A trip report by Johnny Prochera.

**General:**

I had been thinking of going back to Poland for a year or two and so put forward the idea as a cheap birding get away to Oli Reville, Kieran Nixon and Daniel Watson. We agreed mid-May would be the best time as most of the breeding species should be back with perhaps Greenish and Blythe’s Reed Warblers being the exceptions.

Flights cost £90.00 from Stansted to Warsaw Modlin via Ryanair. Modlin is a small airport which is easy to navigate and very simple to get out of and on the road. I have heard of people having problems navigating out of Chopin airport so I would recommend using Modlin.

We booked accommodation at two sites which cost us around £10.00 night B&B which for the standard we got exceed our expectations. Links to the property can be found at the end of this report and I highly recommend using them. Both hosts were very friendly and the breakfasts were superb. The rooms were clean and comfortable and had WIFI.

We hired our car from Herz and paid around £210 for the week, roads were fine 99% of the time with just one or two tracks causing us a few problems.

We undertook some light survey work whilst birding and mapped coordinates for several breeding species to be used for the forthcoming breeding bird Atlas. Please feel free to contact me for any information or coordinates if you are planning a trip here as I have excluded them from this report for the time being.
May 2015

Poland: Bialowieza and Biebrza

Daily reports.

May 16th, 2015.

After a couple of small hiccups with our Herz hire car we were off and on our way out of Modlin airport. It was warm and sunny with a slight breeze and despite being very tired we were in high spirits and optimistic about the week ahead.

The first bird that we recorded was a cracking male Northern Wheatear that was sitting on the airport fencing.

We were soon out in the countryside scanning nearby wires and posts. A Pine marten ran in front of the car ahead carrying what looked like a kit. It was my first marten and I was glad that it managed to miss the car if only by a few centimetres! We were to see 3 more Pine Marten during the rest of the trip.

Grey heron, House sparrow, Wood pigeon, Starling and more unusually for us Fieldfare were all common and we were treated to at least 4 Montagu’s harrier, 60-70 White storks and a couple of hunting Marsh harrier and Kestrel (a bird that was to become quite rare later on in the trip).

The differences in farming practise were instantly apparent as were the huge areas of untouched woodland and scrub vital for connecting habitat together.

...We had a quick stop at a random pull in and added our first Wood Warblers, Willow Warblers and our first “Northern” Long tailed tit. Great spotted woodpecker, Song thrush and Sooty copper were also added.
We raced through the last part of the drive arriving in Bialowieza at around 5.30pm, we were greeted by the owners and showed our rooms. For £9 a night the accommodation exceeded our expectations and we pleased with our comfortable surroundings for the next few days. We bumped into a couple of Scottish birders who were sharing our accommodation. They had been here a couple of days and from the sounds of it had not seen very much at all. They said we would see very little without a guide which made us a little woeful at first! We did not quite know how to take this news so decided to get out as soon as we could and prove them wrong. After rapidly dumping our luggage and grabbing our coats and cameras we headed opposite over the road to our first birding site the Palace Park.

The Palace Park is a small area of reed-fringed water surrounded by scrub and deciduous woodland. We found it very productive, especially on the first evening. Dan and I flushed our first Wryneck feeding on the ground and we all enjoyed good views of singing Icterine Warbler.
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Tree sparrows hopped about at our feet and we had our best Thrush Nightingale views of the trip.

Although not a well-marked bird we enjoyed 5 minutes of it singing in the open and struggled to get similar views during the rest of the week. Fieldfare “chacked” above us and were seen collecting food for young and our first Rosefinch sang its “pleased to meet you” song from nearby.

As we slowly meandered around we added Great reed warbler, Common tern, Great spotted woodpecker, Marsh tit and Marsh warbler and a quick walk up to the Hotel at the back of the park added calling Cuckoo, Nuthatch and Hawfinch as well as lots of feeding Starling in the meadows.

We had a site for River Warbler nearby and so reluctantly left the park and headed back to the car. It was only a couple of KM away and as soon as pulling up we could hear the mechanical reel of this incredible bird.

