

Tour Report

Poland - Winter Wildlife Photography

9 - 15 January 2022

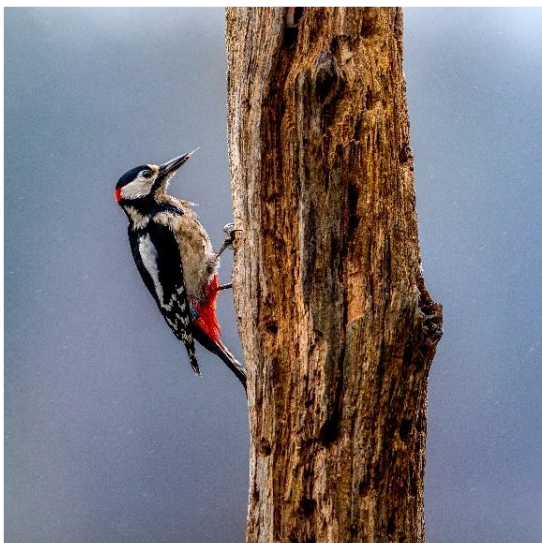
European bison



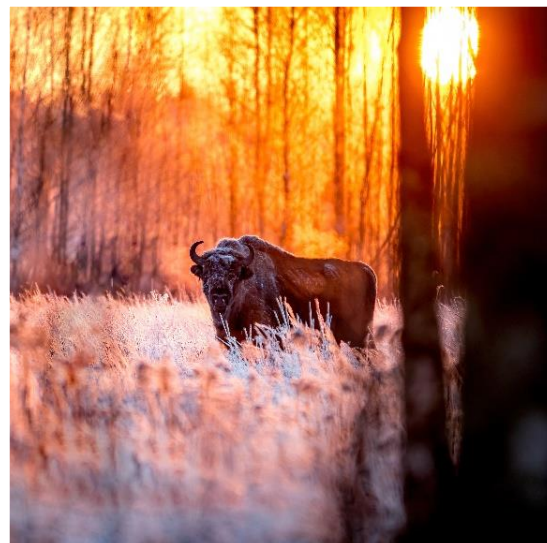
Northern hawk owl



Great spotted woodpecker



European bison



Compiled by Sean Weekly

Day 1: Sunday 9 January 2022

Weather: sunny with blue skies in Warsaw. 3°C

It was an early start at Heathrow airport. After successfully checking in I met one of the guests at the departure lounge and enjoyed a coffee and a chat. He had previously joined me on our Red Kite & Night Sky Photographic Workshop, so it was nice to catch up.

The plane 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 conditions in Narewka where the hotel and our trip is based. We had our fingers crossed for some snow or a thick frost.

We arrived safely and I was briefed about the week from our guide Marek over dinner. I then briefed the group on timings and gave them a day-by-day breakdown of who was in which hide before we retired to our rooms.

Day 2: Monday 10 January 2022

Weather: -5°C

It was an early start for group one as they were spending their first day in the raptor hide. They had to leave at 5:50am to make sure they were entering the hide under darkness so as not to scare the eagles and surrounding raptors.

I joined the other group for their bison safari. We were picked up a little later around 7am by our guide Marian. We spent the next hour driving through the national park on the lookout for our first bison to photograph. We were not yet successful at finding any at this stage, however, we came to a secluded open area with a stream running through. Our guide went to show us a local beaver dam a bit further down the stream.

We were not waiting for too long, around ten minutes, and we heard and saw some of the long grass near the dam moving! We all stayed quiet hoping for a beaver, but although we did not see a beaver, it was in fact a mink that was running across the frozen stream in and out of the long grass looking for its morning feast. It was a lovely sighting and one that the group enjoyed. Although a little too far away for some good pictures it was a nice surprise to the day.

We then continued our tour to look for bison, which were playing hard to get on this particular day. We found one small herd in the open, we tried to approach but they ran in and disappeared into the thick forest. After a bit more driving around, we found a small group of three male bison grazing. We stopped and managed to get some photos. This was followed by going for a short walk into the forest where we saw another male bison resting on the woodland floor and were able to get some more nice images.

