



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Belarus

Ancient Forests & Fens

27th April to 6th May 2023 (10 days)



Bluethroat by Ignacio Yufera

Belarus has become one of the prime birding destinations in all of Europe. Bordered by a number of modern European countries, Belarus has remained hidden from popular view. The variety of birds, that include several highlight species very rarely seen in other parts of Europe, is only one facet of this incredible destination. Small roads allow us access to ancient forests, hundreds of meandering rivers and the biggest marshes and fens on the continent - with little to no traffic to speak of! A true European paradise of intact

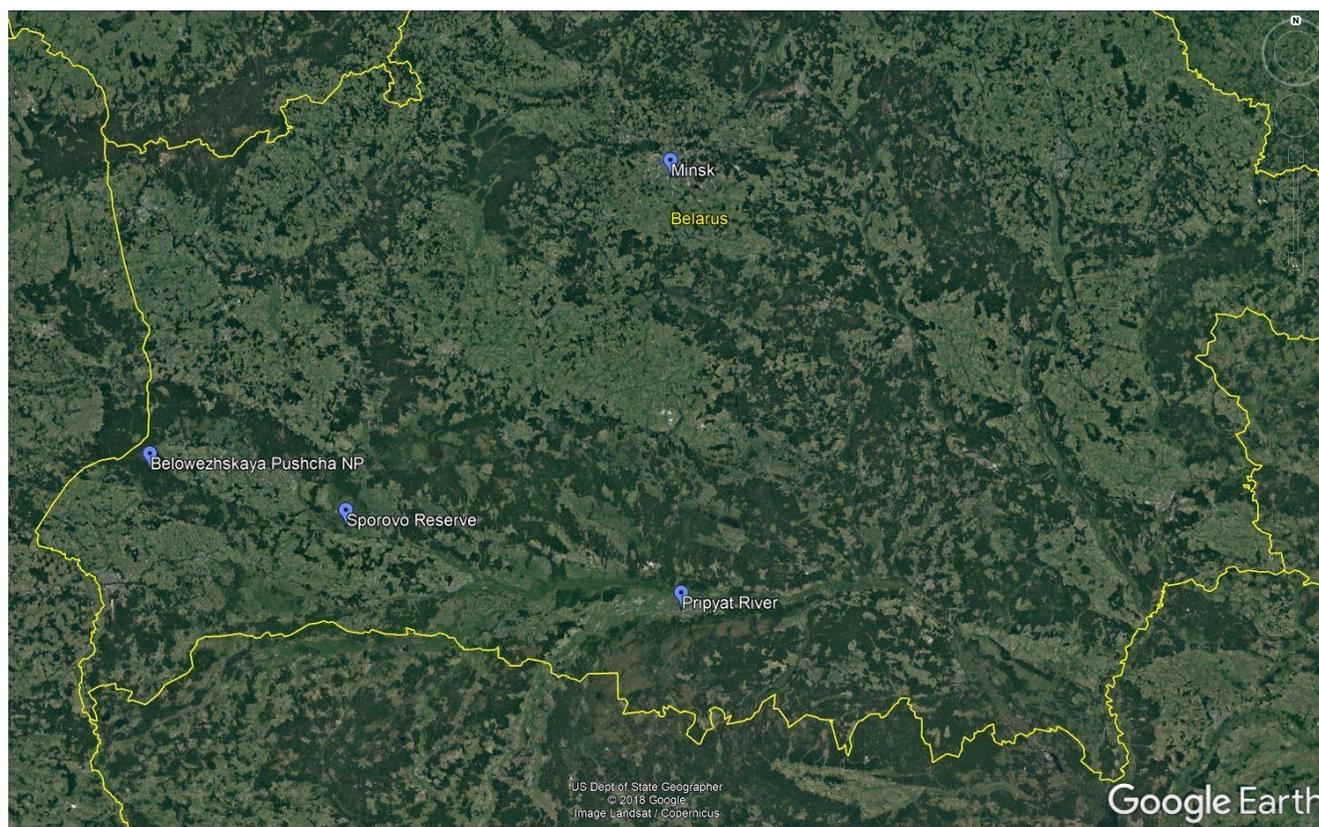
and wild habitat conserving Europe's largest populations of Bison, Lynx and Wolf. A combination of good quality hotels situated close to the best birding sites, along with authentic local cuisine adds extra enjoyment to the experience. One of Europe's safest countries, it offers a taste of an era long left behind in most parts of Eastern Europe. Our tour visits three key places: Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park, which adjoins its smaller, but more famous Polish counterpart - Bialowieza NP. Sporovo Reserve which protects 90% of the world's Aquatic Warbler population and finally Prip'yatsky National Park, a paradise for sought-after waders and unique variety of primarily Eastern species.