Kieran located one quickly and we all enjoyed cracking views as it sat up in the evening light calling. The surrounding area held 2 other birds as well as Grasshopper warbler, Marsh warbler, Common Whitethroat, Hawfinch and a fly-by male Golden oriole. We walked up to the bridge and had our
first calling Corncrake as dusk began to make way for the night. As we piled back into the car a cacophony of frogs erupted from the wet meadows and pools- fantastic!

We ended the day with Roe deer meatballs wrapped in Bacon at a nearby hotel and bumped into some Yorkshire birders, who after having a quick chat with we hoped not to see again.

Sunday 22nd May.

Sunday dawned bright but with grey skies and high cloud. We had decided on the nearby site of Zebra Zubra or “Bison’s Ribs” as our first port of call. We parked the car in the nearby carpark and walked up the road to the site.

Our first Sparrowhawk, Lapwing and Red-backed Shrikes were all added here, the males giving superb views sitting on bushes and nearby garden fences.

It was fantastic to get out into the woods and we were immediately hit by how dense the ground vegetation was and the different trophic layers compared to woodland back in the UK. Wood warblers sang and it wasn’t long until we came across our first of 4 Collard flycatchers.
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**Poland: Białowieża and Biebrza**

Oli picked up a **White-backed woodpecker** and myself a **Grey-headed**. We also had **Red squirrel** and **Great-spotted woodpecker** as well as lots of **Starling** nesting in old woodpecker holes. **Golden oriole** called but remained elusive and sadly there was no sight or sound of **Hazel Hen** for which the site is well known for.

Whilst walking back 3 of us jammed in on the **White-backed** that had decided to feed across the road. I managed shocking flight views only but having seen them before was glad that Dan had got onto it well.

We had a quick but tasty breakfast and a much needed caffeine injection before heading up to Siemieniakowszczyzna (quite the mouthful) Reservoir close to the Belarusian boarder and decided to start on the south Eastern side. As we arrived we were approached by a couple of Policemen asking what we were up to. They were very civil and understood about birdwatching giving us directions to the watch-tower but warning us not to go near Belarus.

A quick scan gave us several **Great Egrets** flopping about over the marshes, **Grey heron** was less numerous but seen well and a few **Marsh Harriers** hunted over the reeds. I soon picked up two **Black kites** also hunting far out (we were told later they were rare here) and Dan added the only **Goldeneye** of the trip.
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**Garganey** floated about in small numbers whilst **Gadwall** was much more common. We saw all three **Marsh terns** here but it was much easier to obtain far better views later in Biebrza so do not worry if you go and can only obtain distant views. A showy **Garden warbler** called around the tower and a cracking **Honey Buzzard** floated over the car – superb!

There were few waders here but **Snipe** displayed and a couple of **Redshanks** were recorded as were “wild” **Greylag geese**. Scanning from the watch tower also gave very distant views of **Lesser-spotted eagle** and **White-tailed eagle** – both of which we had much better views of later in the day.

Unfortunately the wind began to pick up and it started drizzling so we headed back to the car and tried a different point on the Reservoir (see appendix).

Here we saw a very showy **Wryneck**, **2 Ravens** a few **Blue-headed wagtail**, **Yellowhammer** and our only **Corn bunting** of the trip, singing merrily alongside a **Serin**. A scan over the reservoir gave us little – a couple of **Common terns** and **Mute swans**. We continued to Bachury-dammarna and the Fish ponds. **Penduline tit** called from the ascent road and we soon added c.15 **Dunlin** a few **Ruff** a single adult **Caspian gull**, a **Common gull** and a small colony of **Black-headed gull**. **Pochard** and **Tufted duck** floated about alongside a single male **Garganey** and we were lucky enough to hear a day-calling **Pygmy owl** from the nearby woodlands.

We stopped at a local shop for some supplies as the skies opened munching our way through the first of many Pan Au chocolat and for Kieran, bottles of Hoop. After about 15 minutes the rain eased so we made our move to the north east of the reservoir. It is easy to park by the Pump house(?) and is worth a scan over the adjacent fields. There were lots of feeding **Starling** and **Blue-headed wagtails** amongst the cattle and Dan picked out our only **Grey-headed wagtail** also. We
continued down the track to the railway and had superb views of 6 Hobby feeding on insects, 4 White-tailed eagles, Marsh harrier and 2 Lesser-spotted eagles whilst a Bittern “boomed” nearby.

