

# North Holland and North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany



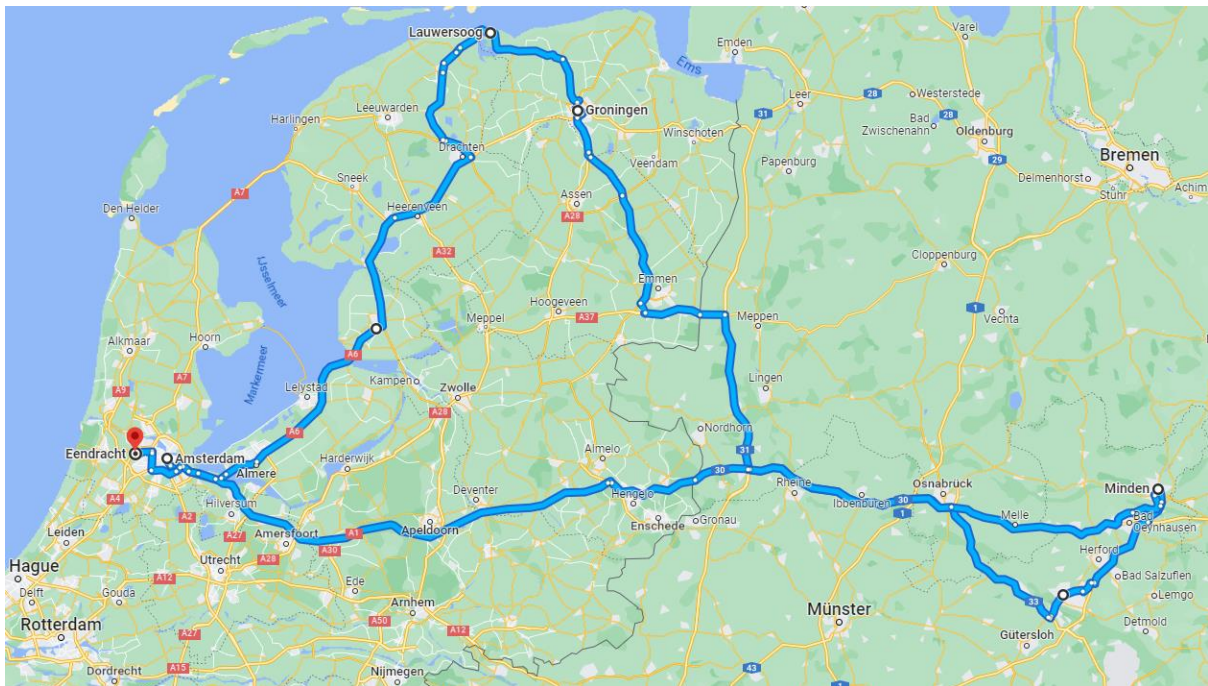
Six days of opportunistic birding (March - April 2023)

## Preamble

Apologies in advance for anyone expecting a high-octane report filled with masses of interesting birds, the main reason for our trip was to catch up with family and friends who couldn't make it to our wedding last year - as a result, most birding was incidental or opportunistic at best, though it was pleasant to be reacquainted with some of the species found on mainland Europe that are either absent or notable in the UK.

A total of 63 species were observed, with highlights including; **White-tailed eagle, White stork, Short-toed treecreeper, Crested tit, Black, Middle-spotted and Lesser-spotted woodpeckers.**

Unfortunately due to luggage restrictions, I opted to take a telescope over a camera, so have limited images taken with a mobile phone only.



*As demonstrated above, our route didn't take us via many of the top birding locations on offer in either Holland or Germany!*

## Day 1 (Schiphol to Groningen)

The one "spare" day for the duration of the trip, sadly foiled by high winds and plenty of rain upon arrival in The Netherlands. Following some kind advise offered on [Birdforum](#), we headed for Nationaal Park Lauwersmeer, with the only species of note en-route being **White tailed eagle**, **White stork** and a single **Great egret**. A very brief stop at a fuel station next to a flooded field added the first **White wagtail** and **Caspian gull** to proceedings.



*This wonderful mural at Lauwersmeer hinted at some of the avian possibilities at the reserve, sadly weather hampered any hopes of a comparable suite of species.*

Upon arrival at Lauwersmeer we were greeted by 40mph + winds, doing little to aid with birding, with my first Swallows of the year hawking over the lake, and a handful of singing Chiffchaff. A very distant **Marsh harrier** was quatering over the reedbed, and a few Gadwall were associated with Mallard and Tufted duck on the water body. After some 45mins of being buffeted by the wind, we decided to continue on towards Groningen. A few Hare and Roe deer were noted along the journey, with occasional Lapwing displaying in fields.

## Day 2 (Groningen)

Our second day was spent visiting friends in the city, with the only notable sightings being the first **Black redstart** of the trip, another bizarre sight of a pair of vocal Oystercatcher which were seemingly holding territory atop a block of flats.



*Though not uncommon in mainland Europe, roof nesting Oystercatcher was an unusual sighting for a UK birder.*

#### **Day 3 (Groningen to Bielefeld)**

Another fairly long and uneventful day in the car, with a couple of flyover **Great egret** the main highlight. In the afternoon we visited Heimat-Tierpark Olderdisen, which was the only opportunity for any birding, and was surprisingly good. A pair of vocal **Middle spotted woodpecker** were the obvious standout, whilst other species of interest included the first **Hawfinch, Firecrest, Brambling** and **Short toed treecreeper**. A nesting White stork within the park was of interest, though the pair looked thoroughly miserable in the wind, rain and low temperatures!

