

Tour Report

Poland - Winter Wildlife Photography

21-27 February 2022

European wolf



European bison



European bison



Buzzard



Compiled by Sean Weekly
Images by Sean Weekly & Jayne & Richard Hurrell

Day 1: Monday 21 February 2022

Weather: Overcast but strong winds post Storm Eunice, 5° C

It was nice to be on a midday flight to Warsaw from Heathrow airport. After check-in I met two of the guests at the departure lounge and we enjoyed a coffee and some brunch at Starbucks and had a good catch up. They had previously joined me on our Red Kite & Night Sky Photographic Workshop, so it was nice to see them both again as I hadn't seen them since Wildfair in August

I then met two of the other guests at the gate and briefly introduced myself and said hello. The plane was on time and boarding was smooth. We were very fortunate that the plane was on time and running, as it was still extremely stormy post Storm Eunice.

The flight was pretty smooth with a little turbulence, but all was fine and we safely arrived at Warsaw Airport. Once we had collected our baggage, I met another guest who arrived on a separate plane a few hours earlier. We then loaded up on to the minibus that was waiting. Our final guest was already in the minibus as she stayed in Warsaw the previous night. With everyone accounted we set out on our 3.5-4 hour drive to our hotel Dwor Bartnika.

Due to the late departure from the airport and some rush hour traffic in Warsaw we arrived at our hotel at around 20:45. We had a quick briefing from our guide Marek about the week ahead who shared the plan for the following morning. We then had an early night after a nice dinner as we had an early start!

Day 2: Tuesday 22 February 2022

Weather: Overcast, 2° C

Today we split the group into two, one group joined the bison safari and the other group headed to the Riverside Hide. It was an early start for the Riverside Hide group, arriving at the hide at 05:30 to avoid scaring any raptors, we had to enter and leave hides in darkness. That group had roughly a 15-minute walk to reach the hide. The group reported back to me in the evening about their day where they heard a few buzzard calls in the morning around 9am. They also enjoyed lots of visits by Eurasian jays, great spotted and middle spotted woodpecker.

Just after 09:00 the golden eagle landed in front of the hide! It came in from the trees to the left of the hide, no doubt it was sitting in the tree for a while. The eagle fed for about 15 minutes on the bait, before flying away! A really great encounter. They had numerous buzzard calls throughout the session and the golden eagle then returned a little later, when it did a flypast and landed in a far tree and sat there for at least an hour.

I messaged the group around midday to see how they were getting on in the hide as I was on the bison safari. I got a reply back around 14:00 saying they had a wolf that had walked into the feeding area! It stayed in front of the hide for around 30 minutes feeding. It then managed to chew some of the carcass bait away and took it off to the safety of the tree line. The wolf then went away and came back again for another 30 minutes or so! When the wolf stopped feeding it sat down in an open area, scratched itself for a short time and sat around for another 20 mins or so before finally disappearing into the forest. What an absolutely incredible encounter. By 17:00 two buzzards finally came down to feed on the remaining food left over from the wolf, unfortunately the light levels were too low for any good photos.

At the bison safari we had just as successful a day as the other group. It didn't take us long before we found a small herd of bison, comprising two females with young calves. We spent quite a bit of time with them, allowing us some lovely photos to start the day. The weather started to turn with rain and sleet showers, so we stopped for a coffee break and a drive around the national park to find more bison. We soon found a

bigger herd which kept us occupied for a while! After a nice lunch break and more coffee we headed into a small village where we found four male bison grazing and resting. We spent a good few hours at this location and got some nice close encounters.

Whilst driving around in the late afternoon we came across a moose, a very close encounter but sadly it was standing in some dense woodland and was blocked by foliage for any good images, but regardless it was great to see.

Day 3: Wednesday 23 February 2022

Weather: Overcast, -1° C

Today was a switch over in groups, I joined group two this time for their bison safari, and group one went into the Goshawk Hide in the hope to get some nice shots!

