

Tour Report

Winter Wildlife Photography in Poland

16 – 22 February 2025

European bison



Northern goshawk



White-tailed sea eagle



European bison



Compiled by Sean Weekly

Sunday 16 February 2025

Day 1:

London to Warsaw

I had an early morning at Heathrow airport. After checking in, I bumped into a couple of the guests at the departure gate, and we enjoyed a short chat and catch-up before the flight. Our flight to Poland was right on schedule, and boarding went off without a hitch. The weather was nice and mild at Heathrow, but we definitely felt the chill when we landed in Warsaw! I met the rest of the group at baggage claim in Warsaw and introduced myself. The weather was clear, however, it was fairly cold and even started to snow a little while we were waiting for our transfer bus to Bialowieza. Everyone was in high spirits and looking forward to the week. We then took a four-hour transfer to our hotel via a minibus. It was a bit colder in Bialowieza, where our hotel and trip are based. We were hoping for some snow or a thick frost. Before flying, and checking the local weather forecast, it looked to be a very cold week indeed, so it seemed promising for some winter magic. We arrived safely, and over dinner, our guide Marek filled me in on the week ahead. I then shared the trip details with the group.

Monday 17 February 2025

Day 2:

Sunny -17 °C

Today, I joined group two for a bison safari that kicked off at 6 am. I heard it had been tricky to spot bison lately since it's been a great year for acorns, which drew them deeper into the woods instead of in the open fields. It was a chilly morning with a low temperature of just -17°C with snow and frost, but the scenery was stunning; we just needed to track down some bison. After a brief drive, we spotted our first bison—two males at the edge of a field—just as the sun was rising, promising a beautiful frosty scene!



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We hopped out of the vehicle and tried to follow them on foot, but they quickly vanished into the trees. We did manage a couple of shots of them before they vanished into the forest. We continued driving, stopping at known bison hotspots, and after a few hours, we struck gold with a large breeding herd in a grassy area. They were a bit far away, but we slowly approached, pausing to let them get used to us. We eventually got within about 50 metres of the herd, which had around 30 bison, including a big male and some calves.



It was a bit tricky to photograph them since they were clustered together, but with some patience, we managed to get some nice shots as they spread out. We then tried to find some bachelor males for closer portraits, but as the light became too harsh with the midday sun, we couldn't find any more bison. Instead, we decided to take a break for coffee and lunch at a cosy café while waiting for the light to soften.

After a while, we set out again on our quest. It didn't take long before we spotted the same herd as before, just in a different spot. This time, a small stream was between us and the bison, making them feel a bit more secure. Thanks to the water, we were able to get about 30 metres closer, which led to some amazing close encounters. It was a chilly but fun day.

Meanwhile, the other group was in the eagle hide and had some awesome views of two adult white-tailed sea eagles, a juvenile, and plenty of buzzard activity throughout the day.

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Tuesday 18 February 2025

Day 3:

Sunny -12°C

Today was another chilly day, especially with the wind chill, with temperatures hitting -12°C. I joined Group One for their first bison safari. The morning was bright and lovely, and the sun rose quickly. Sadly, the bison were hard to find again, and we hadn't seen any yet. After some driving, we finally spotted three male bison in a field, but they were stuck behind some farm equipment, so the photo opportunity wasn't ideal, however, we tried to make the most of a bad situation as the light was gorgeous.



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We kept going and eventually found the same maternity herd we had seen the day before. Getting good shots was a bit challenging since they were all clustered together again, which is typical protective herd behaviour amongst these animals, but with some patience, we managed to snap some nice photos.



After hanging out with the herd, we took a well-deserved brunch and coffee break at a local café. It started to snow lightly outside, so we jumped back in the vehicles and returned to the big herd we had just left, hoping to catch them in the snowfall. By the time we got there, the snow had nearly stopped, but we still managed to get a few decent shots of some females on their own. Later, we left that group in search of some males. Our guide, Marian, spotted one in the forest, which was an incredible find, and then we saw two more after that. We tried to track them down, but they weren't cooperating and disappeared deeper into the woods.

