



*To find our own Great Grey Owl, not at a nest site, taped or lured but simply hunting on the edge of the forest was perhaps the great highlight of the trip! (Nik Borrow)*

# BELARUS

**11 – 22 MAY 2018**

**LEADER: NIK BORROW**

This incredible tour was our fourth visit to the well-kept secret that is Belarus. This land-locked country in eastern Europe nestles between Russia in the northeast, Ukraine to the south, Poland to the west and Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest and was at least certainly 'off the radar' to many ecotourists until relatively recently. There are no words to really prepare the visitor for the apparent remoteness of the country; over 40% is covered in beautiful natural forests and the open areas are comprised of expansive marshes and rural countryside interspersed with the odd town. Even the huge Potassium mines we passed (Belarus is the world's third largest producer) did little to dampen the impact of endless forest and wild open spaces. The population is sparse and decreasing (it has never fully recovered from losing one third of its people in WWII) so wildlife (although hunting is popular) is flourishing here. The terrain is remarkably flat with the highest point of the country only rising to a heady 345 metres and during our journey north we passed



over these rolling 'hills' that mark the southernmost extent of glaciation during the last ice age 10,000 years ago.

Our explorations began with a pre-tour extension to the wonderful Krasny Bor Reserve on the Russian border that lies within the southern Taiga Forest zone and is mostly a mixture of pine and spruce interspersed with picturesque lakes, rivers and features an expansive raised bog. Here we were on the lookout for a number of desirable species that we would either not encounter further south or were more common in the north. Despite it being a bad vole year there was a suite of owls present to get the taste-buds tingling and we had excellent views of Eurasian Pygmy Owl at dusk, whilst in the light of day we found a Boreal (or Tengmalm's) Owl poking its head out of an old Black Woodpecker nest-hole and a massive Ural Owl. This was also a great tour for woodpeckers and in the north, we found Eurasian Three-toed, Lesser Spotted, Great Spotted, White-backed and the primeval looking Black Woodpecker. Although it was a little late in the season we still found some Black Grouse calling and saw one male perform a brief display before flying off over our heads. The Western Capercaillies had certainly finished their courtships but we managed to track down some individuals at the display grounds and again had great flight views as these huge birds exploded out of the forest. After a few flight views of Hazel Grouse, we found a couple sparring by the roadside that stayed around for some prolonged observations. Although the Eurasian Beavers at Dima's lodge refused to put in an appearance we managed to find another nearby swimming just metres away from us at dusk.



*If beautiful ancient European woodlands are your 'thing' then Belarus is THE place to visit. Our tour visits the spruce forests of Krasny Bor Reserve near the northern border with Russia (left) and the ancient oak grove in Belovezhskaya Puscha on the western border with Poland (right). (Nik Borrow)*

Heading back south and picking up the remaining members of the group for the main tour we continued on south to Turov on the Pripyat River and our base for three nights. The virtually pristine floodplain here was somewhat more flooded than usual for this time of year and we needed a boat to reach the meadows where the Great Snipe lek but having reached there we were overwhelmed by at least 25 birds uttering their weird display calls and throwing themselves into the air in little explosive jumps. There were also Terek Sandpipers



on the river, many Ruff in full breeding regalia, heaps of marsh terns and we added Middle-spotted, Syrian and Grey-headed Woodpeckers and Eurasian Wryneck to our woodpecker list. The passerine star of the show had to be the lovely pair of Azure Tits at their nest site in a metal box!

After some close encounters with White-tailed Eagles and a superb daytime beaver along the Pripyat River we visited Bielaje (or Beloe) fishponds, a BirdLife IBA site which is a breeding locality for Smew and we saw at least a dozen before it was time to move on to the western border with Poland. Although the poor vole numbers meant that the Great Grey Owl population had crashed we were exceedingly fortunate that our journey coincided with the rediscovery of a female by a failed nest and despite the rain we made our way to the guarded site deep inside the Vygonoshansky Reserve to obtain some close-up views of this amazing beast. There was just enough time to squeeze in a singing Aquatic Warbler in the Sporovsky Biological Reserve; it had been quite a day! We returned to the reserve the next morning for more Aquatics and also some glorious Citrine Wagtails before continuing to our final destination.

The 'Grand Finale' of the tour took place in Belovezhskaya Puscha, which is the eastern section of forest known as Bialowieza on the Polish side of the border. Here we saw a Long-eared Owl in a nest box, completed our set of woodpeckers with Green Woodpecker and enjoyed the ancient woodlands filled with Wood Warblers and Collared, Pied and Red-breasted Flycatchers. The first evening gave us a big surprise in the shape of another Great Grey Owl that we watched hunting in the late afternoon and on our last evening we went on a quest to see a large herd of 53 European Bison and then finished off with another Eurasian Pygmy Owl. All of this, plus good hotels, tasty food and a modern road network are the reason why so many birders interested in the European avifauna will be making their way here in the near future.



*Marshes, flat expansive landscapes, big skies! The Pripyat River at Turov home to many Great Snipe. (Nik Borrow)*

Our tour began at the modern and refreshingly peaceful Minsk airport, situated just outside of the capital. We passed through immigration quickly and easily and met up with Dima Shamovich, our Belarusian expert naturalist who was to guide us for the next two weeks through the very best areas that the country has to

offer. With no time wasted we loaded up into our comfortable minibus and set off on a 300 kilometres journey towards the Russian border and Dima's super little lodge tucked away in the beautiful woodlands of the Krasny Bor Reserve. The road network in Belarus is amazingly good and the uneventful four-hour drive went pretty smoothly so that we got to his lodge for three nights stay in good time for the first in a series of excellent meals. Dima has a first-class chef working for him and we sampled some wonderfully tasty local dishes during our stay.

