



Belarus: Unspoiled Europe

May 12–22, 2018

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Report and photos by Nick Athanas; all photos are from the tour



Azure Tit, “bird of the trip” for most of the group

This was Tropical Birding's inaugural tour to Belarus, and probably the first of many. While this Eastern European nation is has become well-known in the European birding scene in recent years, it is still mostly unknown to North American birders. I don't often get the chance to guide trips in this part of the world, so when the opportunity arose I was happy to take it. I have to admit, I didn't quite know what to expect, and the media often paints a rather negative picture of this former Soviet republic. I needn't have worried, as Belarus proved to be a quiet, clean, orderly place with beautiful forest and timeless pastoral scenes, yet had decent infrastructure, nice hotels, friendly people, and interesting food. But what about the birds, you ask? Belarus may not sport a large bird list, but most of them are not well known by visitors from North America, and a high proportion of them were lifers for our group (including me I have to admit!). The **Azure Tit** shown above was the favorite trip bird for most of the group, but a few other highlights included a vociferous **Tawny Owl**, immaculate **Smew**, displaying **Great Snipe** and **Eurasian Woodcock**, a confiding **Eurasian Nightjar**, and all ten of the possible **woodpeckers**.

Due to flight schedules, all of us ended up arriving the day before the tour officially began. Our hotel was only a few minutes from the hotel and proved the perfect place to spend the night and even had great birding, so in the future we will be including this night as part of the tour. We birded a few hours after breakfast, and quickly found numerous common and attractive European species like **Eurasian Jay**, **Eurasian Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **Willow Warbler**, **Common Chiffchaff**, **Wood Warbler**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **European Pied Flycatcher**, **Common Redstart**, **Fieldfare**, **Song Thrush**, **White Wagtail**, **Yellowhammer**, **Common Chaffinch**, **European Greenfinch**, and **European Goldfinch** (*photo right*). There were also some rather uncommon species too! An impressive **Black Woodpecker** was a big surprise, and we saw our only **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** and **Goldcrest** of the tour, along with superb sightings of the weird **Eurasian Wryneck** and a pair of cooperative **Willow Tits**. At 1pm, our “local” guide Csaba (he is actually from Hungary) and our driver Sergei arrived in a VW van, and after introductions we started our journey south along modern and well-maintained highways, keeping an eye out for roadside birds like **Eurasian Jackdaw**, **Eurasian Kestrel**, **Great Gray Shrike**, and the tour’s only **Crested Lark**. We crossed the swollen Pripyat River on a pontoon bridge, since the main highway bridge had been damaged in recent floods, and had enough time to stop at a good vantage point along the banks of this picturesque, uncontrolled waterway. Terns were everywhere, including hordes of beautiful **White-winged Terns**, along with smaller numbers of **Black**, **Whiskered**, and **Common Terns**. Stunning **Ruffs** in full breeding plumage were almost comical as they puffed up and strutted around, and we spotted a few other shorebirds including **Wood Sandpiper** and **Common Redshank**. Belligerent **Northern Lapwings** dove at anything and anyone that dared to get too close. We scoped various waterfowl including some handsome **Garganey** and several **Common Pochards**. **Eurasian Skylarks** hovered in the sky singing their endless songs, and a few **Eurasian Linnets** fed on the riverbanks. After this spectacle, we continued a few miles into the center of Turov, a quiet and impeccably clean town on the banks of the Pripyat. Its centerpiece is a blindingly gilded Eastern Orthodox church, though the numerous active **White Stork** nests add a lot to its charm. We spent four nights in a good government run hotel, with a WWII mobile artillery unit monument across the street and even a Terek Sandpiper statue (sadly with rather deformed beaks after years of fondling...). Below is a panoramic shot of the town, with our hotel on the left.



We used Turov as our base to explore the surrounding meadows, wetlands, forests, and farmland. Late spring days are very long in Belarus (at over 50 degrees latitude), so on most days we had a pre-breakfast walk, scoping the banks of the river and birding patches of woodland near town. These always produced something of interest, including our only **Terek Sandpiper** of the trip along with plenty of other shorebirds like the handsome **Black-tailed Godwit**. **Black Redstarts** perched on houses and clung to nearby tree trunks, **Rooks** were nesting in the taller trees, **Tufted Ducks** dabbled along the river edge, and striking **Eurasian Magpies** regularly flew over.