We took a walk down the train track and added our first Black-necked grebe in fine summer plumage, a truly exceptional looking bird and my first in breeding attire. Oli fired off as Whiskered and Black tern hawked nearby and we all enjoyed close views of a first summer Red- backed shrike as well as a Great-grey shrike.

A good hour was spent here and in the surrounding woodland. A quick stroll added a perched Hobby, a Firecrest and 2 nest building Golden oriole - lovely stuff! We ventured as close to Belarus as we dared and saw a few Whitethroats and 7 Crane overhead.

The hours we passing rapidly so saying Goodbye to this fantastic site we headed back to our house via Kosy Most (site ). Hawfinch “ticked” overhead and by the bridge we had an incredibly close encounter with 2 Corncrake. A new bird for all of us!

Spellbound we watched a male “crexing” and walking towards us mere feet away. It popped out of cover and we managed unbeatable views. A second bird flew across in front of us...it really couldn’t get any better than that- High Fives all round.
We were very pleased as I think all of us had had doubts about whether we would manage to see this bird on the trip. A few Swallows began to roost on the bridge and a Savi’s warbler competed with the ‘crakes for our attention.

Walking down river to the viewing platform gave us 2 male Golden orioles, a close Wild boar feeding on the fringe of the woodland and a female Barred warbler that teased us with flight views.

The sun was beginning to set so we decided on an early night and headed back to base only stopping for a perched Tawny owl that Kieran noticed on an old plough and a quick look outside the village which gave us a displaying Green sandpiper and a singing Marsh warbler that mimicked it in real time.

Monday 18th May.

Dan and I started bright and early in the Palace Park taking the left path. Oli went right and Kieran slept in.

We started off with a cracking male Red-backed shrike sitting in the bright sunshine and by the bridge I whistled in 2 Grey-headed woodpeckers that showed nicely in the morning light. We followed the road out of the park and picked up a Collared flycatcher, Marsh warbler on the park-
edge and some displaying Snipe over one of the meadows. A male Common redstart sang and we had good views of a Wryneck calling from a tree.

Several Song thrushes were in the leaf litter and Spotted flycatchers began to chase insects as the day warmed up. Great-reed warblers sang in competition and a male Rosefinch sat out in the open for us.

After a hearty breakfast we drove to Głęboki kąt, a fantastic wooded site with some good glades for butterflies. Here we managed to pick up singing Red-breasted flycatcher, Wood warbler and a super-sweet Lesser-spotted woodpecker that was gleaming insects off the underside of leaves. We didn’t walk the whole route deciding to turn back on ourselves but it is certainly worth a go and I think with patience more woodpeckers could have been seen earlier in the year.
Poland: Bialowieza and Biebrza

We had arranged to meet a local guide who had pinned down a breeding Three-toed woodpecker at 2pm – a bird I really wanted, it being my last “Euro-pecker” so we only had an hour or so before we had to meet him.

We had a quick look at a fishing lake at Torpilo but did not see much. A couple of Spotted flycatcher, Cuckoo and the odd Coot on the water were about it. I think on a less windy day it could be great for Dragonflies though and one or two zipped through.

At 2pm we met Arek and he joined us in our car and took us to a private site that is not accessible for the public. Although we are not averse to the odd “wandering” past fences and signs we are not going to be putting the coordinates up for this bird.
We set up camp about 25m away from a nest-hole and after 30 minutes wait a female flew in and perched outside for a few seconds! Fantastic, I was elated (and a little relieved). Two of the others had not seen Black woodpecker so after brief but satisfying views we went to have a look at a nest site nearby. Sadly no bird showed but Kieran found an active White-backed woodpecker nest and we also spotted a Pine marten and a couple of Wild boars as well as Red-breasted and Collared flycatchers and a few more Wood Warblers.

Dropping off Arek back at the Palace we picked up our first Lesser Whitethroat of the trip. A quick flash through the park gave us our first Middle-spotted woodpecker as well as the Common Redstart from earlier and a few more Spotted Flycatcher. We then returned back to our accommodation to meet Oliwer a friend of Oliver. After a quick “meet and greet” we were back in the car and raced out into the woods to try and find Pygmy owl. We arrived a little late and subsequently had no luck with this diminutive specie. A couple of Woodcock rode overhead however, which was a nice compensation. Oliwer had a suspicion that Tengmalm’s owl bred nearby, this being one of the larger areas of Coniferous forest in the area so we set out on a long walk in the pitch black to try and find one.