Other species seen upon our arrival included a Common Rosefinch singing outside our lodge as well as Green Sandpiper, Woodlark, Barn Swallow, Eurasian Blackcap, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Common Chaffinch, European Greenfinch and Yellowhammer. Of course, we were eager to get in the field and after dinner Dima took us deep into the forest to a site for Eurasian Pygmy Owl. Here we were to get our first experience with the ravenous mosquitoes of Belarus and as we waited for dusk to descend so the insects increased. Little did we know then that the experience was mild to those we would later meet in the south but we certainly got a taste of what was to come that evening. It was a beautiful, still night and our concerns with the biting insects diminished as we gave ourselves over to soaking up the atmosphere of the forest with the resonant cries of Common Cuckoos echoing through the silence. Dima was adept at whistling an impersonation of the owl and we noted some commotion from the forest with the Blackbirds scolding and expecting it to be the pygmy owl it was with great surprise that something much larger flew out in the form of a Ural Owl! It was not much of a view as the shadowy shape disappeared through the trees and we all hoped for something more satisfying in days to come. The forest now fell quiet as the darkness consumed us the first Eurasian Woodcock started roding overhead and the familiar 'churr' of a European Nightjar broke the silence and soon there it was wing-clapping above our heads and all around us! After this fantastic display we moved position and finally heard calls from the Eurasian Pygmy Owl which was located at the top of one of the tall spruces. It kept to the upper parts of the trees but we all had excellent views and after a long day we headed back spotting a Mountain Hare, along the way for a short night's sleep.



*Our tour started with a bang in the forests of Krasny Bor Reserve with excellent views of a Boreal (or Tengmalm's) Owl (left) at its nest in an old Black Woodpecker hole and a female Ural Owl (right) near her nest, both in daylight hours. (Nik Borrow)*



The village where Dima's lodge stands, Sosnovy ('*village made from pine*') originally consisted of around 20 homesteads, which were destroyed by the Germans in 1943. Some folks returned but when Dima moved in around eleven years ago there was only one old lady living there and she is now no longer with us. A few homes that are still habitable are used during the summer and the general area consists of a mosaic of fields of crop for animal feed used by hunters to lure deer and elk into the open during the autumn, abandoned hay meadows, marshes and pine woods. The following day we set about exploring these rich habitats and the patterns the days were to take emerged as a pre-breakfast session with breakfast finally arriving as a 'brunch' mid-morning, then another session until a late lunch after which there was usually time for a short rest followed by a pre-dinner session and the day culminating in some evening/night birding so days were fairly long but there was always the possibility to opt out of any section if desired!

We started our first full day early in search of Black Grouse. The main display season was over but we still hoped to hear a male 'bubbling' somewhere and after trying several likely places we finally got lucky with a male that was watched calling for a short while before he decided to fly right past us and disappear into the forest briefly resting in a treetop before he was gone. In the fields and small settlements were also brightly coloured Whinchats looking very smart in their breeding attire as well as White Stork, Common Buzzard, Northern Lapwing, Common Snipe, Common Wood Pigeon, Red-backed Shrike, Eurasian Jay, Eurasian Magpie, Northern Raven, Eurasian Skylark, Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Common Whitethroat, Common Starling, White Wagtail, Common Chaffinch and Hawfinch. We found a young Eurasian Elk on the edge of one of the fields, hunted out a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker along a verdant stream and also visited an area of flooded forest that had plenty of dead trees suitable for other species of woodpecker and sure enough there Great Spotted, White-backed and Black Woodpeckers but the hoped-for Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker evaded us.



*With 40% of the country covered in forest it was no wonder that woodpeckers would be high on the agenda and we saw all possible species during the tour including White-backed Woodpecker (left) and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker (right). (Nik Borrow)*

After breakfast we were taken to a site for a 'surprise' which turned out to be a Boreal (or Tengmalm's) Owl poking its head out of an old Black Woodpecker nest hole. It stared at us and we stared back for a while and

then left it in peace to go on to another site where a Ural Owl was nesting in a box. This involved a bit of a walk, through woodland where Wood Warblers seemed to be abundant and we found a beautifully coloured Red-breasted Flycatcher along with Coal, Marsh and, Great Tits, Mistle Thrush, Spotted and European Pied Flycatchers, Tree Pipit and Eurasian Siskin. A big prize was a sighting of a responsive Spotted Nutcracker that sat at the top of the tall conifers glaring down at us. A little further on we checked to see if the owl was at home and fortunately she was and we were treated to excellent views of the female sitting in trees near to the nest.

By comparison the afternoon was a lot quieter; a Corn Crake gave poor views for some at Dima's lodge but nearby we managed first class views of White-backed Woodpecker at another nest site where we also saw Northern Goshawk, Mallard, Eurasian Teal, Common Goldeneye and accidentally disturbed a Garganey from its nest. In the evening we saw our first Hazel Grouse in flight from the vehicle as we drove to another Ural Owl site. Sadly, the owl seemed to have failed at its nest site and there was no sign of the bird but we did see a couple of secretive River Warblers and a showy Redwing singing loudly from its prominent post. As dusk fell we visited a Eurasian Beaver lodge where one of the animals was watched swimming close by apparently unaware of our presence. As soon as it had got wind of us it sounded the alarm by slapping the surface of the water with its tail making a sound that rang out like a gunshot and promptly dived. The show was definitely over so after our successful day we headed back for bed!

Pre-breakfast we went in search of Western Capercaillie at their display grounds. The timing of our tour was too late for the display itself but we knew the birds were still around and some individuals in particular as Dima had radio-collared them. This certainly made the birds easier to track down but invariably they saw us long before we saw them and we had to settle for flight views as these huge grouse crashed away through the forest although fortuitously one large male chose to fly right past us. Also, here was a singing Greenish Warbler which disappointed us by promptly disappearing and at a nearby site we again tried in vain for a Three-toed Woodpecker. It had been another long morning and was certainly time for breakfast which felt more like lunchtime!



*The walk out into the middle of Bolshoi Mokh raised bog via the 'boardwalk' to a small island which is a great place to scan for breeding waders and raptors. (Nik Borrow)*

In the late morning we visited the huge raised bog of Bolshoi Mokh which covers an area of 24 square kilometres. Here Dima and his team had constructed a boardwalk made of planks through the bog to a drier area which served as a good watchpoint. You did have to be a little careful where you put your feet but we all survived the walk and then putting us to shame for our fear of the bog, Dima then went on a long circuit cross country to see if he could flush anything of interest! The view of the surrounding bog was magnificent



and we saw some of the Whimbrel that are breeding here well to the south of their main range. Other waders included Black-tailed Godwit and Common Greenshank and there were both Black-headed and Caspian Gulls over the invisible lake. It was also a good spot to see raptors although all were terribly distant but we notched up Lesser Spotted Eagle, Western Marsh Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, White-tailed Eagle and Eurasian Hobby and with the scope you could perhaps make out a Western Osprey sat on its nest.

