



POLAND: BEST OF EASTERN EUROPE

25 APRIL – 10 MAY 2023



*We could find the striking **Spotted Nutcracker** at several locations on our Poland tour.*

In this Poland: Best of Eastern Europe tour, we will visit the best birding locations that eastern and southern Poland have to offer, which we actually rate as some of the best birdwatching in the whole of Europe. During this exciting small group tour, we will explore vast river floodplains with bird-rich marshes, stunning primeval ancient woodlands, spectacular forested mountains and high peaks, and small-scale farmland, all dotted with quaint traditional villages that combine to give the feeling of stepping back in time several hundred years. We will spend time in and around these quiet, charming villages, where the wildlife will be right on our doorstep, adding to the fantastic experience we will have in Poland. We are sure you will love this tour as much as we do!

Poland is one of *the* best countries for birding in Europe, ranking as one of our favorite destinations, and for good reason! Following International Ornithological Congress (IOC) taxonomy (v10.2 in December 2020) the bird list of Poland stands at a whopping **471 species**, with a good number of these being highly sought-after by world birders. Poland is the best country in the world for seeing the rare **Aquatic Warbler** and **Great Snipe**, along with the possibility of seeing most of Europe's woodpeckers. Throw in a decent mix of owls, some amazing raptors, plenty of shorebirds, gorgeous flycatchers, the chance of **Wallcreeper**, some very special warblers, as well as some excellent migrants, this destination should be very high on the list of 'must see' places.



***Aquatic Warbler** is considered globally Vulnerable (BirdLife International), and eastern Poland is one of the best places in the world to see it.*

Our tour will start in Warsaw in central Poland before heading east towards the Belarus border. Here we will explore some of the most incredible marshland in Europe (Biebrza National Park), before delving into an ancient arboreal world (Białowieża Forest), steeped in a fascinating natural

history and a tragic human one (the reminders of World War Two are never too far away in this part of the world and are poignant reminders of past atrocities). We will then move south, following the Ukraine border until we eventually reach the Slovakia border. We will end up in the remote southeast of Poland for what is sure to be a thrilling time in an area not visited by many birders at Low Beskids (Magurski National Park), offering the chance for exciting discoveries. Finally, we will head west along the Slovakia border where we will visit the high-elevation zone of the glorious Tatra Mountains (Tatrzański National Park), and some nearby wetlands, before ending the tour in historic Krakow.

The landscape of Poland is an interesting mosaic of different habitats; we can be birding in forest, reach a small marshland, then some agricultural land (arable, pastoral, or even fishponds), and then a river floodplain, all in a small area which all result in different species. Each area we will visit has been selected due to it holding certain key species that are not found anywhere else on our tour route, while some species will be found across multiple locations. Even the common birds in Poland will be exciting for visiting birders, such as **Black Redstart**, **Eurasian Blue Tit**, **Hawfinch**, **Fieldfare**, **White Wagtail**, **Eurasian Goldfinch**, and **Common Rosefinch**.



***Black Redstart** is a rather spectacular, yet common, garden bird in Poland!*

After arriving in the capital city of Warsaw we drive east and begin our tour in the world-famous Biebrza National Park. This extensive area of marshland around the Biebrza River is home to nearly 180 breeding species of birds in an average year and this diversity will give us some sensational experiences with the birds of the region. Some of the key highlights here include **Great Snipe**, **Aquatic Warbler**, **Black Stork**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Greater Spotted Eagle**, **Montagu's Harrier**, **White winged Tern**, and **Whiskered Tern**.

Spring in the area is an absolute festival of birdlife and every reedbed, bush, meadow, and riverbank is a wall of sound. While here we will target usually secretive warblers such as **Common Grasshopper Warbler**, **Savi's Warbler**, and **River Warbler**, all giving their presence away by their distinctive songs. Biebrza is home to other stunning passerines too, including **Citrine Wagtail**, **Ortolan Bunting**, **Bluethroat**, **Eurasian Penduline Tit**, and **Thrush Nightingale**.