The remainder of the day was spent with family and wandering around the city, with a small group of **Hawfinch** passing over our accommodation en-route to a nearby roost.

#### **Day 4 (Bielefeld)**

Another pleasant if uneventful day in terms of birding, with an hour early doors spent in a small park near to our accommodation providing good views of common birds including Bullfinch, Siskin and a bathing Sparrowhawk, whilst a wander around Sparrenburg Castle in the afternoon found further sightings of **Hawfinch, Short toed treecreeper** and **Firecrest**.

So far it had been a pleasant if somewhat underwhelming (at least from a birding perspective) few days, but things were set to improve somewhat as we continued east to our penultimate destination of the lovely old city of Minden.





*A thoroughly miserable White stork, and the fine Sparrenburg castle in Bielefeld.*

### **Day 5 (Bielefeld to Minden)**

After an evening drive to Minden, I had hoped that the following morning would allow for a few hours birding before catching up with family.

A quick Google search flagged up an old quarry south of Neesen which I quite fancied for Eagle Owl, however upon arrival it quickly became evident that the access road was for military personnel only.



Undeterred, I opted for an unassuming road at Parkplatz Am Leversiek where I could explore the forest. This proved to be a great option, with the forest here alive with common woodland species; Jay, Chaffinch, Brambling, Siskin, Nuthatch, Firecrest, Fieldfare, Greater spotted and Green woodpeckers, Blackcap and Chiffchaff were abundant, whilst **Hawfinch** called and sang from what seemed like every other tree.



*Hawfinch and Red squirrel showed significantly better than my phone-scoped shots suggest!*

It was also good to catch up with the continental variant of Long tailed tit (*europaeus*). Whilst trying to get a sound recording of **Short toed treecreeper** a very loud hammering caught my attention. Casting my mind back to my time in Poland when I earned the nickname of Woodpecker Whistler Watson, I let rip my loudest and best whistle, with the electric reaction of a magnificent male **Black woodpecker** bounding over the treetops before alighting atop a particularly hammered spruce tree just 20 or so meters away - result, and a fine way to end the morning.

We had booked a pleasant medieval house in the centre, and the brief walk through the woodland south of Fischerglacis found good numbers of calling **Hawfinch** as well as a couple of singing **Short toed treecreeper** and surprisingly (at least given the relatively urban environment) at least two pairs of **Marsh tit**.

The remaining part of the day was again spent consuming large amounts of cake and coffee, before enjoying some local beer in the evening.

### **Day 6 (Minden)**

The final full day was again mostly set aside for family commitments and travel, however I had been relieved of any duties before lunch, allowing me a few hours of dedicated birding time. I was a bit unsure of where to go, so rather than returning to the excellent woodland south of Minden, I opted to start my day at Lahder Marsch. There had been a few interesting reports from the site in recent days, but unfortunately it was rather quite during my visit. At least five **Great egret** were foraging around the fringes of the lake, whilst assembled wildfowl included Greylag, Canada and Egyptian geese, Gadwall, Mallard, Tufted duck and a single **Goosander**. A nearby belt of trees held a brooding **White stork**, whilst both Willow warbler and Blackcap were new for the year, and desperately trying to provide some perception of spring despite the sub-zero temperatures! Having decided that my time would be better spent in woodlands, the next port of call was Wietser Teiche, where I had hoped to follow the road north-east through the forest. Unfortunately I was met



with a sign where the only words I understood were "private" and "forbidden", so I decided to do a quick circuit of the lake. This area was less productive, though another **Black woodpecker** was calling somewhere off in the distance, whilst a **Woodlark** sang from a clearing. A few **Marsh tit** and further **Hawfinch** and **Brambling** (including a pristine male) along with a fine singing **Black redstart** on some farm buildings were the only other notable species in an hour or so of wandering. I still had some time, so opted for another road, and purely on-spec, decided to try a [fairly ambiguous track](#) north of the Mittellandkanal just west of Meinsen. This proved to be an unexpected stroke of genius, and in the following hour I enjoyed extended (and often excellent) views of **Green, Greater, Middle and Lesser spotted woodpeckers**, making for a five woodpecker morning - not bad!



*Only this Greater spotted woodpecker showed for a long enough period for me to obtain a photo, at this point I wished I'd prioritised camera over telescope!*

The Middle spotted were particularly vocal, with a male giving the raptor like announcing call from the other side of the canal, before flying directly overhead and drumming in some trees, fantastic! The Lesser spotted woodpeckers were also particularly showy, and I enjoyed views to less than 10 meters as they called and drummed directly overhead - for any local birders, the woodland close to shooting hide (?) No. 18 was particularly productive, with no less than three males calling within earshot.

A singing **Crested tit** was a very welcome addition, and was my first encounter with the species since I had last been in Bavaria some five or so years ago. A few **Siskin, Hawfinch** and **Firecrest** were also present, as were several **Short-toed treecreeper** - again, all fairly common species, but always enjoyable to study behaviour and get better views than previously. As the sun began to work on the temperatures, both **Goshawk** and a beautiful cream-coloured Common buzzard made brief appearances, whilst a Red admiral was the only butterfly of the trip.

The remainder of the trip was once again spent alternating between consuming large quantities of coffee and cake, and undertaking the return journey to Schipol, with a late arrival at our accommodation in Amersfoot curtailing any further opportunity for birding.