A White Stork near its nest across the street from our Turov hotel



A Yellowhammer seen during one of our pre-breakfast walks

One of the highlights of our time at Turov was our visit to the Alshany pumping station, which feeds irrigation canals for the many cucumber farms in this region. This is where we encountered the gorgeous **Azure Tit** (if Dr. Evil were a Blue Jay, then Azure Tit would be his “mini-me”...) along with plenty of others: **Montagu’s and Eurasian Marsh Harriers**, **Eurasian Penduline-Tit**, **Icterine Warbler**, **Sedge Warbler**, **Greater Whitethroat**, **Thrush Nightingale**, **Western Yellow Wagtail**, **Reed Bunting**, and **Eurasian Hoopoe**. **Red-backed Shrikes** were all over the place – this is such a nice-looking bird that we never grew tired of seeing it even though we encountered them almost every day. As we left the site in the afternoon, something scurried across the road, and after tracking it down it proved to be a **Gray Partridge**. After a failed search for Syrian Woodpecker, we spent the late afternoon back on the banks of the Pripyat, where we added several new birds like **Common Ringed Plover**, **Caspian Gull**, **Common Rosefinch**, and **European Serin**, before heavy rains moved in and we called it a day.



Gray Partridge near Alshany

We spent much of the next day at some fishponds, where several gorgeous **Smew** stole the show, but there was plenty more to look for including **Mute** and **Whooper Swans**, **Red-crested Pochard**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Great Crested Grebe**, **Black Stork**, **Lesser Spotted** and **White-tailed Eagles**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Common Greenshank**, and **Mew Gull**. Reedbeds here were absolutely loaded with singing **Great Reed Warblers**, and with a bit of effort we also managed to locate **Marsh Warbler** and **Eurasian Reed Warbler**. A fancy male **Bluethroat** sang from post by the reeds, and we had our first of several **Whinchats**. On the way back to Turov, we stopped at nearby village to have another go at **Syrian Woodpecker**, which had somehow eluded us so far. Csaba tried a different recording, and finally, two birds responded for really nice views – oddly (for a woodpecker), it is most easily seen in towns and villages. However, our day was not done! After an early dinner, we stayed out quite late to visit a lekking site for **Great Snipe** – they are mostly easily seen at around sunset, which wasn’t until 9pm, and we had to take a boat to the spot since the river level was so high. It was well worth it though as we saw several birds fly in to their grassy display, where they scurried back and

forth, hopped up and down, and gave their odd clicking calls. Great Snipes are famous for being arguably the fastest migratory bird, able to fly nonstop between their breeding grounds in Europe and Asia and their wintering grounds in central Africa at an average speed of nearly 60mph (100kph).



Syrian Woodpecker at Kremoe near Turov

On our last full day in the Turov area, we first birded a forest trail in Pripyatsky National Park. It was pretty quiet, and we didn't find any of the hoped-for woodpeckers, though with patience we located a few species like **Coal Tit**, **Collared Flycatcher**, **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, and **Tree Pipit**. A migrating kettle of **Oriental Honey Buzzards** passed over a clearing in the forest, where there was also a **Eurasian Hobby**. A **Wood Warbler** also came down surprisingly low to sing for us, for our best view of the trip (*photo below*).



The mosquitos on this trail were worse than anywhere else, so we fled and headed to some riverine woodland for our picnic lunch. As soon as we got there, a **Eurasian River Warbler** started singing, so we abandoned our meal briefly to go track it down – good thing we did since it was the only one we found on the tour. After lunch, an easy stroll along the river produced some great birds. Handsome **Barred Warblers** were singing boldly from several treetops, brilliant **Eurasian Golden Orioles** finally showed well, a **White-backed Woodpecker** perched briefly, a **Great Gray Shrike** sat on a wire, and we even had a flyby of a lone **Eurasian Roller**, which Csaba told us was a super-rare bird in Belarus. Later in the afternoon, we concentrated on farmland near the forest edge (not wanting to feed the mosquitos) which proved to be a great idea. A **Corn Crake** responded brilliantly, running across the road for us and peering out of the grass, a pair of **Common Cranes** flew over, and we had the tour's only **European Turtle-Dove** and **Hawfinch**.