Again we were unfortunate but we did hear a distant bird calling and Oliwer and I had a Quail migrating overhead. The silence of the forest was deafening at times and it was a really amazing experience to be several miles from the nearest village.

Cutting our losses at about 11 we managed to find a 24h shop and got some food and a couple of beers in before bed. We were invited to a house party by a chap in the shop but we politely declined due to our energy levels beginning to dwindle. Kieran and Oli were away 3h later attempting Pygmy owl again, sadly no luck but they did have a Black woodpecker and a Lesser spotted Eagle, Dan mooched around the park and I enjoyed the extra sleep.
Tuesday 19th May.

It was a bright and sunny morning so we went back to the supposed Black woodpecker nest that we visited yesterday. Once again there was no bird, either duff gen or something had happened to the nest. We did enjoy views of a White-backed woodpecker however and a few more common woodland birds.

Oliwer took us to a couple more nest sites but once again we failed to see Black woodpecker. We drove on to Kosy Most in search of Hazel Hen, we really weren’t doing too well this morning as we did not manage to see or hear this specie either. We were a bit disappointed but understood how elusive they can be at times.

Kieran and I photographed Large Heath butterfly whilst the rest sat in the car looking bored –sorry chaps.

Oliwer had a couple of sites for Ortolan bunting so we headed out to these hoping to catch up with this increasingly rare and beautiful bird.

We stopped at the Reservoir once again, but did not see much adding a couple of Common sandpiper to our list and catching up with a few species from the other day.

Moving into a more agricultural setting at Szymki we came across our first of 4 cracking Ortolan bunting. I have a real soft spot for these little birds and it was a pure pleasure to watch and hear them. Other birds included two White stork, Whinchat and Red-backed shrike.

We continued searching suitable habitat in the hope of more Ortolan and Roller but sadly we came across nothing. There is plenty of suitable habitat in Poland despite the encroachment of Western agriculture so it is worrying to see such a lack of these two once common birds, in fact we went without seeing Roller the entire trip.
We decided to give Siemieniakowszczyzna another go as Oliwer had a Citrine wagtail site close to the reservoir. We had all seen Citrine Wagtail previously but it was an offer we could not refuse. A quick couple of scans produced Ruff and Redshank when suddenly perched on top of a small Salix a male Citrine called. We had smashing views as it was joined by a female and then a younger male. Dan and I managed to get incredible close and were treated to flight views, calls and the perched bird.
A herd of cows going home for the evening brought with them 50 **Yellow wagtails** and a couple of **Whiskered terns** eager for any insects that they may flush. We moved on to the Pump-house and deciding to walk instead of drive like the others I picked up a female **Red-footed falcon** cruising above us – nice!

The Pump-house had few viewable birds. A couple of **White-tailed eagles** sat on the mud like sentinels and a few **Mute swans** dozed in the afternoon sun. Oliwer was not deterred and choosing a random spot of reed bed managed to find us a female **Little crake** which sadly only he and I saw.

We all heard it well however and it was nice just to know they were there. Very little was added on the way back until we stopped just outside the junction to Kosy Most. Dan was the only member of the team to have not seen **Black woodpecker** so we gave it a go in a clearing. It wasn’t looking hopeful until a Batman like shape flopped overhead and proceeded to drum out of site; not the best views but still impressive to see and Dan was happy.

As we packed up were heard a tapping from the clearing and soon picked up a female **Three-toed woodpecker**! We obtained brilliant views for at least half an hour of this incredible little bird. Managing to walk underneath and film it was quite the experience and it was totally unfazed by us as it sprinkled us with bits of bark. A phenomenal end to a long but productive day!

We drew blanks at a couple of Pygmy sites and decided to go to the local Pizzeria ordering with our eyes and not our stomachs. 50cm really is too big per person and we went to bed stuffed.
Wednesday 20th May.