The Biebrza National Park is not just a vast expanse of marshes however, as it also includes some patches of ancient forest, especially to the south of the river. Here we will search for **Black Woodpecker** and **White-backed Woodpecker**, two of the many woodpecker species we can find on the tour.



White-backed Woodpecker is an incredibly range-restricted species in Poland, with populations limited to the extreme south and east of the country.

After exploring the open spaces of the marshes, we will move to the ancient Białowieża Forest National Park. This area is one of the last remaining areas of the primeval forest which once stretched across much of Europe.

While in Białowieża we will focus on targeting the rest of Poland's many woodpeckers (other than **Syrian Woodpecker**, which is not reliably found here – but we have a spot for that later in the tour!) including **Grey-headed Woodpecker** and **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker**. Other key species of this beautiful forest include **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, **Collared Flycatcher**, **Hazel Grouse**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Eurasian Pygmy Owl**, **European Nightjar**, **Northern Goshawk**, **Hawfinch**, **Barred Warbler**, and **Icterine Warbler**.

During our stay here we will also have a short break from forest landscapes and visit Siemianówka Reservoir. This is an excellent spot for waterbirds including **Garganey, Great (White) Egret, Black Tern, White-tailed Eagle, Citrine Wagtail, and Lesser Spotted Eagle.**

From Białowieża we head south to the upland region of Roztocze on the border with Ukraine. This beautiful area is on the edge of the European steppe belt which runs through eastern central Europe and its avifauna reflects this habitat with plenty of new birds available for our tour here.

The real highlight of the area is the number of raptor species to be found. There are several scarcer species included in the main itinerary, but more common species here include **Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Western Marsh Harrier, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Montagu's Harrier, Eurasian Hobby, and Red-footed Falcon.** It is also the only area in Poland where you can find **Short-toed Snake Eagle** and we will spend time looking for this spectacular snake-eater here.

We will explore the vast meadows and famed fishponds of this region in search of other species which are found nowhere else in Poland, including **Ferruginous Duck, European Bee-eater, and Little Owl.** In these habitats we also hope to come across other exciting species like **Eurasian Dotterel, Black Stork, Red-backed Shrike, Great Grey Shrike, Syrian Woodpecker** (this species colonized the rest of Poland from the Roztocze area which is its stronghold), **Purple Heron, Red-necked Grebe, and Caspian Gull.**



*Roztocze is the only place in Poland where **European Bee-eater** breeds, though we may see migrating birds elsewhere during the tour.*

The penultimate destination of our comprehensive Poland tour is the Low Beskids, part of the Carpathian Mountains. This beautiful area in the southeast of the country is arguably the wildest part of Poland. Although the mountains in Magurski National Park are pretty low elevation (c3,300 feet/1,000 meters), they are a truly breathtaking place to visit. We will bird amongst the

rolling hills and forests and take in Poland at its most untouched. Highlight birds of this stunning mountain area include **Ural Owl**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Water Pipit**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Black Stork**, **Golden Eagle**, and **European Honey Buzzard**. While in the adjacent lowland forest areas we will look for **Corn Crake**, **River Warbler**, **Wood Warbler**, **Icterine Warbler**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Hawfinch**, and **Eurasian Golden Oriole**. These forests are also another great spot for **Collared Flycatcher**, multiple woodpecker species, and **Hazel Grouse**. **Lesser Spotted Eagles** occur here at their highest density in Europe, so we should see plenty of these.

The final stop on the tour will be to the stunning snow-capped peaks of the Tatrzański National Park (Tatra Mountains) along the Slovakia border. Here we will look for two very special birds in **Wallcreeper** (a highly sought-after monotypic family) and, after taking a cable-car ride to the top of a mountain, **Alpine Accentor**. We should also find **Ring Ouzel** and **Water Pipit** here.

Poland is also a great destination for European mammals and on this tour we could find many, including some really special ones like **European Bison**, **Eurasian Lynx**, **Grey Wolf**, (European) **Wild Cat**, (European) **Brown Bear**, **Moose** (Elk), **Eurasian Beaver**, **Speckled Ground Squirrel**, **Northern Chamois**, **Alpine Marmot**, **Eurasian Red Squirrel**, and the fascinating **Raccoon Dog**.