Corn Crake near Turov

Our time in Turov had come to an end, so we continued our journey west to the town of Byelaazyorsk. On most tours, we would have devoted much of this day to looking for Great Gray Owl at a forest reserve outside of town, but we had the unusual situation that everyone on the tour had seen Great Gray Owl before. It was therefore a unanimous decision to not look for the owl and instead have more time at the wetlands around Byelaazyorsk. This may have worked out for the best since rain turned out to be a factor today, and it probably would have been a wet slog in the forest. In between showers, we banded at the Sporovo Reserve near town and easily found our key target, the threatened **Aquatic Warbler**, along with **Savi's Warbler**, **Wood Lark**, and **Meadow Pipit**. We had a single night in a nice hotel in Byelaazyorsk.

With the Aquatic Warbler in the bag, we were free to explore a vast network of fishponds to the north of Byelaazyorsk. We first made a short detour to see **Citrine Wagtail**, then headed to Sialets, where a local man that Csaba knew helped to arrange access. At this point in the trip, we were not expecting a whole lot of new birds, but were pleasantly surprised. Ducks were all over, including our first **Eurasian Wigeons** and **Green-winged (Eurasian) Teals** for the tour

along with better views of **Tufted Duck**. Migrants were present in good numbers and with persistence we picked out some unusual species like **Little Stint**, **Red-necked Phalarope**, and **Little Gull**. The favorite of the morning was a male and several females of **Bearded Reedling**, a beautiful bird and a new family for some of the group. After that, we settled in for a fairly long drive west towards the border with Poland, and we reached our hotel in Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park by late afternoon, where we would stay for the next three nights. Our afternoon birding session was rather wet, though we did see a couple of woodpeckers: **Great Spotted** and **White-backed**.



A female Bearded Reedling (the male was camera-shy!)

The next morning started poorly with our pre-breakfast birding being a total washout! This was worrying to say the least, as it was to be our only day in the heart of the national park, which has quite restricted access. We went with a park ranger, Anton, who is a great birder and knows the best locations. Due to the rain, he first took us all the way through the park to a clearing that was packed with several herds totaling over 60 **European Bison** and **Red Deer** (*below*)!





That was a sign things were going to get better, and they sure did. The rain tapered off and became a light mist, and the cool weather kept the birds active through the day. Anton took us to various spots, first in verdant, almost untouched pine forest and then into younger but no less beautiful oak forest. A **Eurasian Nutcracker** responded brilliantly at a stakeout, and our woodpecker list got a big boost with the addition of **Middle Spotted** and **Eurasian Three-toed**, along with another sighting of **Black Woodpecker** near a nest. A stunning **Firecrest** came down and showed off at eye-level, and we finally located some of the forest birds we had been missing like **Eurasian Treecreeper** and **Eurasian Wren**. A **Greenish Warbler** was a bit of a surprise, but luckily it was singing to make the ID easy. In order to make the most of our time here, we had an early dinner and went back out after. With the sun setting so late, there was still plenty of daylight left, and we made the most of it by finally finding a **Gray-headed Woodpecker** (#9 for the trip) and our first **Crested Tits** (*photo right*). We waited patiently for dusk and eventually started hearing the strange, low buzzing song of a **Eurasian Nightjar**. Soon it started flying back and forth over a clearing, and got it in the spotlight for a nice view. It was soon followed by a **Eurasian Woodcock**, with its distinctive shape and odd snapping call. Anton had one more surprise for us. It was almost 11, but when he asked if we wanted to stop to look for **Tawny Owl**, we were "all-in". With some playback, one called back almost immediately, but it sounded pretty far away. Our luck continued though, as the bird got closer to closer, and then a dark shape flew across the road. After some anxious moments, it was finally located and we got the beautiful bird in the spotlight, glaring angrily down at us from its lofty perch.



With our late night, we skipped the pre-breakfast birding and had a more relaxing day. In contrast to the last couple of days, it was a spectacular sunny day with perfect temperatures. We took a long walk on a trail near our hotel and had good activity the whole morning with birds including **Stock Dove**, **Eurasian Hobby**, **Marsh Tit**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Eurasian Blackcap**, and **Garden Warbler**. The highlight of the morning was a **Eurasian Pygmy-Owl**, which we heard tooting and then tracked down for a scope view, and it was also great to find the tenth and final woodpecker of the trip, a **Eurasian Green Woodpecker**. We spent the afternoon exploring some areas outside the park, hoping for some raptors, though we ended up not seeing anything new. One of them appeared to be a **hybrid Lesser X Greater Spotted Eagle**, but was not dark enough and not well enough marked for us to think it was a pure Greater. The next morning, after breakfast, we began the long drive back to Minsk, arriving by early afternoon in time for some of the group to catch flights home, while others would spend another night in the airport hotel before flying out the next day.



