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>
Eurasian Pygmy Owl	-	2h	B	S		1	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>
Long-eared Owl	1			S		1	<i>Asio otus</i>
Tawny Owl	-	1h	B			1	<i>Strix aluco</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	3	2h	>B	>S	T	1	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Black Woodpecker	3	1h	B	S		1	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
Grey-headed Woodpecker	4		B	S	T	1	<i>Picus canus</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	6	1h	B	S	T	1	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	1		B			1	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>
Syrian Woodpecker	1				T	1	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>
White-backed Woodpecker	2		B		T	1	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>
Three-toed Woodpecker	1		B			1	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	-	3h	B		T	1	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>
Wryneck	3	2h	B		T	1	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
Common Skylark	6		B		T	3	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Crested Lark	1				T	1	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Common Sand Martin	1				T	1	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Barn Swallow	8		B	S	T	3	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common House Martin	7		B	S	T	3	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Meadow Pipit	2			S	T	3	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Tree Pipit	4		B		T	1	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
White Wagtail	8		B	S	T	3	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Yellow Wagtail	5		B		T	3	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
European Robin	2		B			1	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Thrush Nightingale	1	4h	B	S	T	1	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>
Common Redstart	3		B	S		1	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Black Redstart	5		B		T	1	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Northern Wheatear	1			>S		1	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Whinchat	4		B	S	T	1	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Song Thrush	3		B			1	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Mistle Thrush	1		B			1	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Fieldfare	2			>S	T	1	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>
Eurasian Blackbird	6	1h	B	S	T	2	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Barred Warbler	1				T	1	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>
Blackcap	3	3h	B	S	T	1	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Common Whitethroat	3		B		T	1	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
Lesser Whitethroat	1		B			1	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
Savi's Warbler	-	3h	B		T	1	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>

Sedge Warbler	2			S	T	1	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
Great Reed Warbler	3			S	T	1	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
Willow Warbler	2	1h	B		T	1	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Wood Warbler	4		B	S	T	3	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
Common Chiffchaff	2	2h	B	S	T	1	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Firecrest	-	1h	B			1	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
Wren	-	2h	B			1	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	5		B	S	T	1	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Red-breasted Flycatcher	1				T	1	<i>Ficedula parva</i>
Pied Flycatcher	2		B	S		1	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Collared Flycatcher	2		B	S	T	1	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>
Great Tit	5	1h	B	S	T	2	<i>Parus major</i>
Coal Tit	1		B			1	<i>Periparus ater</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	3		B		T	2	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Azure Tit	1				T	1	<i>Cyanistes cyanas</i>
Crested Tit	1		B			1	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>
Marsh Tit	3		B	S		1	<i>Poecile palustris</i>
Willow Tit	1				T	1	<i>Poecile montanus</i>
Long-tailed Tit	3		B		T	1	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Eurasian Penduline Tit	1				T	1	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	4	2h	B	S	T	1	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Eurasian Treecreeper	4		B	S	T	1	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Great Grey Shrike	3		B	>S	T	1	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
Red-backed Shrike	1			S		1	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
Common Magpie	7		B	S	T	3	<i>Pica pica</i>
Eurasian Jay	5		B	S	T	1	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Western Jackdaw	7		B	S	T	3	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Rook	6		B	S	T	4	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Hooded Crow	4		>B		T	3	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Common Raven	8		B	S	T	3	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Common Starling	8		B	S	T	3	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Golden Oriole	1	2h			T	1	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
House Sparrow	6		B	S	T	3	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Tree Sparrow	6		B	S	T	3	<i>Passer montanus</i>
Common Chaffinch	8		B	S	T	3	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Common Linnet	2			S	T	1	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	6		B	S	T	3	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
European Greenfinch	6		B	S	T	2	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
European Serin	2		B		T	1	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	2		B			1	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Hawfinch	3	1h	B	>S		2	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Yellowhammer	4	1h	B	S	T	2	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Reed Bunting	5		B	S	T	3	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
Corn Bunting	1			>S		1	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>

MAMMALS

Noctule Bat		B					<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>
Eurasian Red Squirrel		B		S			<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
Red Fox		B					<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>
Eurasian Wild Boar		B			T		<i>Sus scrofa</i>
European Bison		B					<i>Bison bonasus</i>

The following were recorded by droppings or footprints only: Wolf, Lynx, Moose, Red Deer, Roe Deer, Otter and Marten sp

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Grass Snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>		Moor Frog	<i>Rana arvalis</i>
Fire-bellied Toad	<i>Bombina bombina</i>		Marsh/Pool Frog	<i>Rana ridibunda/lessonae</i>
Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>		Edible Frog	<i>Rana kl. esculenta</i>
European Tree Frog	<i>Hyla arborea</i>			

BUTTERFLIES

Grizzled Skipper		S		<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>
Swallowtail			T	<i>Papilio machaon</i>
Wood White/Réal's Wood White		S	T	<i>Leptidea sinapis/reali</i>
Brimstone	B	S	T	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
Large White		S	T	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Small White	B	S	T	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Green-veined White	B	S	T	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Orange-tip	B	S	T	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>
Green Hairstreak		S		<i>Callophrys rubi</i>
Small Copper			T	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
Sooty Copper			T	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>
Small Blue			T	<i>Cupido minimus</i>
Short-tailed Blue		S		<i>Everes argiades</i>
Holly Blue	B	S		<i>Celastrinia argoilus</i>
Painted Lady			T	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Large Tortoiseshell		S	T	<i>Aglais polychloros</i>
Camberwell Beauty (<i>leader only</i>)		S		<i>Aglais antiopa</i>
Peacock	B	S	T	<i>Inachis io</i>
Comma		S		<i>Polygonia c-album</i>
Map		S	T	<i>Araschnia levana</i>
Queen of Spain Fritillary			T	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>
Speckled Wood		S	T	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>

MOTHS

Alder Kitten			T	<i>Furcula bicuspis</i>
Common Heath		S	T	<i>Ematurga atomaria</i>
Lesser Swallow Prominent			>T	<i>Pheosia gnoma</i>
Pale Brindled Beauty			T>	<i>Phigalia pilosaria</i>
Peacock Moth		S		<i>Macaria notata</i>
Rivulet			T	<i>Perizoma affinitata</i>

This list represents those species seen by party members of this tour.

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European Bison



White-tailed Eagle



Western Marsh Harrier



Northern Lapwing



Ruff



Eurasian Hobby



White-winged Tern



White Stork



Yellow Wagtail



Penduline Tit



White-backed Woodpecker



Great Grey Owl



Barred Warbler



Great Snipe



European Beaver pond



Map



Queen of Spain Fritillary

Front Cover: Azure Tit

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