

# Belarus

## *Untamed Europe*

18<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>st</sup> April 2014



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Led by Gabor Orban and Amanda Borrows  
Daily report and systematic lists by Amanda Borrows

**Day 1**                      **Friday 18th April**                      **Arrival Minsk – transfer to Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest**

We all met up in Minsk and then headed out of the terminal for the longish drive to our accommodation in Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest. The roads were good, and we sat back to take in the scenery around us. Large agricultural plains dominated most of the journey. Passing through the small villages was a delight, as most were colourful and the blossom of the trees gave a very 'Spring' look, which was in complete contrast to the concrete structures around the towns, remains of the soviet era.

Eventually, we arrived at our accommodation. The rooms were very large and warm, which we could appreciate after a much looked forward to dinner.

**Day 2**                      **Saturday 19th April**                      **Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest**

Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest is the oldest and one of the largest surviving areas of European primeval lowland mixed forest: pine, beech, oak, alder and spruce. The forest dates back to 8000 BC and is the only remaining example of the original forests, which once covered much of Europe. Many of the ancient oak trees date back more than 500 years, as well as venerable ash, pine and fir trees. There are also large spanses of bog mire, birch and willow Carr, giving the area a very primeval feel. UNESCO granted the park World Heritage Site status in 1992 and a Biosphere Reserve status in 1993. It is home to a wide range of endangered flora and fauna, including Wolf, Lynx and Europe's largest mammal, Bison.

The morning dawned and some of the group were up and out to listen to the musical chatter of Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Chaffinch, Willow Warbler and Song Thrush. By the time we had finished absorbing the activities of a Pied Flycatcher, it was time for breakfast, which was a hearty meal. At 9am we met our young Belarusian guide Anton, with his short-back-and-sides and camouflage attire.

We would be spending the whole day in the park. The morning saw us exploring a circular walk around part of the ancient forest, called '*The Oak Grove*', probably because this part of the forest was dominated by Oak. A short distant in and we were watching a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker feeding on a branch, suddenly she was joined by a male, a quick copulation and he was gone as suddenly as he appeared, whereupon we all had a good laugh about such a typical man, before he came back and repeated the episode, when both birds disappeared. Meanwhile, a Collared Flycatcher was calling behind these shenanigans and this now held our attention.

Eventually we moved on listening to Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, Hawfinch, Grey-headed, Great Spotted and a distant calling Three-toed Woodpecker as we walked through this wondrous forest. Wood Anemones adorned moss-covered logs, while Hepatica shone in the dappled light on the woodland floor. Stopping in a marshy clearing the group found Pine Marten droppings, while we waited to see if we could spot Three-toed Woodpeckers, no luck. However, further along the route some of the group got brief views of this elusive bird. And some were lucky to get some fantastic views of a male Wild Boar scampering through the trees, he was a big boy. Several Red Squirrels were spotted scampering around the trees, what a delight these creatures are.

Another woodpecker called, and we all stopped to try and locate where it was calling from, when Amanda spotted a Red Deer walking across the path in front of the group. A Common Treecreeper inched its way up one of the nearby pine trees, giving Gabor a

chance to tell the group the difference between Common and Short-toed Treecreeper. Goldcrest called in the pines and Wolf footprints were spotted in the soft earth along the track. Reaching the picnic area a Middle Spotted Woodpecker was tapping away on a dead tree next to the vehicle.

Lunch was prepared under the shade, as the sun was now up and the temperature belting out. Anton's wife had prepared some white fatty meat for us, which we found out later was a traditional food. We noticed Anton had only bread and this meat for his lunch, even though we offered him to share he was quite happy with his bread and meat. After a hearty feast, Anton surprised us by producing some delicious sticky desserts, which his wife had also prepared for us, very nice.

From here we headed out to another part of the park stopping first at a very large lake, where two White-tailed Eagles gave grace, one was being mobbed by a female Marsh Harrier and the other a Raven. A short distant on and we stopped to admire an Alder Carr, before a sudden stop by Gabor, made us get out to try and spot two Black Woodpeckers that flew so low they were nearly under the van. Unfortunately, we couldn't get back on to the birds. Nevertheless, with the sun shining and temperatures starting to climb, butterflies were on the wing. Anton pointed out a patrolling Camberwell Beauty and what a beauty it was. Walking back Andrea noticed some movement in the Birch trees, which turned out to be a small group of Waxwing feeding on the mistletoe that adorned the top branches.