Sedge Warbler



Spotted Flycatcher



Pine forest in Belovezhskaya Pushcha

BIRD LIST

The list includes everything that was seen by at least one of the group, including the guides. Taxonomy follows the August 2017 version of the eBird/Clements list; reference: Clements, J. F., T. S. Schulenberg, M. J. Iliff, D. Roberson, T. A. Fredericks, B. L. Sullivan, and C. L. Wood. 2017. *The eBird/Clements checklist of birds of the world: v2017*. Downloaded from <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/download/>

164 bird species seen + 7 heard only

H=heard only

GO=guide only

BNP – abbreviation for Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* – Small numbers on ponds on three days.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* – Beloe and Sialets fishponds.

Garganey *Spatula querquedula* – Encountered on most days.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* – Small numbers at various ponds and lakes.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera* – Small numbers at various ponds and lakes.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope* – Seen only near Byelaazyorsk and at the Sialets fishponds.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* – Common.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* – Singles seen along the Pripyat River on two days.

Green-winged (Eurasian) Teal *Anas c. crecca* – Only encountered at the Sialets fishponds.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* – One pair seen at the Beloe fishponds – a rarity here.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* – Good numbers seen along the Pripyat River and at the Beloe fishponds.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* – A few on the Pripyat River and then again at the Sialets fishponds.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* – Seen at the Beloe and Sialets fishponds.

Smew *Mergus albellus* – A few males and a female were a tour highlight at the Beloe fishponds.

(H) Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* – Heard in farmland near Turov; efforts to flush it failed.

Gray Partridge *Perdix perdix* – One ran across the road into a field near Alshany.

(H) Hazel Grouse *Tetrastes bonasia* – We spent a lot of time looking for them, but no luck...

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* – One seen at the Sialets fishponds; heard elsewhere.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* – Numerous at the Beloe and Sialets fishponds.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* – Small numbers seen in scattered locations.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* – A common and conspicuous bird in Belarus.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* – Numerous at the Beloe and Sialets fishponds.

(H) Great (Eurasian) Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* – Heard “booming” at the Beloe and Sialets fishponds.

Gray Heron *Ardea cinerea* – Small numbers seen on most days.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* – Small numbers seen on most days.

European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* – A small kettle flew over Pripatsky NP, and a single at BPNP.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina* – Regularly encountered. We also had one bird that appeared to be a hybrid
Greater Spotted X Lesser Spotted.

Eurasian (Western) Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* – The most common harrier on this tour; seen most days.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* – Best seen near Alshany, with some scattered sightings during long drives.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* – Good numbers at the Beloe and Sialets fishponds, another outside BPNP.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* – Encountered on most days.

Corn Crake *Crex crex* – Commonly heard in and around Turov – one bird responded well for a really nice view.

(H) Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* – Two were heard along the Pripyat River but were unresponsive.

(H) Eurasian Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* – Heard near Turov; a rather scarce bird in this area.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* – Small numbers encountered on the Pripyat River and Beloe and Sialets fishponds.

Common Crane *Grus grus* – Pairs seen in flight near Pripatsky NP and at the Sporovo Reserve.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* – Singles seen on two days along the Pripyat River.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* – Common, conspicuous, and entertaining to watch!

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* – A few birds seen along the Pripyat River.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* – Seen only at the Beloe and Sialets fishponds.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* – Seen best along the Pripyat River, where they breed – a very handsome bird!

Ruff *Calidris pugnax* – Many seen, especially along the Pripyat River. Males in breeding plumage are truly fantastic!

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* – Several migrants seen at the Sialets Fishponds; we also saw a few being banded
by ornithologists in Turov.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* – Small flocks of migrants seen at the Pripyat River and the Sialets fishponds.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* – Csaba picked out a lone bird at the the Sialets fishponds – somewhat of a rarity here.

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* – Seen flying over the forest at dusk one evening at BPNP.

Great Snipe *Gallinago media* – We visited a lek one evening near Turov, where we saw several birds displaying.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* – Encountered at least four days, including several birds doing display flights.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* – One bird seen along the Pripyat River. They breed in small numbers in this area.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* – One bird at the Sialets fishponds. Very rare here – it was a “write-in”!

