

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



18th to 25th January 2020

POLAND

Eurasian Lynx and winter wildlife

NEW ITINERARY FOR 2020

A wintery week in the company of Marek Borkowski, searching for some of Europe's most exciting large mammals.

The extensive habitats of north east Poland are amongst the last great European wildernesses, with healthy populations of **large mammals** still surviving in the primeval forests and marshes.

Europe's heaviest land mammal, the **European Bison** was driven to the verge of extinction by the 19th century, but has since returned to the Bialowieza Forest, where 60% of the world's free-roaming 'Wisent' now make their home.

The two great predators of the Polish forests are Wolf, with more than 1000 individuals, and the shy and enigmatic **Eurasian Lynx** which numbers around 300.

The lack of vegetation cover, snowy-white background, shortage of food supply and the possibility to follow tracks in the snow all combine to make this one of the best times of year to look for these shy mammals. Apart from the animals themselves, we also have a good chance of seeing the signs of their behaviour, as well as perhaps hearing the eerie howling of local Wolf packs.

Other mammals we can expect to come across include Elk, Wild Boar, Roe Deer and Red Squirrels, while Raccoon Dog, Otter, Polecat and both Beech and Pine Marten are all present in good numbers. **Winter birdlife** should include owls and woodpeckers, birds of prey and grouse, Waxwings and tits.

There is no better season than winter to experience the remoteness of this 'Dr Zhivago country'. Frozen lakes, snow covered fields, great drifts of snow at the edge of the roads and crisp, wintery forests.



Price
£2,095

Single Room Supplement
£180

Full board

Day 1 Fly to Warsaw
Day 2 Masurian Lakes
Day 3 Piska Forest
Day 4 Biebrza Marsh
Day 5-7 Bialowieza Forest
Day 8 Return to UK

Leaders
Philip Precey
and Marek Borkowski

Group size
min 5, max 12

mammals,
winter birding

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to the **Wildlife Trusts**



Focus of interest

This is one of our 'Easy birding and wildlife' trips which means that the itinerary is based mainly on birds and/or other animals (rather than plants or general wildlife) and this also reflects the knowledge of the leaders and guides. A key aspect of this trip will be trying to find Eurasian Lynx and Wolf, as well as other large mammals. However, as with all of our trips, the pace is comfortable with time to enjoy other aspects of the natural history.



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities, including where we have the best chances of finding the large mammals that we will be looking for, at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 Our flight takes us to Warsaw, from where we transfer to the **Masurian Lakes**. Our hotel is located on the tip of a peninsula jutting out into Lake Sniardwy, Poland's largest lake, approximately twice as large as Loch Lomond and surrounded by mature Scots Pine forests. Wild Boar and Red Squirrels are commonly spotted amongst the trees, along with Black Woodpecker and White-tailed Eagle.

Days 2 & 3 We will spend our days searching the 300,000 acres of **Piska Forest** for the two great predators of the forest, Wolf and Eurasian Lynx, along with Capercaillie, while our evenings will be spent looking for Tengmalm's, Pygmy and Eagle Owls.

Day 4 Today we transfer to Marek's farm in the **Biebrza Marshes**. European Beavers live in the garden, Red Squirrels share the feeders with Crested and Willow Tits and a variety of woodpeckers while Beech Martens leave their den in the roof to visit the bird table in the evening. Otter, Polecat and Raccoon Dog are also frequently seen in the area, while the local Wolf pack howls at night to proclaim their territory.

Days 5-7 We move further eastwards, to the wonderful **Bialowieza Forest**, the last great expanse of the European primeval forests that once stretched unbroken from the Ural Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean. Some 1200 square kilometres of forest remains, divided evenly between Poland and neighbouring Belarus.

We will have two full days to explore this fantastic landscape, including the core 'strict reserve', with restricted access. The forest is best known as the home of the European Bison, with around 3,000 animals present either side of the border, and we will have our sights firmly set on spending some time with these wonderful animals. The forest is also home to all of Europe's woodpeckers, Nutcracker, Hazel Grouse and owls, including the occasional Great Grey Owl.