In the afternoon we visited the attractive Izubryca Lakes where we picked up various species of waterfowl such as breeding Whooper Swans as well as Gadwall and Great Crested Grebe. There was a Common Sandpiper, plenty of Common and Black Terns, a Eurasian Bittern was booming and a Savi's Warbler was also heard whilst a Great Reed Warbler was far more obliging. Also, in the area were Grey Heron, Common Crane, Hooded Crow, Eurasian Blue Tit and Lesser Whitethroat. At the end of the day we paid another visit to one of the woodpecker sites and enjoyed instantaneous success as soon as we got out of the car for there in front of us was the desired Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker. An evening drive in search of bison drew a blank with that particular creature but we did see two male Hazel Grouse sparring at the side of the road. Dima hit the brakes and a cloud of dust rose up immersing us all and as it subsided, amazingly enough the grouse, so intent on their battle were still there and we watched them until one of the males conceded defeat. During the drive we also saw European Hare, Red Fox, Red and Fallow Deer, Wild Boar, Eurasian Elk and a leader only Forest Dormouse!



*Two male Hazel Grouse sparring by the side of the road in the early evening at Krasny Bor. (Nik Borrow)*

The next day we packed up and some of us saw a singing Marsh Warbler and Eurasian Bullfinch at Dima's place before we had to embark on the long drive back to the airport to pick up the rest of the group that were joining us for the main tour and then onwards for another 270 kilometres to the town of Turov on the Pripyat River for three nights stay. Although this meant wiping the slate clean of bird species and starting all over



again, the long journey gave us some new birds for the tour as a whole including Mute Swan, Northern Shoveler, Grey Partridge, Great Egret, Little Ringed Plover, Ruff, Common Swift, Western Jackdaw, Rook, Common House Martin, Black Redstart, Northern Wheatear and House Sparrow. Our arrival at Turov coincided with rain which meant that any evening activity was not worthwhile so we managed an earlier night and prepared ourselves for the morrow.

From claustrophobic forests to wide open marshes was quite a dramatic change of scenery. Also, there were a few more people about as our hotel was set in the middle of the town. Our day was spent visiting the various lookout points along the river but started at a site where Dima knew of an active Azure Tit nest and as this beautiful little bird was high on the 'wish-lists' of many that is what we decided to target first. After the rain it was a bright, clear morning and we reached the site with high expectations and it wasn't long before one of the pair showed up but it seemed to have other things on its agenda and promptly disappeared leaving us with only tantalising views. There was little for it but to stake out the nest site area and wait. However, what a beautiful place to wait for a Great Grey Shrike flew past and there were colourful Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Golden Oriole and a noisy Eurasian Wryneck on show with both Common Kestrel and Eurasian Tree Sparrow in the area although the sight of Icterine and River Warblers drew more interest! After a short wait one of the pair of Azure Tits left the nest and thereafter was a regular coming and going as they brought food for their young hidden inside the nest. We watched them for as long as we wished and then a nearby Corn Crake that had been calling since we arrived at the spot now became the object of our attentions. No-one was quite prepared for the aggressive response we got from this bird that came out on the path and flaunted itself in front of us. A perfect end to the pre-breakfast session!



*Azure Tit was a most popular addition to the list in the Turov area and we relished in the prolonged views of a pair carrying food to the nest. (Nik Borrow)*



Turov stands on the banks of the Pripyat River itself so there are literally great birds to see on the doorstep and after breakfast we spent time on the meadows and river bank. The main bird to see was Terek Sandpiper, an individual of which we found quickly which was fortuitous as there did not seem to be many easily viewable this year due to the high water levels. Black-tailed Godwits were much in evidence and the numbers of Ruff were impressive and although on passage the males were dressed up in all their finery and certainly not opposed to some excitable lekking behaviour which was a real treat to watch. Other waders included Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Ringed Plover, Temminck's Stint, Common Redshank and Wood Sandpiper and waterfowl included some handsome Garganey as well as a female Northern Pintail, Common Pochard and Tufted Duck. Constantly moving back and forth over the meadows were large numbers of Whiskered and White-winged Terns, looking very smart in their dashing breeding plumage and small numbers of Little Terns frequented the sandy shores. Another species very much in evidence were the Western Yellow Wagtails that appeared to be of two types; Blue-headed and Grey-headed with some odd-looking intermediates as well bearing a resemblance to the type known as '*dombrowskii*' but with varying supercilia, some just showing a dot above the eye. Sue did well to pick up a Short-toed Snake Eagle hovering on the opposite side of the river and other birds seen included Great Cormorant, European Honey Buzzard, Eurasian Collared Dove, Sand Martin, Sedge Warbler, Meadow Pipit and European Serin. Syrian Woodpeckers played hard to get but gradually became more obliging during our stay in this region. In the afternoon we found some Little Gulls at the nearby sewage farm (an obligatory destination on most birding trips!) and in the evening we managed to lure a Spotted Crake out of its hiding place.



*There were a good number of breeding waders on the Turov meadows including Black-tailed Godwit (left) and the desirable Terek Sandpiper (right). (Nik Borrow)*

Our second day in the area was again spent in the meadows and although a rather wet and gloomy end to the day made birding a little difficult we also exploring some flooded forest. A pre-breakfast excursion to a wooded bund produced an immature Northern Goshawk, European Turtle Dove and a particularly obliging Thrush Nightingale. We had heard many since the beginning of the tour but none had been particularly obliging but finally we scored with a bird singing his heart out with no intention to hide or even move from his chosen perch. A male Eurasian Penduline Tit seen well at the end of the session was another wonderful sighting. However, the main target of the morning was to see Greater Spotted Eagle and we were taken to a particular area where they were known to be breeding and we had scarcely arrived when there was one soaring over the woodlands. During our visit we saw at least two birds and also had good views of a Barred Warbler and on the journey, our only Crested Larks of the trip. After lunch some of us went to 'twitch' a trio of Black-necked Grebes that had been found by another group and at the same location were some Dunlin and another Spotted Crake! Rain moved in through the late afternoon and made a woodpecker quest in some flooded forest a bit of a washout although (yet) another White-backed Woodpecker was seen and we found our first Black Stork and Collared Flycatcher of the tour.