Another impromptu stop was made for another impressive bird, a Lesser Spotted Eagle. It was perched on some overhanging trees along the road eating something. We parked up and put the telescope on the bird, before it flew off. From here we had a gentle walk up to a clearing to see if we could see the eagle again, but no joy, however we did find Wolf droppings.

Late afternoon saw us watching a distant small group of Bison, before moving along the track to admire a very impressive male. A female Montagu's Harrier bounced along the river channel before banking off and flying low over the fields. Another larger group of Bison could be seen in the far distance, but we could not access anywhere to get closer views. We finally ended the day at a tranquil stretch of reedbed, standing on the bridge that straddled a river channel watching the setting sun against the ancient forest. The silence was broken now-and-again from Snipe drumming overhead, vocal choruses from Marsh Frogs, and distant calls from Hawfinch perched at the tops of the trees. It was a very fitting end to a hectic day.

### **Day 3                      Sunday 20th April                      Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest**

It was a bit of a full on day today with an optional early morning walk at 6am. Emerging from the hotel, the noise was deafening all the birds must have awakened and were trying to compete with each other. We were heading out along a woodland track towards a large lake, to see if we could find Hazel Grouse.

With eyes peeled we walked slowly, silently, along the pine track, before reaching an orchard area, where Wryneck, Hoopoe and Hawfinch was calling. We did get some excellent views of these species on the way back, but not of the Lesser Grey Shrike that was sitting on one of the small trees when we first reached the orchard. Moving on to the lake, the dawn chorus had quietened somewhat, allowing us to hear distant Grey-headed and Black Woodpeckers, but no Hazel Grouse. The track opened up to a Birch mire, the white of the bark starkly contrasting in against the brown of the boggy water.

A Grey-headed Woodpecker was located flittering around the Birch at the far end of the mire. After getting some good views of this woodpecker, we had to turn round due to the swampy nature of the area. This turned out to our advantage, as Anne spotted a male Hazel Grouse running in the undergrowth, before it stopped on a dead log, allowing some of us to get some stunning views of this secretive species.

It was time for breakfast and what a treat, drop scones with jam and brightly coloured boiled eggs, as it was Easter today. After a fill, we met our guide Dmitry, who would be joining us today. Our destination was another part of the forest, which would take us through the large open expanses of agricultural land that surround the ancient forest. A few stops were made on the way, such as an obliging Sparrowhawk which sat in a field. A distant raptor circling over a forested area was possibly a Rough-legged Buzzard, while Common Buzzards perched on posts along the roads. Along the edge of the forest, we stopped for a small group of Wild Boar, two males and a female, superb.

A Common Crane standing in the middle of the road made us all wonder what was wrong with it, but it flew off as the vehicle slowly approached it. It was shortly after that we stopped alongside a Beaver lodge, with plenty of evidence that they were active, but unfortunately no sign of them all the time we were there. This stop was mainly for Greater Spotted Eagle, as a pair had a territory in this area. Exiting from the van, a cacophony of Marsh Frogs started to choir, with the low hum of Fire-bellied Toads accompanying the chorus and a pair of Whooper Swans added the odd distant honk.

Along the distant forest line a Great Spotted Eagle had been spotted, so we all had a look through the telescope, before carrying along the road to see if we could get near. The road was lined with attractive *Salix alba*, *Salix aurita* and *Salix dasyclados* willows, with their brilliant yellow catkins hanging, which were attracting numerous insects as well as Large Tortoiseshell, Brimstone and Peacock. Unexpectedly, one of the eagles flew low over our heads, prompting us all to lift our bins, before the cameras, which allowed us to look at the breast spotting from the photographs.

This area was a prime candidate for Elk. Anne had wandered off in front, when Gabor caught her up to see what she was looking at, 'nothing, just hoping'. In the meantime, Ben and Amanda had been chatting, commenting that an Elk was probably watching us from behind those trees. Suddenly, everything exploded, yes, where Anne had been watching and behind those trees was a male Elk watching. Unfortunately, it was only Andrea who got a proper look at this magnificent beast. The rest of us had to put up with the crashing commotion and noisy splashing as it ran away further into the forest.