Day 8 We bid farewell to the wildlife of Poland and head back to Warsaw, and our flights back home.



Local guides

Marek Borkowski, our local guide, is one of Poland's leading conservationists and runs a local guiding company, **Wildlife Poland**. He has devoted his life to saving the wildlife in the region, and his expert local knowledge and experience will be a key part of the success of this trip, in tracking down the shy wildlife that we are so keen to find.

Marek has developed a network of over a hundred field scientists, rangers, researchers and foresters looking for wildlife for us. They have developed skills and techniques of finding the key species in the field, using local contacts and modern technology to best locate and watch the animals. Extra local guides will help us where appropriate.

Last winter, Marek had a **100% success rate** in showing his guests Eurasian Lynx, notoriously one of the shyest European mammals, and we are hopeful that we will continue this run of happy Lynx-watchers.

Marek's conservation work includes a breeding programme for the **Konik** ponies: he was the first person to recognise the suitability of this local breed of horse for habitat management, and his herd has been the source of the animals now used widely across Europe, including British National Nature Reserves such as Wicken Fen and Hickling Broad.

Accommodation, meals and transport

It will, no doubt, be chilly outside, but our hotels are cosy & well heated. All bedrooms have private facilities *en suite*. Food is based on organic products and we will have a chance to experience traditional Polish home cooking. Requests for special diets can be accommodated.

We will travel by minibus but the winter conditions may mean we switch to more suitable transport, with four-wheel drive vehicles and even horse-drawn sledges all at our disposal.

Weather

The weather at this time of year can be, not surprisingly, cold, perhaps around freezing (although it may also be warmer) during the day, with snow on the ground, sometimes at depths of a metre or more. Cold winds can add to the chill factor, and **you should be prepared for it to be cold throughout the trip**. Snow or rain are both possible. We will adapt our activities to the weather.

Health and fitness

We are out and about for much of the day as we travel around the countryside looking for the special wildlife of the area. You should be comfortable with walking on snowy or icy ground. For this reason the trip is not likely to be suitable for anyone who has problems with balance or who needs a stick to walk. There are likely to be steps at our hotels, with no lift, and we are likely to be climbing in and out of the vehicle fairly often.



Leaders

Philip Precey is a Director of Wildlife Travel and has led many of our trips in recent years. Philip is a keen all round naturalist, never to be found far from his binoculars, and his natural history knowledge will ensure you get the most out of your time searching for the local wildlife.

Our local guides are from **Wildlife Poland** a company with direct links with local conservation. Marek and Wildlife Poland guided our previous trips to the country and we are very pleased to be travelling with them again.

Passport and visas

If you hold an EU passport, you do not currently need a visa to travel to Poland. Your passport should be valid for the proposed duration of your stay; you do not need any additional period of validity on your passport beyond this.

Should we leave the EU without a deal in place before January 2020, you should have at least six months left on your passport from your date of arrival.

Flights

Group flights are with LOT from London Heathrow.

18th Jan depart Heathrow 10.25, arrive Warsaw 13.55

25th Jan depart Warsaw 15.30, arrive Heathrow 17.20

Poland is one hour ahead of the UK



TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

DEPOSIT £500 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 19/10/2019
SEE GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET ON HOW TO BOOK

INCLUDED: Return flights from London to Warsaw. Local transport as specified in itinerary, including entry fees. Seven nights' accommodation, all meals. Services of leaders.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Drinks with meals. Gratuities. Insurance. Entry to optional tourist sites.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Wildlife Travel Ltd. Reg. No 2237697; (for Registered Charity numbers, please contact us)*

Photos (all courtesy Marek Borkowski/Wildlife Poland, unless shown otherwise):

Front (clockwise): Great Grey Owl, Eurasian Lynx, Rough-legged Buzzard (Philip Precey), Elk

Inside: European Bison, Wolf, Waxwing, snowy Polish countryside. **Back** Konik horses, Red Squirrel