It was time to leave the Bialowieza and the forests and move up to our second base. It was raining hard as we quickly ran over to a local souvenir store and picked up a couple of postcards. We were to head to Bialystok first of all to drop off Oliwer and check the local fish ponds. There was very little on the way and despite checking a “stronghold” of Turtle dove nearby we sadly did not come across any.
We arrived at the ponds at about 11 am and quickly started picking up birds. A huge flock of Black-headed gulls loafed about on one of the paths and we hear our first of at least 5 Great Bittern. I was very keen to see breeding plumage Red-necked Grebe and was not disappointed. 9 birds were seen well as we walked around including one bird submarining and attacking another.
We also had great views of **Penduline tit**, **Savi’s warbler** and **Great reed Warbler** and all of us obtained nice looks at a male **Little crake** – a lifer for Dan who was very pleased!

We watched the **marsh terns** for a while managing to add an adult **White-tailed** and a **Lesser-spotted eagle** to the day list. Kieran pulled out a **Peregrine**: a superb bird for the area.

A flock of **Gadwall** were scoped and a male **Garganey** drifted amongst them as a couple of **Marsh harrier** and a single **Hobby** cruised overhead. Despite a lack of available mud for waders it is well worth a look here and we had a couple of enjoyable hours searching the pools and watching their inhabitants.
Oliwer had a couple more sites to show us before he had to go home both in the city. Syrian woodpecker was seen well here but a site for Little Bittern failed sadly but we did get a family of Coots and a Red-necked grebe on nest with chicks.
Poland: Bialowieza and Biebrza

We said our thanks and goodbyes to Oliwer who had been great fun to do a couple of days birding with and headed off out of the city to Biebrza and part two of the trip.

After about an hour’s drive we reach our destination. We were warmly welcomed and put our luggage away before deciding what to do with the remaining afternoon.

Our first port of call was the watch-point in Goniadz overlooking the marshes. We picked up a few White stork and a single distant Honey buzzard but not much else. There has been Greenish warbler breeding near the hotel so we “pished” around in the surrounding broadleaf and scrub for a while. Our fears of being a bit too early seemed apparent but we did manage to gain good views of Icterine Warbler and fleeting glimpses of a single Barred warbler. A male Common Redstart sang and a Wryneck called but remained elusive. A couple of Painted Lady fed on a Lilac but sadly no Camberwell Beauty which was a specie we were after.

Back at the accommodation we found another Barred Warbler, a couple of Lapwings in the garden and Grey partridge in the adjacent field.

The day was closing in and we were all pretty tired so cruised down the Tzar road in search of mammals. We jammed in on a couple of Wild boar with 7 piglets and one or two Roe deer. Hawfinch flew up from the road sides and the odd Common Buzzard hovered over rough ground.
The main shop in Goniadz has a few basics and is well priced and so we ate at home with Dan creating a delicious, if not small-portioned, pasta supper.

Thursday 21st May.

It was grey and a bit drizzly as well as rather cold so not feeling a stroll we piled into the car and went for a pre-Breakfast drive. Very little was seen with just a few Cranes, a single Northern Wheatear and one or two Marsh Harriers of note.

Breakfast however was fantastic with lots to choose from and more importantly FRESH COFFEE! Dan and I had been desperate for one all week and with a freshly made pot waiting for us we were in luck!

After we had packed our things we headed out to Mscichy in the gloom. Driving along the start of the track we recorded a couple of Cuckoo, our first Bluethroat, Icterine Warbler, Thrush Nightingale, Golden Oriole and a Marsh Warbler.

Fieldfare, Common Redshank and Lapwing fed out in the damp fields and a couple of Black-tailed Godwit called and showed occasionally. A drake Garganey was flushed from a dyke as was a Great Egret that slowly flapped off in disgruntled fashion.

Dan was lagging behind photographing the Bluethroat and caught up with us as we moved up the path. Hooded crows mobbed the Marsh harriers and a few Grey heron cruised between their favoured feeding areas.

We continued up the path until out of nowhere a herd of cows started ambling towards us. I like to think that I am quite an adventurous person when it comes to birding but if there is one thing that stops me in my tracks it is cattle.

The others assured me they would not bother us as we walked through them. I won’t lie I was pretty scared especially of one particularly boisterous chap.

We emerged from the other side unscathed and continued up to watch tower at the end of the route.