Time had pressed on and we were dining out today. Lunch was at a small traditional village with a local family. A Wryneck called from the fruit trees, Black Redstart called from around the buildings, and a Golden Oriole joined in from the distant tall trees. We ate cabbage soup and spaghetti bolognese to the bill clapping and mating rituals of White Stork. The storks were nesting on a pole next to the house, and didn't seem to be bothered by people at all.

After lunch our host delighted us, by showing us pictures of the prime reason we were here, Great Grey Owl. He monitors the birds, as well as looking after the area and putting up nest boxes for them. The area we would be visiting for the rest of this afternoon is a well-known hunting ground for them. However, none are nesting, which is a bit of a concern for our host, and for us, as they may be very hard to find. At least we would be in the right area for them.

We thanked our hosts and set out in good spirits, arriving at a dense forest, skirted by boggy mire, reedbeds and Birch Carr. This is ideal habitat for the bird, as they liked the

open areas for hunting their prey, which are mainly voles. Unfortunately, no birds were sighted, but Les and Anne had a couple of Wrynecks, while the rest of us found Elk and Wolf droppings. The lake next to the vehicle was host to Green Sandpiper and *Menyanthes trifoliata*, unfortunately not in flower.

It started to rain, so we started our journey back; looking forward to the hearty feast of dinner, we have been having back at our accommodation. We also had time to update the checklists.

**Day 4                      Monday 21st April                      Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest – Sporovo Reserve**

It was another noisy morning for the early birders, not from the normal chorus, but from a Great Spotted Woodpecker that was hammering away at one of the white circular lampshades! Very odd behaviour, but it was giving all its worth, even if it kept sliding off. A pair of Bullfinches and Marsh Tits was also a delight this morning, giving some excellent views of both species. This would be a day of contrast and changeable weather, as the morning had started off blue, but the clouds soon started rolling in and so did the drizzle.

Walking towards the restaurant a gorgeous Red Squirrel was bouncing among the twigs of one of the big trees. The red is so vivid and bright compared to our native Red Squirrel that we all were transfixed by this beautiful creature.

Today we were leaving the Belovezhskaya Pushcha area and heading out towards Sporovo Reserve, a good area for Aquatic Warbler. It would be a long journey, so our first stop would be around lunch time, unless we saw anything interesting along the way. By the time we had reach our destination blue skies had emerged and temperatures were up, and our jumpers were off. The area we were visiting was by some fishing pools, river channels, reedbed and lakes. Most of the river channels were flanked by local men all fishing, a very strange sight as their lines were longer than the channel. We slowly followed the river, listening for anything interesting, when Gabor heard Savi's Warbler among the reedbeds, so we stopped. In fact it was such a nice location next to one of the lakes that we decided to have lunch.

The group wandered around the lake scrutinising the Marsh Frogs basking on the riparian vegetation, when Amanda spotted a Grass Snake slithering slowly through the reeds, allowing us to get some close views of this snake. The lake was home to Shoveler, Teal, Tufted Duck, Great White Egret, lots of Mute Swans, which were joined by a pair of Whooper Swans to name a selection of waterfowl. After lunch, we made a concerted effort to find the singing Savi's Warbler, which we did, even getting some close views of this sulky bird.

We arrived at Sporovo Reserve mid-afternoon, to see if we could get to see Europe's rarest songbird, the Aquatic Warbler. The reserve holds the highest population of this species in Europe, unfortunately the birds were not in yet, and none of the locals had heard them. Undeterred, we boarded the small ferry; well in fact it was a cable ferry, floating bridge or punt, depending on what you wanted to call it, but you still needed to pull the cable to get across the water. This was done by a wooden lever, which Gabor made good use of to start with, before Les had a go and finished the crossing.

From the landing platform which was littered with Otter spraints, we followed the boardwalk through the tall reeds to an open area and small viewing platform where we could scan the surrounding grassy marsh area for anything that moved. A Marsh Harrier

was quartering the reeds and a pair of Greylag Geese flew over, otherwise it was just the calls of Reed Bunting, Chaffinch and Willow Warbler.

After a while, we returned back to our accommodation and a short walk around the lovely little village before a very large, locally, prepared hearty meal. A Wryneck was calling from one of the trees in the back of our accommodation, which most of us got good views of.

