

BELARUS



(The new eastern European hotspot)

Thursday 21st April – Friday 29th April 2011



If you fancy something different from the usual European destinations then Belarus is **THE** new hotspot in Europe. Situated on the eastern border of Poland with which it shares many similarities, this is a land of ancient primeval forests, flower-filled meadows and rushing rivers, and is home to the largest marshlands in Europe. It is a wild country where there is hardly any traffic on the roads and the countryside is so beautifully unspoilt it is no wonder there is a wealth of birdlife waiting to be discovered. We have timed our visit in the mid-Spring when the magnificent forests are bathed in a blanket of fresh green leaves, summer visitors are newly arrived and the country vibrates to their song. Pride of place and high on everyone's wish-list is the stunning little Azure Tit, here in its only location within Europe. We will also target a superb suite of woodpeckers and owls which include Grey-headed, Black, Three-toed and White-backed Woodpeckers, as well as the mighty Great Grey,

Ural, Pygmy, & Tengmalm's Owls. The vast marshes hold a healthy population of Great Snipe, both Terek and Marsh Sandpipers, Little and Spotted Crakes and huge White-tailed Eagles patrol overhead, whilst flocks of recently arrived White-winged and Black Terns add a splash of the exotic to proceedings. Add to this all of the more regular eastern European breeding birds and we're sure of an exciting time in Belarus!

TARGETS:

- Azure Tit
- Great Snipe
- Three-toed Woodpecker
- Hazel Grouse
- Great Grey Owl
- Pygmy Owl
- Terek Sandpiper
- Marsh Sandpiper
- White-tailed Eagle
- Lesser Spotted Eagle
- Collared Flycatcher
- Thrush Nightingale
- Grey-headed Woodpecker
- White-backed Woodpecker
- Little Crake
- Smew

Our Tour Itinerary:

Days 1- 2 Minsk - Sporovo Reserve

After landing at Warsaw airport we will cross the Polish border and drive into Belarus, where we head to the superb Sporovo Reserve for a 2 night stay. Our excellently situated hotel is close to a forest which is good for Great Grey Owl and we hope we can admire this magnificent species. This area also provides a fantastic introduction to a wide variety of species with Little and Spotted Crakes present in some nearby marshes, Corncrakes should be proclaiming their territories in the verdant meadows, and there are also Northern

Goshawk, Hen and Montagu's Harriers, Great Grey Shrike, Golden Oriole, Penduline and Bearded Tits, Citrine Wagtail and Common Rosefinch all being quite common here.

Days 3 - 6 Pripyatski National Park

Our next base will be at a comfortable hotel in Turov for 4 nights and is located on the banks of a river near the famous Pripyatskiy National Park. Several sought-after shorebirds such as Great Snipe, and both Terek and



Marsh Sandpipers breed on the banks of the untamed Pripyat river that floods vast areas of meadows and forests in Spring. On at least one evening we will stake-out the meadows near our hotel which often produce spectacular gatherings of hundreds of migrating Black-tailed Godwits and Ruff including many extremely colourful males, and elegant Spotted Redshanks are also found in good numbers. Surely one of the strongest candidates for bird of the trip will be the stunning Azure Tit and Belarus is the only place in Europe where we have good chances to find this wonderful little bird in its breeding habitat along the riparian willow forests of the Pripyat river. So we'll spend plenty of time searching for this key species of course! There are also ancient Oak, Spruce and Birch forests to explore where some easy walks can produce Eurasian Wryneck, Black, Middle, Three-toed and White-backed Woodpeckers, Golden Oriole, Collared and Red-breasted Flycatchers, Hawfinch, and Short-toed Treecreeper. Hopefully, Thrush Nightingales will have just arrived, whilst Common Crane, Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Bluethroats and Citrine Wagtail

are relatively easy to see in this magic place. We also visit the nearby fishponds where Red-necked Grebe, Whooper Swan, Smew, Eurasian Bittern and White-tailed Eagles breed, and is also a great place for migrating waders as well.

Days 7 - 8 Belovezhskaya Pushcha

Our last base will be in the middle of the famous World Heritage Site, the Belovezhskaya Pushcha ancient forest. We will have easy walks amidst ancient trees and focus on species we might have missed earlier. These fairy tale woods hold breeding Great Grey, Ural, Eagle, Pygmy and Tengmalm's Owls, all the European woodpeckers, Crested Tit, Red-breasted and Collared Flycatchers and Common Crossbill. Along Lake Liadskoye Whooper Swan, Wood Sandpiper and both Savi's and River Warblers occur. The area is pretty good for raptors with White-tailed, Short-toed and Greater Spotted Eagles, European Honey Buzzard, Northern Goshawk, and Hen and Montagu's Harrier all present. As in most of the ancient forests we visit there are Lynx, Elk, Wild Boar and European Bison all present but we would count ourselves very fortunate indeed to catch a glimpse of them.



Day 9 End of Tour

This morning we will drive to Warsaw airport and fly back home after an incredible and bird-filled tour.

Leader: Nick Bray and local guides

Tour Price: £1295.00 per person

Single supplement: £150.00 **Deposit:** £200.00

Group size: Minimum for tour to go ahead 5 and maximum 10 with 2 leaders.

Included in cost: Accommodation in twin rooms en-suite, all meals including picnic lunches where necessary and bottled water, all entrance fees to National Parks, transport throughout in air-conditioned coach and services of the leaders.

Not included: International flight (approx £250), departure tax, visa fee (currently £75), insurance, drinks, tips and items of a personal nature.

Flight information: If travelling from the U.K please note that you need to arrive in Warsaw by midday of Thursday 21st April. Departure should be from Warsaw in the afternoon of Friday 29th April. Please contact our agent Shane Wheatley at Dial-a-Flight on 01732 591470 or 01732 593196 for the best up-to-date flights that you can book to your requirements. Once the tour is a guaranteed departure you will be contacted and given details of the relevant flight options.

Accommodation: Is of a generally good and comfortable standard in en-suite rooms throughout the tour. We are using the best accommodation available closest to the birding sites to utilise our time to best effect.

Tour Code: This is a relatively easy birding tour where some early starts and late finishes can be expected. Please be aware that any observation of owls is not guaranteed, although our local guides usually have them staked out before our arrival. Most of our birding walks will be of a usual slow pace and are quite easy along well worn paths and trails from between 2km – 5kms. The weather is variable at this time of year and we can expect a few light showers, as well as (hopefully) some fine, sunny days. It can be a little cool in the early morning and late evening, so a fleece will be quite handy.

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