Itinerary (16 days/15 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Warsaw, transfer to Biebrza Marshes

After your morning arrival at Warsaw Chopin Airport, (maybe after completing our **Spain: Spring Birding Extravaganza** tour) you will be met by your Birding Ecotours tour leader and expert Polish local bird guide. We will then transfer, in a comfortable minibus, to the town of Goniadz on the border of the Biebrza National Park. This journey will take around two and a half hours, as we drive east across Poland's vast central region. If you would like to arrive before the tour starts, we can recommend and arrange hotels for you in Warsaw. The city has a famous history and is an interesting place to explore, particularly if you have an interest in World War Two.

We plan on leaving Warsaw by mid-morning and arrive in Goniadz early in the afternoon, checking into our accommodation for the next three nights. As this is the first day of the tour you may be tired after your long journey, so we will therefore have an optional afternoon birding session in the nearby marshes. Otherwise you can relax in the wonderful hotel garden which backs onto the marshes themselves, maybe starting your trip list off with **Black Redstart**, **Common Cuckoo**, or **Eurasian Wryneck**. We will have a traditional Polish evening meal at the hotel as a welcome for everyone where we will discuss the trip and get to know each other ahead of what is sure to be a fantastic two-week birding tour in Poland.

Overnight: Dwór Bartła, Goniadz

Days 2 - 3. Birding Biebrza Marshes

We will spend two full days (plus the morning of Day 4) birding the spectacular Biebrza Marshes. We will explore a wide range of habitats and sites here and take in the best birds this huge area has

to offer. We will be packing a lot into our time here as there are just so many incredible birds to be found and lots of different habitats and sites to visit at one of the best wetlands in the whole of Europe. However, do not be fooled by the name of the area, yes there are lots of wetland habitats (complete with boardwalks and viewing towers), but there are also plenty of other habitats in the area, including some great forest, interesting farmland, and dry and sandy heathlands. Some of the specific areas we will visit here include the famous Goniadz, Długa Luka, and Brzostowo sites. Once we have visited these key areas, we will target specific sites for enjoyable avian experiences or specials which we may have missed previously.

The most important birds for us in this area of Poland are **Aquatic Warbler** and **Great Snipe**, both highly localized in Poland and Europe as a whole. Not too far from our centrally selected accommodation, is a **Ruff** lek, and here we stand our best chance of locating the **Great Snipe**. The **Aquatic Warbler** can be found in a vast marshland area from a boardwalk that we will visit.



Ruff is one unique and interesting shorebird, no two seem to look the same! We will enjoy watching them on their lek.

We will explore the area around the village of Goniadz itself. The village is the central point of Biebrza Marshes and the area is seriously rich with birds. While at the marshes there are several common species that we will see at multiple sites. These include **Lesser Whitethroat**, **European Goldfinch**, **Black-headed Gull**, **White Stork** (they are found nesting in many of the small villages and are an amazing sight), **Eurasian Skylark**, **Barn Swallow**, **Common Chiffchaff**, **Eurasian Blackcap**, **Western Yellow Wagtail**, **Common Buzzard**, and plenty more. The marshes are also home to two key mammals: **Moose (Elk)** and **Eurasian Beaver**. We could come across them pretty much anywhere within the national park.



*One good-looking raptor! A male **Montagu's Harrier** hunting over the marshland.*



*As we drive around the pretty rural villages of eastern Poland, we see plenty of **White Storks** returning to their traditional nest sites. It is an impressive sight and considered lucky if your house is chosen, so the birds are welcomed. We may see some courtship or maybe even some nestlings during our visit, it's a thrilling sight to witness!*

We will also get our first taste of the area's key species and we could come across **Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Common Crane, White-winged Tern, Whiskered Tern, Great Spotted Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Temminck's Stint, Savi's Warbler, Bluethroat, Citrine Wagtail, and Eurasian Penduline Tit.**