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	Arrival in Minsk
Days 2 to 5	Pripyat National Park
Day 6	Pripyat National Park to Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park
Day 7	Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park
Day 8	Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park to Sporovo Reserve
Day 9	Sporovo Reserve
Day 10	Sporovo Reserve to Minsk and final departures

TOUR MAP...



THE TOUR IN DETAIL...



Bearded Reedling by Niels Poul

Day 1: Arrival in Minsk. Upon arriving in the city of Minsk, you will be met and transferred to a comfortable hotel in the city. We will meet up for a welcome dinner, with time to talk through some of the exciting adventures to come over the next week and a half.

Days 2 to 5: Pripyat National Park. Over the next few days, we will spend our time both within the National Park, as well as along the uncontrolled Pripyat River. Several sought after shorebirds such as Terek and Marsh Sandpipers and Great Snipe breed on the vast flooded meadows and forests in spring. We will experience spectacular gatherings of migrating Ruff, including many in near-perfect breeding plumage; while elegant Spotted Redshanks are also in good numbers. On the top of our target list, and surely one of the strongest candidates for bird of the trip will be Azure Tit. Belarus is the only place in Europe where we stand a good chance of finding this stunning bird - where it breeds along the riparian willow forests of the Pripyat River.

We will spend some time exploring the ancient oak, spruce and birch forests too. Easy walks and short drives are liable to produce Common Crane, nesting Fieldfare, Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Collared and Red-breasted Flycatchers; while woodpeckers are very well represented indeed, with 10 species possible! Eurasian Wryneck and White-backed Woodpecker are fairly common; while we will have to search a little harder for Syrian, Grey-headed, Black, Middle Spotted and Three-toed Woodpeckers. Thrush Nightingale, Bluethroat, Common Rosefinch, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Common Linnet and Hawfinch are common in these magical forests.

We also pay a visit the nearby Beloe Fishponds, home to breeding Whooper Swan, Smew, Caspian Gull, Eurasian Bittern, Common Goldeneye, White-tailed Eagle, Red-necked Grebe, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Western Marsh Harrier and Bearded Reedling as well as vast numbers of migrating shorebirds. If we get really lucky, we may even find Black-throated Diver flying overhead, The banks separating the ponds are home to Caspian Terns, Black-headed Gulls, Little Ringed Plovers, Ruff and Spotted Redshanks; while the reedbeds often contain Great Reed Warblers. Common Cuckoo will provide incessant background vocals for much of our time in the forests.

Day 6: Pripyat National Park to Belowezhskaya Pushcha National Park. We have some more time this morning to bird around Pripyat River for any species we may be missing - or desire better views of - before heading to Belowezhskaya Pushcha National Park this afternoon. En route, we may visit Telehany Forest where we hope to find Great Grey Owl on a



Great Grey Owl by Adam Kovacs





Azure Tit by Peter Csonka

Belowezhskaya Pushcha National Park. We will walk amidst ancient trees and forests, focusing primarily on woodland species. The fairytale woods here hold Hazel Grouse and both Great Grey and Eurasian Pygmy Owls - and although we need a little luck to see all of them, previous tours have proven to be very successful. Both Eurasian and Short-toed Treecreepers occur here, giving us a chance to study the minor physical differences between them. We may chance across the gorgeous Brambling, with males sporting their jet black caps, while Common Redstart, European Serin, and Hawfinch will compete for our attention. We also have improved chances for many of the numerous woodpeckers should we be missing any, as these forests hold every species of known European woodpecker! We have further chances for Red-breasted and Collared Flycatchers, European Crested Tit, Icterine Warbler and Red Crossbill as they will all be breeding here, while Spotted Nutcracker would be an excellent bonus.