The following morning, we were blessed with good weather and today our time was mostly spent in the Prip'yatsky National Park which meant a return to the forest. This park is known by such descriptive names as 'the lungs of Europe' or the 'Belarusian Amazon' but our very brief visit was just a taster and could not do this wilderness area justice. An early morning walk took us into the dense mixed forest interspersed with more open boggy areas which are often the work of the local beavers and the resultant dead trees were the haunt of woodpeckers. Again, the shimmering songs of numerous Wood Warblers greeted us as we entered the dark and dense forest where we coaxed a lovely little Red-breasted Flycatcher down from upper branches. On the edge of an attractive bog with a flush of yellow irises we also got to grips with both Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers.



*We birded in some gorgeous woodland in the Prip'yatsky National Park (left) where plants such as Birds-nest Orchid (right) were growing. (Nik Borrow)*

After breakfast another area of flooded oak woodland was wonderfully birdy and here we found a responsive Middle-spotted Woodpecker, set eyes on a Garden Warbler, scoped a River Warbler sitting high up in the open on a dead snag and studied the local 'northern' forms of Eurasian Nuthatch and Eurasian Treecreeper.

After lunch we had an enforced break as it was going to be a very late night. Due to the very high water levels we had not been able to access the Great Snipe lek which is usually reachable on foot but this year demanded a boat to get us to the right area. Unfortunately, the boat had not been available during the three nights we were staying in Turov and we had been due to change location today but as the boat was only available for us on this particular evening we managed to change the itinerary to visit the Great Snipe lek and then afterwards drive in the night to our next lodge. It was a very fine afternoon and early evening and whilst waiting for the boat we saw a Peregrine Falcon dashing along the river. The boat to carry us the short distance along the river was very small and could hold no more than four people at a time so we were ferried to a point where we could access the lek site and eventually all of us were in situ. It was still quite early and there was good daylight and already the bizarre twittering, clicking, crackling, undulating whining (and 'wibbling' noises could be heard from individuals buried deep in the long grass. Eventually the top of one individual's head could be seen and then a bit more and a bit more until we were seeing pretty much all of



some of the birds. Others were flying all around us, in and out from the lek so that one almost didn't know where to look! With patience the unique display ritual could be seen with the male clicking his bill, puffing up his chest feathers whilst stretching up and throwing back his head and ending with a leap to show off the wing markings and a flash of white from the outer tail feathers. The midges and mosquitoes did their best to persuade us to leave but we stayed on as late as we could, watching their antics as the sun was setting. It was now simply a case of a quick meal and then driving through the night to get to our next lodge. The bridge crossing the Pripyat River was broken and being repaired and a traffic jam there did not aid our plight and we finally got to our next lodge on the banks of the river at a quarter after midnight tired but happy.



*Our experience at the Great Snipe lek was well worth it with great views of at least 25 individuals. (left, Rainer Ertel, right Nik Borrow)*

During our full day in the Doroshevichy area we spent some time in the morning birding the wide open agricultural land that lies north of the park. Here on the lookout for raptors, we spent a long time scanning the skies and as a reward managed views of Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Black Kite and some displaying Lesser Spotted Eagles.



*A relaxing boat trip along the Pripyat River was a wonderful way to view the forest and we also had fantastic views of White-tailed Eagle (left Nik Borrow) and Eurasian Beaver (right Hector Galley)*



In the afternoon a boat trip was planned along the river and although there was little in the way of exposed muddy banks due to the high water levels it was still a very pleasant way to view the forest. Normally there would have been numbers of Terek Sandpipers along the way but we just had to make do with one. We noted several Common Kingfishers and some Caspian Gulls but the main highlights of the excursion were a close up encounter with a White-tailed Eagle and an excellent look at a Eurasian Beaver that hauled up on the bank and then chose to swim across the river right next to the boat.

From Doroshevichy we spent some pleasant hours at the Beloe (or Bielaje) fish farm which is a BirdLife International IBA. The main reason for the visit was to see some of the Smew that breed here. We saw at least 12 birds including fine males but they were quite wary and kept their distance. However, for Dima a pair of Red-crested Pochard were possibly more interesting as it is not a common bird in Belarus and as we watched them copulating perhaps next time there will be a few more! A Eurasian Bittern was booming from the reedbeds and we also saw Whooper Swan, Little and Great Crested Grebes, Eurasian Coot and Mew Gull.



*Two amazing birds in the same day! The grey ghost of the forest, a female Great Grey Owl (left) and the rare and fast disappearing Aquatic Warbler (right). (Nik Borrow)*

We continued our journey eastwards and reached the Vygonoshansky Reserve in the late afternoon just as it started to rain. We had come to this place for one major bird; the enormous Great Grey Owl. It had been touch-and-go whether or not we would manage to see this species as in Belarus they live in the mixed alder and pine forested bogs and prey on *hydrophilus* vole species but this year the vole population had crashed and all known nests of the owls had failed. For the past two days the adult birds from the last two failed nests had totally disappeared but that morning Dima got a message from the rangers that monitor the birds that a female had been found by the nest, hence our visit. We parked the cars and had to walk about a kilometre through the rain and mosquito filled forest via three rangers who relayed us to the site. Fortunately, the rain was not too heavy but the poor owl was beginning to look a bit soggy when we arrived. It initially stared at us with its tiny piercing yellow eyes emphasised by the concentric circles that fill the facial disc but otherwise seemed unconcerned by our presence and clamorous attentions. Seeing this stunning creature in its natural

setting and so close was more than we could have hoped for and we had ample time to study the bird well. With much relief we returned to the vehicles and headed further east to the town of Biaroza and the nearby Sporovsky Reserve for one more iconic species the stripy Aquatic Warbler. There was little left of the day but we managed to get there in time and get to see a singing bird before dusk.