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucus* – A few seen along the Pripyat and then again at Sporovo.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* – A few seen at the Beloe fishponds.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* – Ditto.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* – A few encountered, especially along the Pripyat where small numbers breed.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* – Noisy and conspicuous, especially along the Pripyat, which is a breeding site.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* – The most frequently-encountered gull on this tour.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* – One flock seen at the Sialets fishponds.

Mew (Common) Gull *Larus canus* – A few seen at the Beloe Fishponds.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* – Small numbers seen at ponds throughout, and from the van during long drives.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* – Common and conspicuous along the Pripyat River, where they breed.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* – A few noted along the Pripyat and at various ponds; less numerous than the next.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* – Large numbers along the Pripyat River, a few elsewhere. Beautiful this time of year!

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* – Regularly seen along rivers and at fishponds. Stunning in breeding plumage.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* – Seen most days.

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Stock Dove *Columba oenas* – Several encountered near BPNP.

Common Wood-Pigeon *Columba palumbus* – Seen most days.

European Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia turtur* – Two birds seen in a recently plowed field near Turov.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* – A few noted around Turov.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* – A common sound of the Belarusian countryside, and seen on a few occasions.

Eurasian Pygmy-Owl *Glaucidium passerinum* – Great scope views of a fierce bird along the Lakeside Track at BPNP.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* – Anton’s stakeout did not disappoint! A pair responded, and one showed well in the spotlight; it came in second for “Bird of the trip”.

Eurasian Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* – One bird (at least) flew over us several times at dusk in BPNP.

Common Swift *Apus apus* – Regularly encountered, especially in towns.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* – Individuals seen on four days.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus* – One flew by our picnic site along the Pripyat River – very rare in Belarus.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* – Seen at the Green Park Hotel, Alshany, and the Beloe fishponds.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* – One at the Green Park Hotel was the only sighting on the tour.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius* – One seen in BPNP.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* – One along the Pripyat River and another in BPNP.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* – Seen daily while at BPNP.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* – A pair seen at Kremnoye near Turov, and another bird near Byelaazyorsk.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus* – One seen in BPNP.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* – One at the Green Park Hotel and another in BPNP.

Eurasian Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* – We called one called in along the Lakeside Track at BPNP for our tenth and

final woodpecker; it's usually the hardest woodpecker to find on this tour.

Gray-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* – One seen at one of Anton's stakeouts in BPNP.

Eurasian (Common) Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* – Several seen around Turov.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* – One bird at Pripatsky NP and another at BPNP.

(GO) Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* – One was harassing flocks of shorebirds along the Pripyat River.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* – This beautiful bird was seen on most days of the trip in lightly wooded areas.

Great Gray (Northern) Shrike *Lanius excubitor* – We saw one in farmland near Turov.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* – Regularly encountered, though it took a while for us to get a decent view.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* – One at the Green Park Hotel and several sightings in BPNP.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* – Seen on most days.

Eurasian (Spotted) Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* – Nice views at one of Anton's stakeouts in BPNP.

Eurasian (Western) Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* – Mostly seen from the van during long drives.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* – Common, seen most days.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* – Common, seen most days.

Common (Northern) Raven *Corvus corax* – Small numbers noted in most areas.

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus* – A bird heard at the Beloe fishponds vanished without a trace, but we had a nice encounter with one male and several females at the Sialets fishponds.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea* – Two birds seen doing display flights at the Sporovo Reserve.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* – Common in grassy areas – it's always fun to watch their tireless display flights.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* – One lone bird was seen along the side of the road en route to Turov.

Bank Swallow (Sand Martin) *Riparia riparia* – Regularly encountered, including some nesting colonies.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* – Daily.

Common House-Martin *Delichon urbicum* – Daily.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater* – Seen in forest at Pripatsky NP and BPNP.

Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus* – It took us until nearly the end of the tour, then had two nice encounters at BPNP.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* – One bird seen on the Lakeside Track at BPNP.

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* – Superb views of a pair by the pond at the Green Park Hotel, and another in BPNP.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* – Seen on three days of the tour.

Azure Tit *Cyanistes cyanus* – A pair showed well along the dike near the Alshany pumping station – it won a very informal vote for "Bird of the trip".

Great Tit *Parus major* – The most common tit in Belarus, seen almost every day.