We will then move further afield within the Biebrza National Park, heading south from Goniadz, we will explore the area known as Długa Luka. This is a real highlight spot in the national park as it is regarded as the best place to see **Aquatic Warbler**. The simple boardwalk trail here should give us excellent views of this species but, like all warblers, they often require patience to get the best views. While here we will also look for a range of other species such as **Little Bittern, Western Marsh Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, Bluethroat, Thrush Nightingale, Barred Warbler, Common Grasshopper Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Great Grey Shrike, and Common Rosefinch.**

Another excellent area that we will visit in the southern section on Biebrza Marshes is at Brzostowo. This is a fantastic site for breeding cranes, waterfowl, shorebirds (waders), and terns with common species including **Black-necked Grebe, Black Stork, White-tailed Eagle, Common Crane, Ruff, Little Gull, White-winged Tern, Whiskered Tern, and Ortolan Bunting.** There is also a chance of rarer species being found, including **Red-necked Grebe, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle, Montagu's Harrier, Northern Goshawk, Marsh Sandpiper, and Caspian Tern.** This part of the wider site is definitely worth concentrating plenty of time on.



*Biebrza Marsh is an excellent place to see flocks of the striking **White-winged Tern.***

As mentioned above, this site is not all about the wetland habitats and we will also explore birch forests within the national park for **Black Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, White-**

backed Woodpecker, and **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**. Here we may also find passerines such as **Collared Flycatcher** or **Thrush Nightingale**. While in the grassland areas between the forest patches we have a good chance of finding **Black Grouse**, **Bluethroat**, **Citrine Wagtail**, **Whinchat**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Montagu's Harrier**, and **Great Grey Shrike**.



*The vibrant colors of the stunning **Citrine Wagtail** are really impressive. This gorgeous passerine breeds in the Biebrza Marshes and we will spend time in its habitat tracking it down.*

Each evening we will retreat to our hotel, where we will enjoy fine Polish food and discuss the day's sightings, as we go through our daily bird and animal checklists, something we do every night on all our tours and is always fun as we reminisce on the day's highlights.

Overnight (two nights): Dwór Bartla, Goniadz

Day 4. Biebrza Marshes to Białowieża via Dojlidy Fishponds

After birding the Biebrza Marshes for the final time we will head southeast and enjoy a quite different kind of birding. Just a two-hour drive from the mosaic of open marshes, scattered woodland, and rivers of Biebrza, is the ancient primeval Białowieża Forest. Here we will spend the next few days in search of some truly special birds.

On our way we will stop at the Dojlidy Fishponds on the outskirts of the city of Białystok. This will be a good way to break up our journey and the site itself is home to some excellent birds including **Eurasian Bittern**, **Caspian Gull**, **Red-necked Grebe**, **Black-necked Grebe**, **Little Crake**, **Eurasian Penduline Tit**, **Bearded Reedling** (Bearded Tit), **Savi's Warbler**, and **Great Reed Warbler**. The site is also excellent for a range of terns, gulls, waterfowl, and shorebirds (waders).



***Bearded Reedling** (*Bearded Tit*) is a rather unique bird in Europe and always a top target.*

After finishing up at the fishponds we move on to Białowieża, a small village nestled in the heart of the ancient forest that stretches across the Belarus border. The wildlife and birds we seek can sometimes be found right up to our accommodation. This is another really birdy area and is one of the top forest sites in Europe.

Once settled into our accommodation, where we will be based for the next four nights, we will explore the picturesque Białowieża Palace Park, right in the heart of the village. This expansive parkland (complete with pretty ponds, wildflower meadows, and scattered tall trees) is a fantastic area for birds and common species here include **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Wryneck**, **Great Reed Warbler**, **Marsh Warbler**, **Icterine Warbler**, **Greenish Warbler**, **Thrush Nightingale**, **European Robin**, **Dunnock**, **Common Redstart**, **Black Redstart**, **Collared Flycatcher**, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, **European Serin**, and **Common Rosefinch**. We should see gorgeous **Eurasian Red Squirrels** too.