Shortly after, we headed to a different clearing in the forest, hoping for some bison. While we didn't find a large group, we did come across a single male who posed nicely for a few pictures among the trees. It was a lovely way to wrap up a great day.

The other group were in the riverside hide and had lots of activity from two goshawks, a white tailed eagle, common buzzard, long-legged buzzard and a rough-legged buzzard. They also had lots of visits from smaller woodland birds, including grey-headed, middle spotted and greater spotted woodpecker, crested tits and jays to name a few.

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Wednesday 19 February 2025

Day 4:
-14°C

What a long day it was today hunting for bison! I checked out the woods where the male bison was hanging out last night and ended up spotting two males and spending some time with them. We decided to take a coffee break, and then it started snowing. We drove around in a bit of a panic, trying to find more bison or any other species to photograph in the snow, but no luck.

So, we decided to head west of the forest to search for a bison herd. We saw plenty of roe deer and a few red foxes in the distance.



Finally, we located the big herd and approached them slowly, managing to snap a few distant shots. We wrapped up the day with a beautiful silhouette of the herd on a ridge against the setting sun.



Thursday 20 February 2025

Day 5:

Sunny -18°C

The morning was exceptionally cold, with temperatures that made it feel like winter had fully settled in. We woke up at the early hour of 5 am, eager to get into our hide before dawn broke. However, once we were inside, we encountered some challenges; the windows had frozen over on the inside due to the severe cold, obstructing our view.

It took nearly three hours for the ice to melt sufficiently, allowing us to finally begin capturing photographs. Unfortunately, the wildlife was rather scarce until around 2 pm, when we were thrilled to finally catch sight of our first pair of magnificent tailed eagles, a striking male and female duo.

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They remained on the ground for approximately 45 minutes, giving us a chance to observe them closely before they took flight. As the daylight began to fade, we were also visited by a few common buzzards, adding to the day's excitement. However, the light was too dark for any images of the buzzards.

Friday 21 February 2025

Day 6:

Cloudy -10°C

We began our day bright and early at the riverside hide, which is divided into two distinct sections, one that overlooks an expansive open meadow, perfect for observing raptors, and the other that provides a breathtaking view of a frozen reflection pool. It wasn't long before we caught sight of our first raptor, a gorgeous northern goshawk. It's always up there with one of my favourite birds and a bird that a lot of guests on this trip want to get a glimpse of. The light was still relatively poor at this point, so images were a bit tricky. However, we all managed a few nice photos of this gorgeous bird before it was scared away by a few hungry buzzards who then stayed for most of the day feeding and resting in the surrounding trees.

The morning started slow; however, activity of smaller birds was very frequent and we had quite a few visits from the great spotted woodpecker, middle spotted woodpecker and the grey-headed woodpecker, which kept us entertained whilst waiting for the eagles. We also had lots of visits from various tit species including the gorgeous crested tit.



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In the afternoon, just as the light was best, we got a welcome surprise. We had one visit from a male white tailed sea eagle that had come in to feed. It gave us some really great views and photo opportunities for some tight portraits.



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Not long after, a big female white-tailed eagle swooped in and knocked the male off the food. This led to a pretty intense fight, with the female pinning the male down with her talons. He was pretty much defenceless but tried to fight back as best as he could. Eventually, he managed to escape from her grip and quickly flew off to the safety of the forest. It was such an amazing moment that caught us off guard. Thankfully, we had all our settings ready since we had been photographing the male alone before. It was definitely up there with one of my top encounters!

Saturday 22 February 2025

Day 7 :

And that's a wrap!

With a fantastic week of sightings under our belts, we ate breakfast on the road and headed for Warsaw Chopin Airport. A quick coffee and snack whilst we waited, and then soon enough it was time to board the plane and say goodbye.

Thank you for a great week!

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