The Bison Safari started at 07:00, it was a frosty start with some very light snow flurries throughout the morning. There was some heavy snow forecast for the afternoon, so it was exciting to see what today's session produced. It didn't take too long until our guide Marian found the small herd of bison, the two females with calves. The ground was fairly frosty so it made for some really nice shots laying down and getting photos of the two young bison. After a couple of hours the ground we were laying on started to defrost and we were soon laying in some rather wet boggy ground! Not a great start with damp clothes but the images and encounter were worth it.

After the session with the female bison, it was time to move on and try to find a bigger herd to photograph. It was becoming a tricky morning finding the bison, and we spent a good couple of hours driving around the national park with not much luck. So, we decided to have a slightly early lunch and coffee stop before heading further north in the forest to continue our search. After our lunch we took the hour drive further north, as the weather predicted it was starting to snow fairly heavily. This was exciting however we still had zero bison in front of the cameras to make it worthwhile.

It was a rush against the snow, hoping we would find a herd before the snow stopped. Marian, our guide, decided to park up near some meadows and hopped out the 4x4 to search the surrounding fields and he had a feeling some bison were around. About 15 minutes later he came running back saying he had found four large male bison grazing. It was an incredible few hours photographing them in the remaining heavy snowfall. Finally, it felt a little more like winter!

The snow turned to sleet and rain and that was our cue to back up and head to the warmth of the vehicle. What a fantastic day. Unfortunately, the group in the hide were not successful in seeing the goshawk, but still got some lovely snowy images of other birds.

In the evening I ran a Lightroom session, editing some of the group's and my own images. I taught them how I edit my own images and showed them everything that I do to bring out the best in photos when shooting in difficult lighting conditions! The group enjoyed it and hopefully took some good tips away that they can use on their own images.

Day 4: Thursday 24 February 2022

Weather: Overcast, 2° C

Today I joined group one for their session in the Riverside Hide hoping for that sighting of the golden eagle and that stunning grey wolf that was spotted on the first hide session. It was a very early start with being in the hide at 05:30, this was going to be our home for the next 12 hours!

The morning started slow; however activity of smaller birds was very frequent, we had quite a few visits from the great spotted woodpecker and the middle spotted woodpecker, which kept us entertained whilst waiting for the eagles.

After a long morning we got our first glimpse of the golden eagle landing in a distant tree! Sadly after 30 minutes or so it flew off and that would be the last time we saw it for the day. All was not lost though as we had some visits from some buzzards in the afternoon which made the long day worth it.

The second group were in the woodpecker hide and had a great day with some visits from red squirrels and even had a moose run through in front of the hide!

Day 5: Friday 25 February 2022

Weather: Overcast, 2° C

Today it was my turn to join group two in the Deer Hide, which is mostly set up for goshawk. It was going to be another long day, however we were all in good spirits and looking forward to the day. We had lots of activity from the small woodland birds and also a few visits from the crested tits. They don't hang around for long when coming to the feeders, so the group enjoyed playing around trying to get some nice shots.

Day 6: Saturday 26 February 2022

Weather: Overcast, 0° C

A day in the woodpecker hide today where I joined two of the guests, the rest of the group wanted to do the bison again as it was their last day of photography.

The woodpecker hide was good, with birds and activity rolling in throughout the day. A mixture of species visited from great and middle spotted woodpecker, bullfinch, hawfinch, various tits, siskins, green finch and also a few visits from a red squirrel. It was a great day in the hide and we finished early around 14:00, so it was nice to have so much activity in a fairly short hide session. The other group had a fantastic day with the bison, they got some great golden light images in the morning and late afternoon, and also managed to get some nice silhouette shots in the late afternoon light. So they were all very pleased with the photos they took.

Day 7: Sunday 27 February 2022

Weather: Overcast, 1° C

Today was the day we parted ways and headed back to Heathrow. We all enjoyed a little lay-in this morning and had breakfast together around 09:00. Our driver was then coming to collect us from our hotel at 11:00 to take us back to Warsaw Airport which took around 4 hours. We had a good few hours to spare before our flight so we enjoyed a coffee together and discussed the week's activities, before boarding our flight and heading home.