Dan spotted a radio tagged Lesser-spotted eagle sitting out in the marshes and I found a juvenile White-tailed sitting close by, the size difference instantly apparent. We had good scope views until they both had had enough of the Corvid harassment and flew off in separate directions.

By the watch tower Fieldfare frantically gathered worms to feed their young and 3 Black storks waded around the pools. These were to be our only birds of the trip so it was great to catch up with them and gain prolonged views. All were full adults and seemed pretty unbothered by us.

There were plenty of Whiskered and White-winged terns too hunting over the wet grassland and we managed to take some good photos and video of these delightful birds.

A female Pochard flushed from the edge and a couple more Garganey were seen on the pools whilst displaying Common Snipe were a constant.
The walk back was less eventful and thankfully the cows had disappeared into the meadows. A couple of Cuckoo showed very well as did Redshank sitting out on bare posts.

After a quick and uneventful lunch of bread and water we drove on to Brzostowo. There was a 3zł “entrance” fee despite having passes for the marsh. The view was impressive but it lacked birds, perhaps due to the wind?

We had Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank and a few displaying Ruff plus the usual terns. Still worth the visit for the view!

Dhuga Luki was next and following the boardwalk up we got great views of Aquatic warbler with at least 3 birds showing. It was a new bird for 3 of us and we were all very pleased with the show that one male put on for us. Our Polish friend told us that there had been a lot more Sedge warblers in this area this year and that some guides were palming off Sedge as Aquatic to their groups...

About half a KM down the road is a watch tower at Bagno Lawki, which we spent about half an hour at. From here we had Lesser-spotted eagle, Montagu’s harrier and 2 Short-eared owls displaying and chasing off anything else in the area.
I noticed a “long winged” buzzard about 2 miles away and after prolonged views it became clear that it was a **Rough legged**. We managed to bump into this bird again the following day and grab some shots. Kieran and I took a quick stroll across the road having good views of a couple of **Red-backed shrike** and a **Willow warbler** as well as a brilliant array of Flora (which we could not ID).
A quick walk around the area near the house gave us Barred warbler again, 3 Cranes going to roost and 3 Citrine wagtails as well as a Hobby terrorising the local House martins.

Before dinner Oli, Dan and I went to Osowiec Fort which is the remains of a military position erected by the Soviets in WW1. We had a nice walk listening to Thrush Nightingale and Marsh warbler and moved a fledged Fieldfare from the road but sadly could not hear/see any Spotted Crake for which the habitat looks perfect.

I kept on trying as it was a bird that I had not seen whilst Dan and Oli scanned over the floodplains from the other side. It wasn’t long until I heard an excited call from Dan waving his arms to come and join them. They had 4 Red-foots hunting insects. We had two adult males and a first summer bird but in the rapidly depleting light they soon became silhouettes.

None of us had seen many Red-foots in our lives so we were very pleased with the show they had put on for us.

The last birds of the day were a family of Greylags a single Mute swan and a Mallard floating downstream. On the way back a Tawny Owl pounced on something from a pylon before flying off back into the woods presumably to feed young.
Friday 22nd May.

We all had a lay in this morning after quite a lot of Vodka was consumed. Setting off at about 10am we decided to give some local fishponds a try.

It was bright and sunny for a change and after several cups of coffee all but Dan were feeling okay!

Our first stop was at the Zygmunta Augusta Reservoir. A raft of Gadwall floated about and a couple of White-tailed eagles soared but it was very quiet apart from them.

We quickly drove onto the Fishponds to try our luck with some waders. All the ponds were private and had signs telling us to keep out. We didn’t see anyone on either of our visits so we went in to have a look.

Fortunately there was some exposed mud and we were amazed by its productivity. We had two Dunlin, 5 Temminck’s stint, 10+ Ruff, 1 Greenshank, 1 Little Stint, 2 Redshank a beautiful summer
plumaged Turnstone and a superb Terek Sandpiper. Two of us had seen them before but only outside of the WP.

The Temminck’s were really smart and at such close range. I would advise going here and having a sneak around as on the following day we also found 3 Broad-billed sandpipers after a rain storm.

The adjacent ponds held a lot more water so we only managed to see a single Wood sandpiper but it was good to see a flock of 20 Whooper swans.

