

Report of two holidays by train through Switzerland in August 2017 and December 2018

As few reports on bird observation in Switzerland appear on CloudBirders, I decided to (briefly) write up my observations made during two recent trips. As I was with my family, these two trips were no regular birding trips though. My observations do give you an idea what can be seen. These include alpine species like Golden Eagle, Alpine Accentor, Lammergeier, Alpine Chough and Spotted Nutcracker. I searched for my WP nemesis bird, Three-toed Woodpecker, during both trips but again failed... Especially the December trip should have delivered, as I was certain I was in prime habitat under the guidance of local birder Hans Meierhans. I want to thank him for taking me out birding. I also want to thank Jan Bisschop for bringing us in contact.

We decided to travel by train in both occasions, as this is very relaxing. In Switzerland many different train types will bring you to the smallest mountain villages where there is always a hotel for the night to stay. In many such villages, cars are not allowed. Travel was arranged through treinreiswinkel.nl. They made excellent arrangements (including train travel, hotels and scheme where to switch trains), even on a very short notice. Below follows the itinerary and a list of bird observations for both trips.

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Trip report of a holiday by train through Switzerland, 12-19 August 2017

12 August: left Utrecht at 08:30 with ICE through Arnhem, Oberhausen, Koln to Karlsruhe where problems with the rails made it impossible to travel further. This resulted in chaos outside the train station where many travellers, including us, had to catch trams and buses to, first, Raststatt, and then Baden Baden to continue. In the end, in Raststatt, we decided to hitchhike towards Baden Baden: a very nice lady was fortunately prepared to take us to the train station there. From thereon, we travelled to Freiburg where we stayed in the Novotel close to the train station.

13 August: from Freiburg, the train towards Luzern (through Basel) left at 10:24. In Luzern we took the boat over Lake Luzern (in German: Vierwaldstättersee) at 12:12 towards Vitznau. In Vitznau we took a small cable train to station Rigi Kaltbad-First where we arrived at 13:30. At Rigi Kaltbad, we stayed at Hotel Bergsonne, which has 15 Gault Millau points. Therefore, quite expensive but very nice, with a nice view over the mountains. Later the afternoon, we took the gondola down to Weggis (next to Lake Luzern). There we had nice Swiss sausages for dinner before taking one of the last gondolas back to Rigi.

14 August: a full day at Rigi. From the hotel, we walked up the mountain towards Rigi Staffel. Walked back along the train tracks on the Blumenpfad (Flower Trail) where nice wild flowers were still flowering. Arrival in the hotel after noon. Nice dinner at the hotel.

15 August: at 09:35, we left by cable train towards Rigi Kulm, with the highest top on 1752 m. From there, we took the Voralpen Express, another cable train, to Arth-Goldau where we arrived on 10:48. From here, we took two trains (with a change over at Pfaffikon) to finally arrive at Linthal. There, we took the cable car to Braunwald, another village where cars are not allowed. Golden Eagles greeted us at arrival at 14:00. Horse and buggy took us to our hotel Todiblick. In the afternoon, I searched several forests in vain for Three-toed Woodpecker. In the afternoon, a spectacular thunderstorm from the dining room.

16 August: a travel day from Braunwald to Bergun with several change overs (at Ziegelbrücke, Landquart, Davos and Filisur). Arrival at hotel Albula at 15:13. We had some time in the afternoon to go up the mountain by ski-lift from Preda. Lots of Spotted Nutcrackers!

17 August: a big day as we travel with the famous Glacier Express from Bergun to Zermatt, with the highest point reached at Oberalppass (at 2044 m). The Glacier Express crosses the famous Landwasser Viaduct. Departure today at 09:47 and finally arrived at 17:10. Hotel Alpenrose with a nice view at the Matterhorn of which the top was quite visible. We walked a little towards the mountain during which we heard and saw Alpine Marmot.

18 August: we decided to visit the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise (at 3883 m) in the morning before we left. Very cold and windy but excellent views of Matterhorn and eternal snow. Many skiers including the Swiss Olympic Team. Down the mountain in time to catch the 11:13 train to Brig. Through Bern we arrive at Basel at 16:29. Novotel near the station.

19 August: left Basel at 10:15 with ICE to Karlsruhe where we experienced the same problems as on 12 August. Now, however, buses drove on and off to Raststatt. From thereon, we travelled on to Karlsruhe, and onwards to Frankfurt and Utrecht where we arrived at circa 17:00.

Trip report of a holiday by train to Kandersteg in Switzerland: 27-31 December 2018

Our intention was to get to the snow, as this is very rare thing nowadays in the Netherlands. Kandersteg in Switzerland delivered although a couple of km's further north was devoid of snow...

27 December: we left by ICE from Utrecht (the Netherlands) at 08:30 and arrived in Basel at 14:35. From there we went on to Bern and final destination Kandersteg where we arrived at 17:40. We walked through a little bit of snow to our Hotel des Alpes.

28 December: we went up by gondola to the Oeschinensee. A full day of wintersport. Kandersteg is visited during day-time by a large flock of Alpine Choughs that however sleeps high in the mountains. In the village I saw a White-throated Dipper.

29 December: full day of walking through the Hohewald. Nice views and nice forest, but no Three-toed Woodpecker although it does occur. I was lucky to see a first-year Lammergeier though.

30 December: my family went to the ice-skating ring while I went back to the Hohewald with Hans Meierhans. Again without luck although we saw several Spotted Nutcrackers. Late afternoon, we took the train back to the Netherlands.

31 December: in the late morning, arrival in Utrecht

	27-dec	28-dec	29-dec	30-dec
Mallard Anas platyrhynchos				2
Lammergeier Gypaetus barbatus			1kj	
Common Buzzard Buteo buteo	c			
White-throated Dipper Cinclus cinclus		1		
Winter Wren Troglodytes troglodytes				
Goldcrest Regulus regulus			1	2
Willow Tit Parus montanus		1		1
Crested Tit Parus cristatus			2	5
Coal Tit Parus ater		1	10	10
Great Tit Parus major		2	1	
Eurasian Treecreeper Certhia familiaris			1	
Eurasian Jay Garrulus glandarius			h	
Common Magpie Pica pica		5	2	5
Spotted Nutcracker Nucifraga caryocatactes				2
Alpine Chough Pyrrhocorax graculus		100	100	100
Carrion Crow Corvus corone		10	2	5
House Sparrow Passer domesticus		2	3	
Common Chaffinch Fringilla coelebs			5	
European Goldfinch Carduelis carduelis		5	h	
Eurasian Siskin Carduelis spinus		h	5	
Lesser Redpoll Carduelis cabaret		10		
Common Crossbill Loxia curvirostra		35	10	10
Chamois Rupicapra rupicapra				3