Overnight: Dwór na Otulinie, Białowieża

Days 5 - 7. Birding Białowieża Forest

We will have three full days to explore this top site, easily one of the best birding destinations in the whole of Europe. As at Biebrza, we will explore a few key sites while targeting specials of the area. One such site is the trail at Wysokie Bagno, to the south of Białowieża village. The superb trail will give us the chance of some special birds. We will be in ideal habitat to find the elusive **Hazel Grouse** and **Eurasian Pygmy Owl** while woodpeckers are also a key feature here, with **Black Woodpecker**, **White-backed Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker**, **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, and **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** all likely species. This is also an

excellent location for new passerines such as **Coal Tit**, **European Crested Tit**, **Willow Tit**, **Marsh Tit**, **Long-tailed Tit** (the sublime white-headed *caudatus* subspecies), **Common Firecrest**, **Wood Warbler**, and **European Pied Flycatcher**.

Another key area during our visit will be the habitats around the village of Budy. This remote location is eastern Poland at its finest and its birds match the finery of the area. The meadows between Budy and the village of Teremiski will be scanned for perched **Lesser Spotted Eagle** while the scrub areas should contain **Red-backed Shrike**. This is also an excellent area for our first views of the huge **European Bison**, a staggeringly impressive (and rare), large mammal.

We will also explore the woodland around Budy Bridge. This area is famed for its woodpeckers and we have a good chance of six species here: **Black Woodpecker**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**, **White-backed Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker**, and **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**. The more open forests around Budy are also an excellent area to try and see **Collared Flycatcher**, **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, **Hazel Grouse**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Common Snipe**, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, **Icterine Warbler**, **Common Firecrest**, **Eurasian Hobby**, **Montagu's Harrier**, and **Black Stork**.

Small patches of reeds around wet areas should hold singing **Common Grasshopper Warbler**, **River Warbler**, **Savi's Warbler**, **Marsh Warbler**, and **Great Reed Warbler**. Some of these species are extremely shy and inconspicuous while others are more obvious at this time of year. Those species that are setting up breeding territories, after returning from their sub-Saharan wintering grounds in Africa, can be easier to see and they all have some incredible vocalizations ranging from gorgeous melodic warbles to insect-like trills and scratches.



Finding European Crested Tit is always a thrill.

It is a special feeling being in Białowieża village, there are literally amazing birds everywhere, all of the time. The local farming style is like that of a bygone age, to anyone more familiar with current western intensive agricultural systems. Here, the small fields are surrounded by good quality, dense hedgerows and clumps of scrub and scattered trees, these all result in lots of insects, which in turn provides lots of food for lots of birds and plenty of enjoyment for us! **White Storks** patrol the fields and are quite obvious, but lurking in the same area can be a myriad of other species and you just never know what you might bump into. This is especially true during the spring migration period (our tour takes place in spring) when many birds pass through the region as they head to the Arctic taiga and tundra zone. It is an exciting time to be birding in this part of Europe when a **Eurasian Wryneck** might appear right in front of you, or a **Marsh Warbler** might mimic the call of a **European Bee-eater** (which could also be overhead) from a nearby bush!



***Red-breasted Flycatcher** can be found breeding in the deciduous woodlands in eastern Poland.*

One of the real treats while birding in Białowieża is a visit to the Strict Reserve. Entering through the Palace Park, we will walk into a whole other world, the ancient, primeval, and, pretty much, untouched forest that once stretched across most of Europe after the last ice age. Białowieża Forest started growing around 11,000 years ago and this section of the forest has been a primeval wilderness for millennia, even escaping the destruction that occurred to 25% of the wider forest area during World War Two. Entrance to this reserve is only allowed with a local guide and specific routes are to be followed. It is a unique experience and one to savor. Many of the birds we see in the Strict Reserve will be similar to those seen outside but could include **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker**, **Black Woodpecker**, **White-backed Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Eurasian Treecreeper**, **Common Wood Pigeon**, **Eurasian Jay**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Collared Flycatcher**, **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, **Fieldfare**, **Redwing**, **Tree Pipit**, and **Hawfinch**. Our time inside the Strict Reserve is sure to be memorable.



*While in Białowieża we stand a good chance of coming across the huge **European Bison**.*

While in Białowieża we will also take a drive to the vast Siemianówka Reservoir. This area straddles the border with Belarus and will offer a new experience to the birding we have done so far. The habitats here (other than the huge waterbody) are a mixture of reedbeds, forest patches, and farmland. The reservoir itself is an excellent spot for birds and over 240 species have been recorded here, the vast majority of those in spring.