Of course, just to get a brief look at an Aquatic Warbler was not enough so we returned to the reserve the following morning for more looks. The species is classified as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife International as this sedge fen specialist is believed to be "suffering a continuing decline at a moderately rapid rate following a major decline caused by habitat destruction during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century". Belarus probably has the biggest population of this species with an estimated 2,9668-5,548 singing males in 2013. The morning sun was just at the right angle for viewing this lovely bird and once again we enjoyed some close views of the same showy, singing bird and also found a second more secretive individual. The views were so good that we did not need to search for more! Another target bird was also added to the list in the form of several stunning Citrine Wagtails including some gorgeous lemon-yellow males. A Woodlark was song-fighting over a patch of forest by the marsh and we crossed a river via a hand-pulled ferry to a rather dilapidated boardwalk where we found yet another Spotted Crake sunning itself. A male Bearded Reedling only allowed brief flight views but we saw pretty 'white-spotted' Bluethroats well and had amazingly close views of a showy Savi's Warbler.



*Small numbers of Citrine Wagtail (left) and a singing Savi's Warbler (right) were seen at Sporovsky Reserve. (Nik Borrow)*

Nearby at the Sialiec fish farm we had special permission to enter and found a pair of Common Stonechat, a write in for our list and another uncommon and recent arrival in Belarus. Eurasian Wigeon was added to the tally and a flock of 50+ Little Gulls was an impressive gathering and there were a number of White-tailed Eagles floating around. Highlight of the visit however was probably watching a pair of Eurasian Penduline Tits building their very comfy looking nest in a strong wind. Despite being blown here, there and everywhere they managed to cling on and construct this intricate structure.



Leaving the plains, marshes and fish ponds behind we headed back to the forest and our final port of call; the truly impressive forests of Belovezhskaya Puscha for our final two nights stay. We had time to make an evening excursion in search of European Bison but drew a blank. However, the evening was hardly a failure for we were not at all prepared for what was our second Great Grey Owl of the trip! This one was not at a nest site but chanced upon out hunting and we had fantastic views of this impressive bird until darkness fell and the woodcock started roding over our heads.

Our final day was spent inside the Belovezhskaya Puscha National Park which is a preserved part of the forest that is known as Bialowieza on the Polish side of the border and contains a large population of European Bison or Wisent, an animal that was brought back from the brink of extinction after it was exterminated in the wild in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. From specimens kept alive in captivity a population was raised that has now been reintroduced to a number of European countries and in Belarus in particular this magnificent species seems to be doing very well.

We began our day at some flooded forest in a quest to add Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker for the main group but sadly it was not to be and we could only assume that the birds were too busy with nests and youngsters to show themselves to us birders! Whilst making these efforts we did add Green Woodpecker to the list and also managed repeated views of Black, White-backed and Lesser, Middle and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, so it wasn't all bad! Some great views of European Crested Tit were obtained but Dima was the only person to see a Willow Tit leave its nest hole. Stock Dove was heard and seen by some and in the impressive ancient oak grove we managed views of Common Firecrest and more Red-breasted Flycatchers. Our local forest ranger had a Long-eared Owl nesting in a box in his garden and we were taken to see it but returned in the late afternoon and early evening to the forest on our bison quest. A Spotted Nutcracker was found en route and like our previous bird it stayed in the very tops of the trees for good views.



*Part of the large herd of 53 European Bison that had come out of the forest to graze in the early evening. (Nik Borrow)*

As the end of the day was fast approaching we now made a bee-line for the best place to see the bison as they emerged from the depths of the forest to graze in the open meadows. Our information was spot-on for soon enough we came across a large herd of at least 53 animals. They were wary but we got out of the vehicles slowly, taking care not to slam the doors or make unnecessary noise and after some minutes the herd became used to our presence and returned to their evening meal. This was a wonderful grand finale to the tour but we were not expecting the encore which followed shortly after. Just as it was getting dark Dima stopped in an unremarkable spot in the woods and began to whistle Eurasian Pygmy Owl and almost immediately a bird responded. This individual appeared to be very territorial and its aggressive behaviour led to some terrific views and as if this wasn't enough soon after we found ourselves watching a European

Nightjar wing-clapping over our heads and churring into the still night. It seemed that the tour had come full circle and we returned to the hotel very satisfied with this marvellous sequence of events.

The long journey back to Minsk the next morning was uneventful and the hours passed very quickly as we sped along the new highway back to the airport surrounded by forest. This had been a remarkable trip with some wonderful encounters of some iconic eastern European birds that will stick in our memories for years to come. If Belarus is not on your radar then it certainly should be for here one can slip back through time in comfort and get an idea how this part of Europe once was. The forests and marshes have some superb birding and mammal-watching possibilities and they are there waiting for you. Thanks to Dima Shamovich for his hard work in making this tour such an enjoyable one!



*Eurasian Pygmy Owl – the ‘Grand Finale’ to our exciting Belarus tour! (Nik Borrow)*





*The views of Corn Crake were unbeatable and almost unbelievable during this tour. (Nik Borrow)*

## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). IOC World Bird Names. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

**CR** = Critical, **E** = Endangered, **V** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near Threatened, **DD** = Data Deficient.

## BIRDS

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor* A few scattered sightings but 100+ at Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus* Breeding birds at Krasny Bor and 24+ at Beloe (Bielaje) Fish Farm.

**Garganey** *Spatula querquedula* A nest found at Krasny Bor and commonly encountered during the main tour.

**Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata* Most common in the Turov area.

**Gadwall** *Mareca strepera*. Regularly encountered but most numerous at Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Mareca penelope* 5 at Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta* A female was seen by some at Turov Meadows.

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* Small numbers on lakes at Krasny Bor and a male at Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* A copulating pair was seen at Beloe (Bielaje) Fish Farm.

**Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina* Most numerous at Turov Sewage Works with 21 counted.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* Seen at Turov and the various fish farms.

**Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* Regularly encountered throughout the trip.

**Smew** *Mergellus albellus* At least 12 were counted with at least 7 fine males.

**Hazel Grouse** *Tetrastes bonasia* 3 flight views and a wonderful encounter with 2 sparring males at Krasny Bor.

**Western Capercaillie** *Tetrao urogallus* 3 males were flushed at Krasny Bor and 1 of these showed well.

**Black Grouse** *Lyrurus tetrix* A total of 4 males were seen at Krasny Bor.



*A super male Black Grouse flew right past us at Krasny Bor. (Rainer Ertel)*

**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix* A pair for some as we drove south from Minsk.

**Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* (H) Heard only at Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* A pair at Beloe (Bielaje) Fish Farm.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* Scattered sightings at various wetlands.

**Black-necked Grebe (Eared G)** *Podiceps nigricollis* 3 were seen at Turov.

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* Small numbers seen from Turov onwards.

**White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia* Commonly seen as if every village should have at least one pair.

**Eurasian Bittern (Great B)** *Botaurus stellaris* (H) Heard booming at Krasny Bor and Beloe (Bielaje) Fish Farm.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* Mostly seen during the main tour.

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba* Seen regularly during the main tour.

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* Just small numbers seen during the main tour.

**Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* A distant bird on a nest at Krasny Bor.

**European Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* A total of 12 seen during the tour.

**Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* 2 sightings but everyone saw the bird at Turov.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Clanga pomarina* At least 7 birds seen during the tour.

**Greater Spotted Eagle** *Clanga clanga* 2 birds seen in flight at a known site near Turov.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* Just 2 sightings during the main tour.

**Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis* 4 sightings during the tour.

**Western Marsh Harrier (Eurasian M H)** *Circus aeruginosus* Commonly encountered throughout the tour.

**Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus* A total of 8 sightings during the tour.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* 4 were seen in the Doroshevichy area.

**White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* Scattered sightings and a memorable encounter on the Pripyat River.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* Small numbers seen almost daily throughout the tour.

**Water Rail (European W R)** *Rallus aquaticus* (H) Heard at Turov.

**Corn Crane** *Crex crex* Phenomenal views near Turov.

**Little Crane** *Porzana parva* (H) Heard by Dima and Rainer at Krasny Bor.

**Spotted Crane** *Porzana porzana* 2 seen at Turov and 1 at Sporovsky Reserve.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* (H) Heard only at Turov.

**Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra* Only numerous at Beloe (Bielaje) Fish Farm.



**Common Crane** *Grus grus* Only small numbers seen.

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* Only a couple seen at Turov.

**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* Commonly seen throughout the tour.

**Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* Just a few birds seen at Turov.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* Small numbers seen in the Turov area.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* At least 5 seen on the Krasny Bor raised bog.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* Good numbers seen in the Turov area and on the Krasny Bor raised bog.

**Ruff** *Calidris pugnax* Still plenty of migrants in stunning breeding attire and occasionally lekking at Turov.

**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* 4 sightings during the tour between Turov and Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* Small numbers at Turov and 1 at Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Eurasian Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* Often seen 'roding' in the evening at widespread localities.

**Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* At least 25 birds seen at the busy lek at Turov. A trip highlight!

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* Widespread sightings throughout and much 'drumming' noted.

**Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* Due to high water levels only 4 were seen during our time on the Pripyat River.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* Most numerous during visits to the various fish farms.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* Seen widely here on their breeding grounds and one nest found.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*. The meadows at Turov seemed to be their stronghold.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* Large numbers in the Turov area.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* Just 1 seen on the Krasny Bor raised bog.

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* Common in suitable habitat.

**Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus* 3 at Turov Sewage Works and 50+ at Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Mew Gull (Common G)** *Larus [canus] canus* Just 3 at Beloe (Bielaje) Fish Farm.

**Caspian Gull** *Larus cachinnans* Seen at many wetland areas from Krasny Bor to Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons* Easily seen in the Turov area and at Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* Commonly encountered at the various wetlands.

**Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* Easily seen in the Turov area and at Beloe (Bielaje) Fish Farm.



Breeding plumage Little Gull (left) and Whiskered Tern (right) were seen well in the Turov area. (Nik Borrow)

**White-winged Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* Many of these handsome birds were seen in the Turov area.

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* Sightings from Krasny Bor to Beloe (Bielaje) Fish Farm.

**Rock Dove (introduced)** *Columba livia* Probably entirely domesticated birds.

**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* Heard by all and seen by some in Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* Small numbers seen throughout.

**European Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur* Just 4 sightings from Turov to Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* Small numbers, usually associated with villages.

**Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* Heard more than seen but pleasingly common throughout the tour.

**Tawny Owl** *Strix aluco* (H) Heard only at Krasny Bor and Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Ural Owl** *Strix uralensis* Shadowy flight views and a wonderful female at the nest site at Krasny Bor.

**Great Grey Owl** *Strix nebulosa* A female in Vygonoshansky and a male hunting at Belovezhskaya Puscha.  
**Eurasian Pygmy Owl** *Glaucidium passerinum* 1 at Krasny Bor and superb views at Belovezhskaya Puscha.  
**Boreal Owl (Tengmalm's O)** *Aegolius funereus*. 1 in its Black Woodpecker nest hole at Krasny Bor.  
**Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus*. 1 in a nestbox at Belovezhskaya Puscha.  
**European Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus*. Seen well at Krasny Bor and at Belovezhskaya Puscha.