I was beginning to feel a bit ropey from the night before so decided to go for a walk up the road. A single Whinchat, a Turtle dove and a Hoopoe added a bit of colour. (A further 4 Turtle Dove were seen as we left)

As we packed up to move on 4 more Turtle dove were flushed and we observed a Bluethroat collecting food and a 1st summer Rosefinch.

As we left an Osprey cruised over adding itself to the list – nice! A rare breeder in Poland, sadly many Ospreys succumb to the lure of fish ponds only to be shot for doing what they do naturally.

We had a chilled afternoon birding around our accommodation. The local Citrine Wagtails showed very well as did the young male Barred Warbler that we had enjoyed seeing over the last few days. Grey partridges strolled around the garden and the ever-watchful Lapwings kept a close eye on us.
Saturday 23rd May.

It was our final full day and once again a touch grey. Kieran decided to have a lay in whilst the rest of us mooched out and set off to Kapice hoping to see the increasingly rare Great-Spotted eagle. On route we flushed a Turtle dove from the road and this looking as good a place as any pulled in by a farm and stretched our legs. Dan quickly picked up a singing Ortolan bunting sitting high in a Silver Birch. A couple of Woodlarks accompanied it singing from the wires. A productive stop!

We reached our site and began a nice 2km walk. Quails called from the fields a sound missing from much of the UK and a Hoopoe “hoopoed” but remained hidden.

On the fringes of the woods we picked up pairs of Common Crane along with their tiny ginger chicks. It was a real delight to watch their parents carefully pass insects over to them. A couple of Lesser Whitethroat and Common Whitethroat called and a single Barred Warbler was seen too.

Lots of Red-backed Shrike showed well down the track and this was one of the highest densities we encountered on the trip.
Sadly we did not see any Great-spots but we had some compensation we a fantastically low Lesser-spotted carrying prey into the forests. The walk back gave the same birds and we also had a superb male White-backed woodpecker here calling and feeding low down on a trunk.

It was a good walk and well worth the effort despite not seeing our target bird which is now, sadly, very rare in Europe outside of Russia.

We headed back to our accommodation to see if Kieran was awake yet. He was and after a quick cup of coffee and seeing a break in the rain we decided to head back out to the fish ponds that had been so productive yesterday.
May 2015

Poland: Bialowieza and Biebrza

It was instantly apparent that a lot of birds had moved off overnight and was at first a little disappointing. This was soon to change however as Dan picked up 3 Broad-billed Sandpiper frantically feeding alongside a Temminck’s Stint.

We watched the birds for a good hour. They are truly wonderful little birds and we collectively agreed that it was one of the major highlights of the trip.

Our views were cut short as the Heavens opened and it began to pour down. I elected to watch a Marsh Warbler from the car whilst listening to a House radio station whilst the others added Greater-White fronted Goose to the list and got drenched...

It was a fantastic finish to our time in the Biebrza area.

Saturday night was spent in Goniadz having a last meal together and a good chat about our trip. We were all of us impressed with the amount of birds we had seen and the quality that we had enjoyed. It was sad for it to come to an end but I think we were all looking forward to going home and having some rest.
Sunday 24th May.

After saying our goodbyes and a couple of final checks around the property we packed up for the drive back to Modlin. A couple of random stops heralded some good birds including Ortolan bunting and a super male Honey Buzzard that I enjoyed to myself feeding a few meters from me.

Kieran suggested a quick 15 min bird race to kill some time and we scoured some woodland on our own enjoying our last Wood Warblers and Redstarts.

We arrived early to Modlin and passed time sleeping and having a flick through some of the fantastic photos that Oli had managed to get.

Reflection.

Poland is a fantastic country to visit and we all had a great time and were treated to some brilliant species. There is a real abundance of birds compared to the UK, especially in agricultural settings and we were awarded amazing views and photos through patience.

Everyone we encountered was friendly and helpful, the accommodation surpassed our expectations and the food was delicious and very reasonably priced.

It is still fortunate enough to have lots of undeveloped countryside and large tracts of very wild habitat.

It was sad to see Western agricultural influence creeping in and unfortunately larger fields and more common use of pesticides are becoming apparent.

With the EU Bird’s Directive in the firing line who knows what Poland’s future will be…
May 2015

Poland: Bialowieza and Biebrza
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