Key species that we will focus on here (those that could be harder to find elsewhere on the tour) include **Whooper Swan, Common Goldeneye, Eurasian Bittern, Black-winged Stilt, Spotted Redshank, Greater Spotted Eagle, European Honey Buzzard, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Hen Harrier, Red-footed Falcon, Water Rail, European Green Woodpecker, Red-throated Pipit, and Short-eared Owl**, but there will be many other species found here during our visit too.

After our action-packed days exploring the Białowieża Forest and surrounding area we will head back to our comfortable guesthouse in Białowieża village each evening where we can enjoy traditional Polish food and hospitality.

Overnight (three nights): Dwór na Otulinie, Białowieża

Day 8. Białowieża to Roztocze

After several days exploring the primeval forest at Białowieża we, once again move on, after our final birding session in this awe-inspiring area, and head south for two nights in the beautiful Roztocze region of southern Poland. The journey of around five hours will see us travel down much of Poland's eastern border with Ukraine before finally arriving in the city of Roztocze. We will make a start on the birding in the late afternoon, time permitting.

Overnight: Hotel in Janów Forest Landscape Park

Day 9. Birding Roztocze region

Roztocze is the only place in Poland where we can find several species from southern Europe and these will be the main targets for the next two days. We will search the area's numerous fishponds for the shy **Ferruginous Duck**. This species is Near Threatened (BirdLife International) and the ponds in Roztocze are the only area in Poland to reliably see this species.

We will also explore the meadows and crop fields on the edge of the Janów Forest. Here we will look for the incredibly rare and absolutely stunning **Short-toed Snake Eagle**. There is believed to be only five pairs in the whole of Poland, making this a highly prized target of our tour.



*The **Short-toed Snake Eagle** is only found in the Roztocze region of Poland. While here we will spend time looking for this striking and large eagle species.*

This area is also home to two relatively new arrivals in Poland. The open fields are a great place to look for the beautiful **European Bee-Eater** and the woodlands here are home to **Syrian Woodpecker**. Both these species only colonized Poland in the 1970s and the mild climate in this corner of the country makes it a reliable place to see them both and will provide a thrilling birding experience. There are not many sounds more evocative than the sound of the bee-eater!

Alongside our main targets, we should come across a great range of other species including **Little Bittern**, **Black Redstart**, **Common Redstart**, **European Serin**, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, **Little Owl**, **Icterine Warbler**, **Ortolan Bunting**, **Red-backed Shrike**, and **European Turtle Dove**.

While in the area we will also visit Zamość. The area around this historic city is home to **Speckled Ground Squirrel**, a Near Threatened (IUCN Red List) mammal which only breeds in the Roztocze region of Poland.

Overnight: Hotel in Janów Forest Landscape Park

Day 10. Roztocze to Low Beskids

After a final morning birding around the Roztocze area we will make our way into the remote southeast of Poland, not too far from the Slovakian border and Magurski National Park. We will arrive at our base for the next two nights and commence with some birding in this new and exciting area, perhaps making a start on some of the highlights listed for Day 11.

Overnight: Hajstra, Low Beskids

Day 11. Birding Magurski National Park, Carpathian Mountains

Our next area of focus is the beautiful foothills of the Magurski National Park, part of the spectacular Carpathian Mountains. Here we will spend the full day (as well as the previous evening and following morning) searching for birds inhabiting the different elevations of these mountains.

The forests here will be alive with birds at this time of year and we should come across **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Tawny Owl**, **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, **Collared Flycatcher**, **European Pied Flycatcher**, **Wood Warbler**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Red (Common) Crossbill**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Eurasian Jay**, **Eurasian Treecreeper**, **Black Redstart**, **Goldcrest**, **Willow Warbler**, **Common Firecrest**, **European Serin**, and **Willow Tit**.