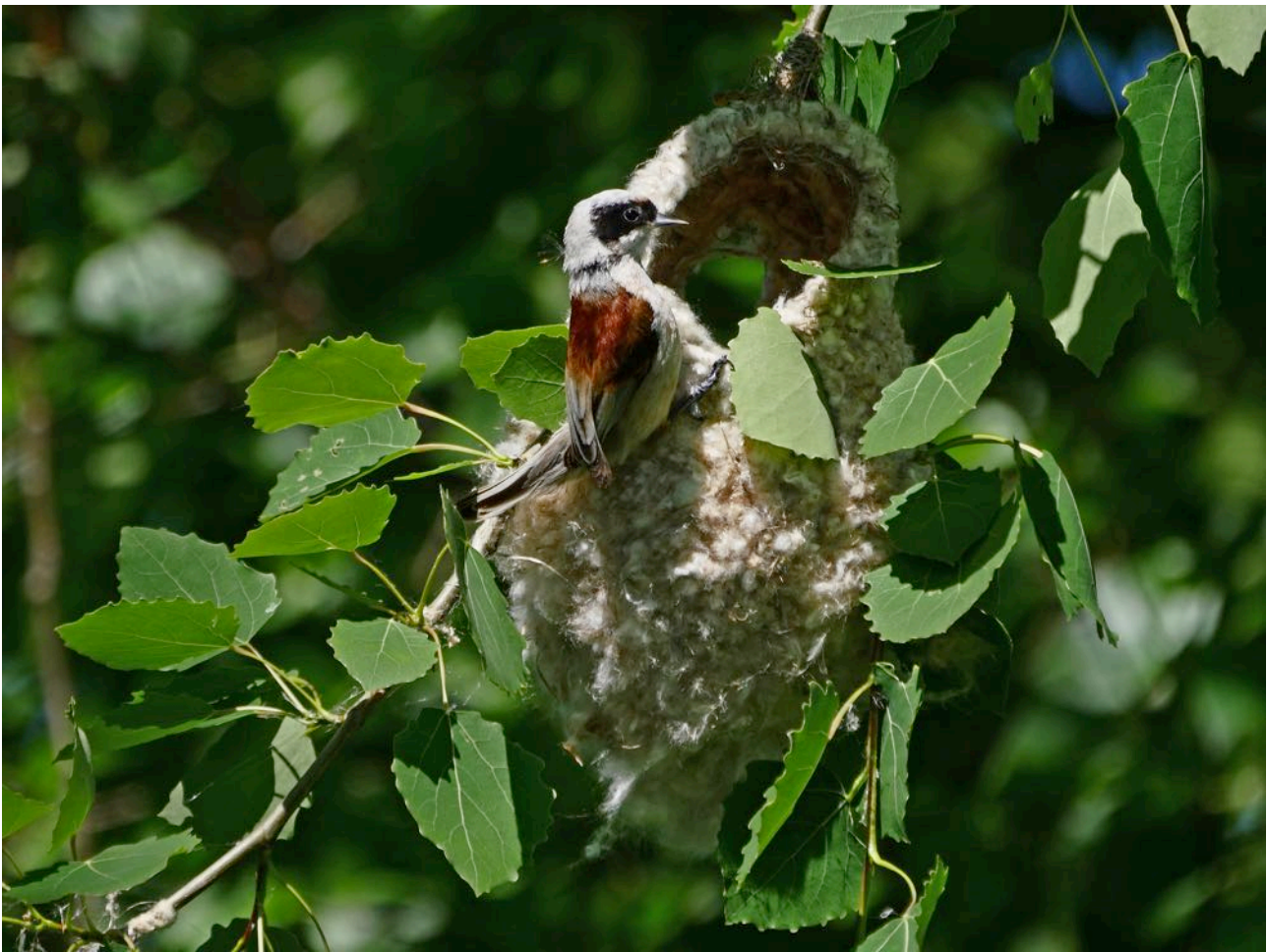
This European Nightjar (left) was seen on the roads of Krasny Bor at night. A female Syrian Woodpecker (right) at Turov. (Nik Borrow)

**Common Swift** *Apus apus* Commonly encountered during the main tour.  
**Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* 4 seen on the Pripyat River.  
**Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* 5 seen and others heard during the main tour.  
**Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla* A total of 7 seen and others heard.  
**Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picoides tridactylus* Just 1 male seen well at Krasny Bor.  
**Middle Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocoptes medius* Just 5 seen during the main tour.  
**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** *Dryobates minor* Single males were seen at Krasny Bor and Belovezhskaya Puscha.  
**Syrian Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos syriacus* Small numbers seen in the Turov area.  
**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* Scattered sightings, seemed to prefer pine forest.  
**White-backed Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos leucotos* Easily seen with 5 sightings during the tour.  
**Black Woodpecker** *Dryocopus martius* 6 seen and others heard during the tour.  
**European Green Woodpecker** *Picus canus*. 1 male seen at Belovezhskaya Puscha.  
**Grey-headed Woodpecker** *Picus canus* Just 2 seen in the Pripyatsky National Park.  
**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* Just 1 at Turov.  
**Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*. 3 sightings but never for everyone at any given time!  
**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* 1 was seen flying down the Pripyat River.  
**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* Regularly seen in small numbers throughout the tour.  
**Great Grey Shrike (Northern S)** *Lanius excubitor* 5 seen during the main tour.  
**Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* Small numbers seen and heard from Krasny Bor to Doroshevichy.  
**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* Scattered sightings throughout the tour.  
**Eurasian Magpie** *Pica pica* Commonly encountered throughout the tour.  
**Spotted Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* Singletons at Krasny Bor and Belovezhskaya Puscha.  
**Western Jackdaw** *Coloeus monedula* Commonly seen, mostly on the main tour.  
**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* Commonly seen on the main tour.  
**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix* Commonly seen from Krasny Bor to Doroshevichy.  
**Northern Raven** *Corvus corax* Regularly encountered throughout the tour.  
**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* Only seen at Krasny Bor and Belovezhskaya Puscha.  
**European Crested Tit** *Lophophanes cristatus* 3 seen well at Belovezhskaya Puscha.  
**Marsh Tit** *Poecile palustris* A pair at Krasny Bor.  
**Willow Tit** *Poecile montanus* (LO) Only Dima saw the bird leaving a nest at Belovezhskaya Puscha.  
**Eurasian Blue Tit (European B T)** *Cyanistes caeruleus* Small numbers noted throughout.  
**Azure Tit** *Cyanistes cyanus* A trip highlight was the pair watched taking food to the nest near Turov.



**Great Tit** *Parus major* Small numbers noted throughout.

**Eurasian Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* A male at Turov and a pair nest-building at Sialiec Fish Farm.