Our local guide had a tip off about a sighting of a northern hawk owl which was around 60 kilometres (one hour drive away). We decided to make the journey and it was a fantastic afternoon with the owl putting on a great show and gave us all some great photos.

Day 3: Tuesday 11 January 2022

Weather: -3°C

I joined the second group on their bison safari today and the weather was fairly chilly again - around -3°C. After spending the morning searching, we finally came across a lone male in the field grazing which gave the group some nice photo opportunities. We then came across one big herd mostly females with young. We tried to get close to them on foot through the woodland as cover but couldn't get close enough for photos sadly.

We then decided to leave the bison searching early and headed back to the owl site earlier in the afternoon. We had some good close sightings of the hawk owl hunting which was great to see. We stayed for a couple hours until sunset then headed back to our hotel for dinner and to meet the other group and hear how they got on in the hide.

The second group had a great day in the woodpecker hide, seeing goshawk and various other smaller birds.

Day 4: Wednesday 12 January 2022

Weather: -10°C

Today was forecast to be the best weather conditions with a thick hoar frost and temperatures at -15°C first thing in the morning, with highs of -10°C throughout the day. I made the decision for the whole group to join the bison safari today. We took two 4x4s, one of which I drove following our guide Marian in the other vehicle.

The weather conditions were superb, crisp clear skies and thick sparkling frost everywhere. It was magical to just step out of the hotel let alone head out on the search for bison to photograph. After about 45 minutes of driving deep into the bison territory we eventually came across a small group of three male bison just as the sun was starting to rise. It was a surreal moment; I have not witnessed a sunrise like this before in quite a few years!

We all took our time to approach the group of males on foot keeping ourselves as discreet as we could using the small tree line as cover. Eventually we were all close enough for a few images before the bison saw us and ran off into the cover of the forest. A truly unforgettable encounter.

For the rest of the day we found a single male in a field again covered in thick frost. Initially he was tucked away amongst some silver birch trees. It took a bit of patience but eventually he came out from the trees and into the open to graze. It produced some lovely wintery images!

Day 5: Thursday 13 January 2022

Weather: -2°C

Temperatures had increased hugely since yesterday with a 13°C increase. Sadly, there was no frost anymore.

I spent the day in the raptor hide with group one. It was an early start leaving the hotel at 5:50am but it didn't take too long until we got our first eagle sighting at 8am, one single bird flew into a distant birch tree. Frustratingly it was just checking out the location and left around 20 minutes later.

A couple of hours later we got another visit from a juvenile white-tailed sea eagle landing in a distant tree. Shortly after this we got a fly by from two adult eagles which were great to see fly past.

After around 45 minutes the juvenile eagle flew to a closer tree giving us some nice views through the binoculars. Eventually after around 15 minutes or so it flew off out of sight. It all went pretty quiet so we made the most of this and decided to eat our packed lunch in the hide. At 1:30pm we had a white-tailed sea eagle that landed on the ground to the right of hide. We were all very excited in the hope we were finally going to get some nice photos. We all stayed very still hoping it would come closer. Eventually after staking out the area it came within a close enough range to take some photos. However, we did not want to move our cameras and disturb it until it was settled and started to feed. To our frustration it never settled and very shortly flew off.

Despite this we had numerous visits from a great spotted and middle spotted woodpecker, jays and one visit from a pair of common buzzards. The other group spent the day in the woodland hide and had a great day with numerous woodland birds.

Day 6: Friday 14 January 2022

Weather: 5°C

Today I joined the other group in the raptor hide, but sadly due to very strong winds and heavy rain it was not a very successful day for photography. We briefly saw a goshawk fly into a distant tree, and spent the majority of the day photographing small woodland birds from the side of the hide, including middle spotted woodpecker and various tits including the gorgeous, crested tit.

Day 7: Saturday 15 January 2022

Sadly today the trip came to an end, after breakfast we returned to the airport and said our goodbyes.