This is another excellent area for woodpeckers and once more we will search for **White-backed Woodpecker**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, and **Black Woodpecker**. More open areas will give us a good number of birds of prey including **European Honey Buzzard**, **Golden Eagle**, **Common Buzzard**, and **Common Kestrel**. **Lesser Spotted Eagles** occur at their highest density in Europe here and so we stand a very good chance of further views of this large raptor.



*We will look for **Ural Owl** while in the southeast of Poland.*

One of the avian highlights, and challenges, of our time in Magurski will be searching for the large **Ural Owl**. To find this species, we will undertake evening drives but also search for nest sites during the day. **Ural Owl** can be incredibly challenging to find but a sighting is worth the effort. The night trips will be a great change for finding mammals, maybe the odd-looking **Raccoon Dog**!

Overnight: Hajstra, Low Beskids

Day 12. Low Beskids to Zakopane (Tatra Mountains)

We will have a final morning birding in the Magurski National Park area, perhaps looking for more of the birds mentioned for Day 11, before we commence the relatively short drive to our base for the next three nights, near the town of Zakopane in the spectacular Tatra Mountains. The Tatra Mountains are the highest mountain range in Poland (and in the whole of the Carpathian Mountains), and we will be in for some fun days thoroughly exploring this area across a wide range of elevations. We will make a start on those birds mentioned for Days 13 – 14.

Overnight: Dworek na Klinie, Zakopane

Days 13 - 14. Birding Tatra Mountains

We will enjoy two full days (as well as the previous afternoon and morning of Day 15) birding through a range of elevations within the Tatrzański National Park and the wider area. One of our main target birds in the national park is the highly prized **Wallcreeper**, a unique species belonging to a monotypic family. They should have just returned to their breeding sites, after the winter period, by the time of our tour and we will allocate plenty of time to try to find them.



Wallcreeper is a monotypic family and can be found breeding in the Tatra Mountains.

The mountain streams of the national park are an excellent area to find **Grey Wagtail**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Common Kingfisher**, **Common Merganser** (Goosander), and **White Wagtail**.



*An absolutely gorgeous bird, we will keep our eyes peeled for **Common Kingfisher**.*



*Found in fast-flowing mountain streams, the cute **White-throated Dipper**.*

While looking for **Wallcreeper** we might also find **Golden Eagle** and **Spotted Nutcracker**, along with a long list of more common and widespread birds like **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker**, **Red (Common) Crossbill**, **Common Firecrest**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, and **Red-breasted Flycatcher**.

One of the mornings will see us getting up to the high peaks of the Tatra Mountains. Do not worry though, limited hiking is needed as we will take a very sturdy cable-car ride all the way to the top of the mountain (it is like being in a floating coach!). On reaching the top, we will hope for clear views of the stunning snow-capped peaks. It really is a spectacular place! We will immediately start looking for our main target, the extremely habitat-specific **Alpine Accentor**.



***Alpine Accentor** will be one of the targets while birding the Tatra Mountains.*

Other birds we will look for in this zone include **Ring Ouzel**, **Water Pipit**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Mistle Thrush**, **Lesser Redpoll**, and whatever else we can find. We will also look for the Critically Endangered (IUCN) *tatrica* subspecies of **Northern Chamois** (a goat-like mammal); there are estimated to be less than 200 individuals of this subspecies in the world and it is still declining. Another top mammal here is **Alpine Marmot**; the *latirostris* subspecies of this mammal that occurs in the High Tatras is rare, threatened, and has a restricted range.

Numerous exciting birds will be possible during this part of the tour, but we will also keep a look out for Europe's "Big Five" mammals while out birding in this remote part of Poland: **European Bison**, **Eurasian Lynx**, (European) **Grey Wolf**, (European) **Brown Bear**, and (European) **Wild Cat**. All five of these species can be incredibly elusive and all occur in small numbers in the national park, so sightings of them, like many things in nature, are not guaranteed. That said the national park is probably the best place in Poland to see all five of these animals. While exploring the area, we will also look for amphibians and reptiles. Distinctive species, that only occur in this

area of Poland, like **Fire Salamander** and **Aesculapian Ratsnake** will hopefully be the standout species and are likely to add to what will be an enjoyable few days here.