A male Eurasian Penduline Tit building his nest at Sialiec Fish Farm. (Nik Borrow)

**Bearded Reedling** *Panurus biarmicus* A male seen in flight at Sporovsky Reserve.

**Woodlark** *Lullula arborea* Sweetly singing birds seen at Krasny Bor and Sporovsky Reserve.

**Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* Regular sightings in farmland throughout the tour.

**Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata* Just 2 seen in farmland near Turov.

**Sand Martin (Bank Swallow)** *Riparia riparia* Numerous and nesting in the sandy banks of the Pripjat River.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* Common to very common throughout the tour.

**Common House Martin** *Delichon urbicum* Common to very common mainly during the main tour.

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* Heard far more often than it was seen throughout.

**Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* Less common than the previous species.

**Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* The voice of the forests!

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (H) 1 heard at Krasny Bor but promptly disappeared.

**Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Widespread sightings and easily seen.

**Aquatic Warbler** *Acrocephalus paludicola* Excellent views of 2 at Sporovsky Reserve.

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* Commonly encountered mostly during the main tour.

**Eurasian Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* (H) Remarkably uncommon and only heard a few times.

**Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris* 3 sightings at Krasny Bor, Doroshevichy and Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Icterine Warbler** *Hippolais icterina* Seen and heard throughout but most common in the Turov area.

**Common Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia* Seen by some at Sporovsky Reserve and heard elsewhere.

**River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis* Seen well particularly in the Pripjatsky NP at the tops of a bare tree!

**Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides* Superb views at Sporovsky Reserve and heard at Krasny Bor.

**Eurasian Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* Most numerous at Krasny Bor with only few on the main tour.

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* Heard more than seen, mostly during the main tour.

**Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria* At least 8 birds seen during the main tour.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* Small numbers noted, mostly during the main tour.

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* Mostly noted in the Turov area.

**Common Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapilla* 1 seen well at Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* (H) Only heard at Krasny Bor and Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* (H) Only heard at Krasny Bor and Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*. Sightings in Pripyatsky and Belovezhskaya Puscha National Parks.

**Eurasian Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris* Sightings in Pripyatsky and Belovezhskaya Puscha National Parks.

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* Common everywhere!

**Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula* Most numerous at Krasny Bor and sparse during the main tour.

**Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* Fairly common at most localities.

**Redwing** *Turdus iliacus* 1 seen well at Krasny Bor and another heard at Turov.

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos* Scattered sightings throughout the tour.

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* Small numbers at Krasny Bor and 1 at Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* Small numbers noted throughout but nowhere common.

**European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* Several seen at Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica* Everybody saw the showy birds at Sporovsky Reserve.

**Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* Heard almost everywhere and seen well in the Turov area.

**European Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca* Most numerous at Krasny Bor but also seen during the main tour.

**Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* Noted in Pripyatsky and Belovezhskaya Puscha National Parks.

**Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* Red breasted males at Krasny Bor, Pripyatsky and Belovezhskaya Puscha.



Barred Warbler (left) and a male Red-breasted Flycatcher (right). (Nik Borrow)

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* Often seen around villages or hotel gardens!

**Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* 1 male at Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* A bird of the meadows and agricultural land.

**European Stonechat.** *Saxicola rubicola* A pair at Sialiec Fish Farm.

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* 3 sightings of singles or pairs on the main tour.

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* Present near human habitation.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* More common than the previous species but only on the main tour.

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* Many went subspecifically identified but were either of the following:

**Blue-headed Wagtail** *Motacilla [flava] flava*

**Grey-headed Wagtail** *Motacilla [flava] thunbergi* Possibly more common but mainly hybrids or *dombrowskii* types.



**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* Beautiful males seen well at Sporovsky Reserve.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla [alba] alba* A familiar species, seen daily.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*. Scattered sightings during the main tour but easily seen at Sporovsky Reserve.

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* Very common at Krasny Bor but heard more than seen and a few on the main tour.

**Common Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* Very common throughout.

**Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Small numbers seen throughout the tour.

**Eurasian Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (NL) 1 was seen by some at Dima's Lodge.

**Common Rosefinch (Scarlet R)** *Carpodacus erythrinus* Seen or more often heard most days.

**European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris* Small numbers seen throughout.

**Common Linnet** *Linaria cannabina* Scattered sightings throughout the main tour.

**Red Crossbill (Common C)** *Loxia curvirostra* (H, NL) Rainer heard this bird at Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* Scattered sightings throughout.

**European Serin** *Serinus serinus* A few sightings during the main tour around villages and in Turov.

**Eurasian Siskin** *Spinus spinus* Only seen during the pre-extension.

**Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra* 1 was seen during the drive west.

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citronella* Seen daily.

**Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus* Present in all suitable habitat.



*Turov birders! (Nik Borrow)*

## **MAMMALS**

**European Hare (Brown H)** *Lepus europaeus* A few sightings in agricultural land.

**Mountain Hare** *Lepus timidus* 2 sightings at Krasny Bor.

**Southern White-breasted Hedgehog (Eastern H)** *Erinaceus concolor* 1 for some at night en route to Doroshevichy.

**Eurasian Beaver** *Castor fiber* 1 at Krasny Bor and 2 during the Pripyat River cruise.

**Forest Dormouse** *Dryomys nitedula* (LO) 1 for Nik at Krasny Bor.

**Eurasian Red Squirrel (Red S)** *Sciurus vulgaris* (NL) 1 for Peter and Diane at Green Park Hotel.

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* 5 scattered sightings.

**European Pine Marten** *Martes martes* (NL). 1 for Hector at night at Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**Wild Boar (Wild B)** *Sus scrofa* 10 one evening at Krasny Bor.

**Eurasian Elk (Elk)** *Alces alces* 3 sightings at Krasny Bor.



**Common Fallow Deer *Dama dama*** Good numbers seen at Krasny Bor.

**European Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*** Small numbers seen during the main tour.

**Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*** Small numbers at Krasny Bor but most common at Belovezhskaya Puscha.

**European Bison *Bison bonasus*.** A large herd of 53 animals was counted at Belovezhskaya Puscha.



left to right: Pool Frog (*Pelophylax lessonae*), Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*), Great Capricorn Beetle (*Cerambyx cerdo*), Fire-bellied toad (*Bombina bombina*), Turov. (Nik Borrow)