Eurasian Penduline-Tit *Remiz pendulinus* – Nice views at Alshany and at the Sialets fishponds.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* – We only found one, along the Lakeside Track at BPNP.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* – We only saw two – one in Pripatsky NP and another in BPNP.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris familiaris* – Seen a few times in BPNP.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* – One sighting in BPNP.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* – One of the first birds of the tour as we scoped one in a tree next to the parking lot at the Green Park Hotel.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla* – One came down to eye level in BPNP for a super view.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* – Heard almost every day and seen a few times as well.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* – A common voice of Belarusian woodland, and frequently seen as well.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* – Another commonly-heard bird that also showed well on a few occasions.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* – A singing bird was tracked down in BPNP; rare here.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* – Several great sightings around Turov, and heard elsewhere.

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* – This bird was the main reason to visit the Sporovo Reserve, which is one of its strongholds (it's generally considered Europe's rarest and most threatened passerine). We scoped several individuals as they came up to sing from the top of a small bush. We also heard it at the Dzikaje Mire near BPNP.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* – We saw them pretty much anywhere there were reedbeds.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* – Nice scope views at the Beloe Fishponds, and heard a few other places.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* – Seen at the Beloe and Sialets fishponds.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* – We saw them pretty much anywhere there were reedbeds.

Eurasian River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis* – We saw one bird well near a picnic area along the Pripyat River.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella lusciniooides* – A great encounter with a responsive bird at the Sporovo Reserve.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* – After hearing it a few times, we finally had a nice view of a male along the Lakeside Track at BPNP.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* – I think it was a "guide only" bird near Turov, but everyone finally got on it along the Lakeside Track at BPNP.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* – Our best sightings came near our picnic area along the Pripyat River. I find its song to be confusingly similar to the previous species...

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* – Seen several times the first few days, and regularly heard over the rest of the trip.

Greater (Common) Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* – Regularly encountered at a number of sites.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* – Seen on most days.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* – One seen at Pripatsky NP and a few others heard at BPNP.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* – Most common around Turov, where we tracked one bird down for a scope view. A few were heard elsewhere.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* – We scoped one singing from a post at the Beloe fishponds.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* – Immature males seen at Pripatsky NP and BPNP.

European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* – Seen at the Green Park Hotel and near Turov, and heard elsewhere.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* – Several good views inside forest at Pripatsky NP and BPNP.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* – Best seen at the Green Park Hotel, and some of the group saw another one near the hotel at BPNP.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* – Several seen around houses in and near Turov.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* – A few sightings in open areas.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* – A pair seen at the Sialets fishponds – quite scarce in Belarus.

Eurasian (Common) Blackbird *Turdus merula* – We saw it a few times in forest – surprisingly shy in Belarus!

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* – Quite common in many areas, and we saw it most days of the trip.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* – A few encountered over the course of the trip.

(H) Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* – Heard at BPNP.

European (Common) Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* – Seen daily in large numbers.

Western Yellow (Blue-headed) Wagtail *Motacilla flava flava* – Common in open areas.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* – A few seen near Byelaazyorsk and at the Sialets fishponds.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* – Common and seen every day.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* – A few birds at the Aquatic Warbler stakeout in Sporovo.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* – We scoped one perched in a tree at Pripatsky NP.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* – A common bird in Belarus, and seen all but one day.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* – Seen in and around wetlands throughout the trip.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* – One of the most common birds on this tour.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* – One bird seen near a farm not far from Pripatsky NP.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* – We saw several males in and near Turov.

(H) Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* – Heard in BPNP.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* – Seen at the Green Park Hotel and around Turov.

Eurasian (Common) Linnet *Linaria cannabina* – We saw several birds near Turov.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* – Common at the Green Park Hotel and around Turov.

European Serin *Serinus serinus* – We scoped a singing bird at Turov.

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* – Only encountered at the Green Park Hotel. Somehow we missed it at BPNP...

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* – Common.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* – Common.

MAMMALS

European Hare (Brown Hare) *Lepus europaeus* – One seen between Turov and Byelaazyorsk.

Eurasian Red Squirrel (Red Squirrel) *Sciurus vulgaris* – One seen at the Green Park Hotel.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* – One seen near Byelaazyorsk.

Red Deer (Elk) *Cervus elaphus* – A small herd was near the bison in BPNP.

European Bison *Bison bison* – Sixty or so were seen in a large clearing in BPNP.