A short detour to Lake Liadskoye will see us searching for Wood Sandpiper and two rare warblers - Savi's and River. We also need to keep our eyes peeled for a number of possible raptors, including White-tailed, Short-toed Snake and Lesser Spotted Eagles, European Honey Buzzard, Northern Goshawk and both Hen and Montagu's Harriers. There is no shortage of interesting mammals to search for either, with Eurasian Elk, European Roe Deer, Red Fox and Wild Boar being rather common; while European Bison still dwell amidst the trees - though they are incredibly shy.

Day 8: Belowezhskaya Pushcha National Park to Sporovo Reserve. We have some more time this morning to bird around Belowezhskaya Pushcha National Park for any species we may be missing - or desire better views of - before heading to Sporovo Reserve Park. Depending on which species we still require, we may make some stops en route.

Days 9: Sporovo Reserve. We have an entire day to sample the avian delights of Sporovo - an area of untamed marshes, fens and fish ponds, home to many exciting species of birds and mammals. Our day is liable to be filled with incredible sightings of the bright Citrine Wagtail, tricky Bearded Reedling, Savi's Warbler,

day roost, the somewhat tricky Hazel Grouse and even the chance of finding Boreal Owl if their nesting locations have been found.

After what is expected to be another successful morning's birding, we transfer to Belowezhskaya Pushcha National Park - our base for the next two nights. Time permitting, we may start our exploration of this area after arrival, scanning overhead for Great Spotted Eagle or sorting out Common from Lesser Whitethroat in the surrounding trees.

Day 7: Belowezhskaya Pushcha National Park.

We have an entire day to explore the famous



Aquatic Warbler by Gabor Kovacs





Great Snipe by Peter Csonka

glorious Bluethroat and possibly views of the ever vocal Corn Crake. However, top of our list of desirable species is Europe's rarest songbird - the Aquatic Warbler. It will be late in the afternoon when we can expect to admire their characteristic song flight while admiring the numerous Whinchats and Common Reed Buntings that perch conspicuously on the dead *Phragmites* reeds. If that were not all, our day's birding here will no doubt turn up a host of other wetland denizens, including Black, Whiskered and White-winged Terns, Great Grey Shrike, Hen and Montagu's Harriers, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Common Rosefinch and Eurasian Golden Oriole. Eurasian Beavers make dams on the surrounding rivers and Eurasian Elk inhabit the woodlands - though we will consider ourselves very lucky to get sightings of these large but shy *bovids*.

Day 10: Sporovo Reserve to Minsk and final departures. After breakfast this morning, we will drive back to the capital city of Minsk for our international departures.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 10;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- Extra activities as mentioned in the itinerary; and
- All local guiding services.

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees;
- **ANY** flights;
- Tips for local guides and services;
- Any beverages except that stipulated above;
- Telephone calls and
- Laundry and other items of a personal nature.



Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.
- b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.
- c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.
- d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tippling: As noted above, gratuities are NOT included on this tour.

Special Notes:

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- Fitness: This Belarus tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health. Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure. Accommodation throughout the trip is of a comfortable standard. There is no camping on this trip.

ARRIVAL and DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include any airfares. The tour will depart from Minsk International Airport (IATA: MSQ), Minsk on Day 1 and, as it is an arrival day, you are welcome to arrive any time. The tour will conclude by mid-morning at Minsk International Airport, Minsk (IATA: MSQ) on day 10. Please do not arrange departure flights before 12:00 mid-day.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Minsk International Airport, Minsk (IATA: MSQ) is the main port of entry for international flights into Belarus, and is well serviced by some of the world's major airlines (Etihad, Lufthansa, Turkish Airlines and Belavia). **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

