

Tour Report

Poland – Winter Wildlife Photography

21 – 27 January 2024

Red Squirrel



Goshawk



White-tailed sea eagle



Bison



Compiled by Sean Weekly

Day 1:**Wednesday 21 January 2024**

London Heathrow to Warsaw

It was an early start at Heathrow airport. After successfully checking in I met one of the guests at the departure gate and enjoyed a coffee and a chat. He had flown down from Newcastle that morning. The plane for Poland was on time and boarding was smooth. Nice mild weather outside Heathrow so the cold weather in Warsaw certainly hit us on arrival!

I then met the rest of the group at the baggage reclaim at Warsaw airport and introduced myself. Everyone

was in good spirits and excited about the week ahead. We then transferred 3.5 hours to our hotel. The weather was clear in Warsaw but colder in Bialowieza where the hotel and our trip is based. We had our fingers crossed for some snow or a thick frost. From looking at images before I flew there was quite a bit of snow in the area so it was looking hopeful for some winter conditions.

We arrived safely and I was briefed about the week from our guide Marek over dinner. I then briefed the group on the trip ahead.

Day 2:**Thursday 22 January 2024***-4 °C, Cloudy*

I joined group 1 for their bison safari. It didn't take too long for us to find a small maternity herd in an open clearing. They were very skittish so we had to photograph them from a good distance. We decided to move on and look for more bison, and we came across a small herd of males in an open clearing.



We approached them slowly, keeping our distance. They weren't doing much except sitting but it was a nice start to the trip. After some time with these males we decided to move on.

Continuing driving around the national park we saw a couple of distant red deer which was nice to see walking amongst the snow.

We came across a nice herd with a young bison in it. They were crossing an open field then across a road stopping in the middle of it to look at us. It was a great photography opportunity.

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Finishing off with another small female herd in a lovely picturesque setting. The snow was knee-deep so it was tricky at times approaching the herd. Eventually we got into a nice position for low angle images.



The other group was in the eagle hide, they had some fantastic sightings with four white tailed eagles in total, lots of flying and feeding on the ground in the snow, a pair of common buzzards, lots of ravens, and a yellow hammer.

Day 3:
[TITLE/LOCATION]
-4 °C, Cloudy

Friday 23 January 2024

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To make it even due to having to split the groups due to hide numbers, I decided to join the other group on their bison safari. A small herd of bison was in the distance but again in a protected area so we couldn't get close. But a good start to the day. We soon came across a nice herd of female red deer crossing an open area, which was a nice snowy scene. We stayed here for a while enjoying the nice scene of them walking across the landscape.



We then moved on back to the group of male bison we had the day before. It didn't take too long to find them and there were seven male bison in total. They were all resting in the forest. A couple stood up so it was nice for a few portraits.



The other group had a very successful day in the eagle hide. Lots of activity, with five to six eagles in total throughout the day, lots of ravens and a pair of common buzzard too.

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Day 4:
Riverside hide
-6 °C, Cloudy

Saturday 24 January 2024

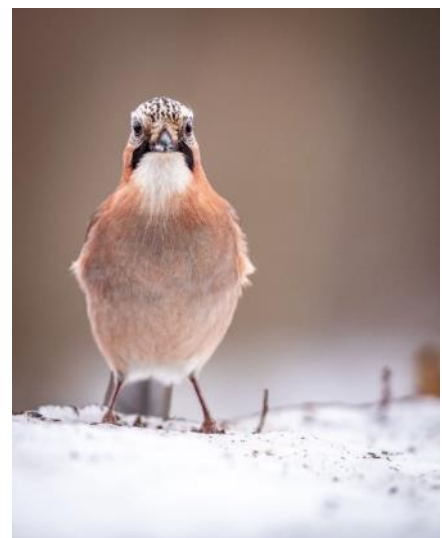
It was an early start for us as we were in the riverside hide today. The hide is split into two sections, one overlooking an open meadow which is more for raptors and the other overlooking a beautiful frozen reflection pool.

It didn't take long until we had our first visit from some raptors. We saw six buzzards at first light. A bit too dark to start photographing yet, but what a great start to a long day in the hide!

Lots of jays fed around the reflection pool, and a buzzard landed around the reflection pool feeding very close. We got some nice full frame shots with 300mm, and the light is slightly better now so good to get some shots!



It was a few hours of waiting before a beautiful White-tailed sea eagle came in and was feeding on the ground. The weather changed drastically and we had some really heavy snowfall which was just superb for photos. Some of the best conditions that I have photographed in!



We also got super lucky and the northern goshawk came in after the eagle. The goshawk had landed on a perch in front of the hide again in heavy snowfall. Absolutely incredible! It produced some very magical images!

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A middle spotted woodpecker also came in, and we had a few visits from some crested tits which was great and kept us all busy trying to get some images as they were so quick.

We had a very brief encounter with a pine marten, which came and grabbed some food and then ran back to the forest.

It was a fantastic day of photography which gave us all some incredible sightings which kept us all talking for the rest of the trip.



Day 5:
-4 °C, Cloudy

Sunday 25 January 2024

Today me and half the group spent the day in the garden hide. It's a reflection pool based hide situated in our local guide Mareks garden.

There were lots of birds and activity all day long in the hide, including goshawk and a buzzard which was a highlight. A variety of species paid us visits, including red pole, coal tit, blue tit, red squirrel, linnets, thrush, great spotted woodpecker, green finch, bull finch, Jay, Siskin, brambling, and great tit. The highlight for me though was the endearing and cute red squirrel. An absolutely superb day of photography which kept us very busy!

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Day 6:
0°C, Cloudy

Monday 26 January 2024

It was our last full day of photography and it was a split group again. One group visited the riverside hide and were fortunate to see the goshawk again and white-tailed sea eagle, although the lighting conditions were not ideal. Despite this, they managed to capture some beautiful photos and were delighted to witness the goshawk for the first time. They were also very lucky to have a few visits from a rough legged buzzard. Additionally, they had the opportunity to photograph Eurasian jay, crested tit, and lesser spotted woodpecker.

I, on the other hand, joined the second group for the bison safari. After driving for about 45 minutes, we encountered our first bison, a solitary male that was cautious and quickly retreated into the forest. Although it was challenging to get close enough for good photographs, it was still a remarkable sighting.

Throughout the day, we had several encounters with different bison. We encountered three females resting in an open meadow, allowing us to capture some stunning images. Later, we encountered a large herd of bison consisting of males, females, and calves. We spent the remainder of the session with the herd, focusing on photographing individual animals.



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Day 7:
6°C, Cloudy

Tuesday 27 January 2024

It was an early start leaving at 5:45am to start our four-hour journey by minibus to get back to Warsaw airport.

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