Overnight (two nights): Dworek na Klinie, Zakopane

Day 15. Zakopane (Tatra Mountains) to Zator

After a final morning birding around the Tatra Mountains near our base we will head towards the town of Zator for the final night and birding of the tour. Along the way we will call in to Orawa Reservoir, along with its neighboring peat bogs and meadows. Here we will hopefully get another look for **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Garganey**, **Marsh Warbler**, and if we are extremely lucky, the secretive **Black Grouse**. One of our other major targets here is the bewitching **Corn Crane**. This species is quite a late migrant to Poland, and we may find that we do not record this species until we get to southern Poland. Here we will put plenty of time into searching for it and listening out for its distinctive “crex crex” call which gives the species its scientific name. Of course, if we have heard the species before now, we will have tried to see it, they are incredibly shy and tough to see usually, though singing males may show occasionally.



Corn Crane can be a real challenge to see and fleeting glimpses are highly rewarding.

During our final evening meal together the tour leader and local guide will be on hand to answer questions relating to the trip or identification of species we have seen. We will also need to make the vital choice of ‘bird of the trip’, which will not be easy as we will have seen so many fantastic species (and we do have one final exciting birding location to visit on our final morning – will there be any late contenders?).

Overnight: Karpik, Zator

Day 16. Transfer to Krakow airport where tour concludes

Our last birding of the tour will see us visit the amazing “Zator Fishponds” near Krakow. There are an incredible number of artificial and natural wetlands here (such as Spytkowice Fishponds) and we will finish the trip with many fantastic birds, such as breeding **Black-necked Grebe**, **Whiskered Tern**, **Caspian Tern**, **Eurasian Bittern**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Little Egret**, **Red-crested Pochard**, **Common Pochard**, **Egyptian Goose**, **Northern Lapwing**, and **Little Bittern**. Interesting passerines here may include **Bluethroat**, **Common Nightingale**, **Corn Bunting**, **Yellowhammer**, and **River Warbler**.

In the late morning we will check out of our accommodation and start our short journey to John Paul II Krakow-Balice International Airport where this Poland: Best of Eastern Europe tour will end at 2pm.

You can connect with your flight home in the late afternoon/early evening, or continue your travel further, such as exploration of the Krakow area (some people who have birded in this part of Poland with us have been interested to visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, for example) or you might be interested in extending your birding in Europe with our **United Kingdom: Ultimate Spring Tour** or **Bulgaria and Romania: Balkans in Spring** tour, both of these offer a wide range of amazing birds and will complement this Poland trip extremely well.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes must use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	16 days / 15 nights
Group Size:	4 - 8
Dates:	25 April - 10 May 2023
Start:	Warsaw Chopin Airport, Warsaw, Poland
End:	John Paul II Krakow-Balice International Airport, Krakow, Poland
Prices:	€4,975 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants (2023)
Single Supplements:	€559 (2023)

Price includes:

All accommodation (Day 1 until Day 15 as described above, or similar)
Meals (from lunch on Day 1 until lunch on Day 16)
Drinking water – please bring a refillable water bottle
Expert tour leader
Local bird and wildlife guide fees
Birdwatching site entrance fees (including all national park fees) and travel permits
All ground transport and tolls/taxes while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Flights to Warsaw Chopin Airport, Warsaw, Poland
Flights from John Paul II Krakow-Balice International Airport, Krakow, Poland
Expenditures due to flight cancellations/delays or other causes beyond our control (force majeure)
Visa fees if visa required
Departure tax
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))

Useful information

During our small group Poland: Best of Eastern Europe tour, you will be driven by your guide in a comfortable vehicle. This tour does involve some longer walks but these will mostly be on flat, firm ground. The latter part of the tour will see us at altitude but only around 3,300 feet (1,000 meters) for the majority of the time. We will take a cable-car higher on one morning (weather permitting) as we ascend from 3,300 feet (1,000 meters) to 6,400 feet (1,953 meters).

Polish food and hospitality are superb and all of your accommodation will be well appointed in a traditional style and private bathrooms throughout. We will spend time in and around quiet, charming villages where the wildlife will be right on our doorstep, adding to the fantastic experience we are sure to have in Poland.