**Day 5**                      **Tuesday 22nd April**                      **Sporovo Reserve – Vygonoschansky  
– Pripyatsky NP**

It was a blue morning over the village, but an eerie mist hung over the reedbeds at Sporovo Reserve. We all met up for a morning walk before breakfast, as we had a long drive to Pripyatsky NP today. With Cuckoo loudly calling in contrast to the Wryneck we made our way down the sandy track to the Yaselda River which we had crossed yesterday onto the reserve.

A Wood Sandpiper sat on one of the boats as we arrived, while the Marsh Frogs all dived back into the water. Savi's Warbler was singing from the reedbeds, and a Bittern was booming in the distance. The walk finished off with a superb White-spotted Bluethroat perched on top of the nearby reed, which we were all pleased about.

In due course we packed the van and headed out for our journey to Turaŭ. First we were going for another chance to try and see the large but splendid Great Grey Owl. We had been told that a pair was nesting in a wooded area that was along the way. However, like with all old Eastern block countries we had to go through all the bureaucratic papers, including an escort with the Director, the PA and a Ranger to show us where the birds were. In fact we only had a 500metre walk rather than the one kilometre, we were told about to where we had a nesting female.

Before seeing the owl, the group were distracted with good views of a Grey-headed Woodpecker feeding from the birch trees. The female Great Grey Owl was unperturbed by our presence and we remained silently watching her, cameras busy clicking. It was a fantastic moment. While we were watching her and taking in the atmosphere of the forest, a Grey Red-backed Vole scampered along the forest floor and disappeared down a hole under the nest side of the owl. This species is a staple diet of this very large bird, thus, not sure if this was stupid or a wise move, but it was taking its life in its hand.

After a while we silently, excitedly moved on, our hosts wanted to show us other owls, such as Pygmy, so off we went. A brief stop next to a very colourful cemetery and Long-eared Owl was pointed out sitting in a wicker basket. We then had a walk along the rough track before turning into the forest, but no owl. The wood was very nice with Wood Anemones carpeting the floor, and *Chrysosplenium alternifolium* lighting the marshy track ways with its golden yellow flowers.

The temperature was now around 26°C and still rising, so it was very refreshing to be walking in the shade of the forest, more importantly it meant that butterflies were on the wing. We visited another potential site for Pygmy where we were shown the nest box, but no owl. However the marsh meadow was a haven for butterflies, it was brimming with bouncing Brimstones, Green-veined Whites, the gorgeous iridescence Green Hairstreak and the wonderfully marked Map Butterfly, one that Les had been hoping for. Black Woodpecker called loudly and landed in a nearby tree, giving some splendid views of Europe's largest woodpecker. Dragonflies were also interesting with two species of

White-face Darter, *Leucorrhinia dubia* and *rubicunda*, flying around the marshy edge of the Carr next to the meadow.

All this excitement was making people hungry, so we said our goodbyes to our officials and headed out to a picnic area next to a very large lake. The weather had suddenly changed, thunder roared behind us, but the rain stayed off until we had just finished our lunch, when the heavens opened and the deluge started. It would be another three hours to our accommodation so we moved out.

After a while the rain stopped and we could enjoy our journey keeping an eye out for Wild Boar, Elk or Bison as we were back into marshy woodland and Carr terrain. We stopped to look at the huge expanse of the Pripjat river floodplain, with its vast areas of water meadows and swampy forests. It is possibly one of the largest floodplains in Europe. Gabor pointed out a distant White-tailed Eagle circling in the distant skies, before we continued our journey towards Turaŭ.

A brief stop was made down beside a lake area, producing Spotted Redshank, Ringed Plover, and Whiskered Tern, as well as distant Ruff in their technicolor plumage. An impromptu stop produced closer views of this amazing colourful species, as they danced, flounced and flared their ruff at each other before the small flock flew off, and we continued our journey to Turaŭ. Once everyone was settled into their accommodation we all reconvened for checklists, before a welcoming dinner.

Turaŭ was an ancient capital of the Dregovichs tribe - one of the three Eastern Slavic tribes that are considered ancestors of modern Belarusian nation (the others being Krivichs and Drevlians). Turaŭ was first mentioned in the "Tale of Bygone Years" from 980. According to legend, the city was founded at the crossing of Yazda and Strumen rivers by Duke Tur - hence the name Turaŭ. Other etymology draws the name from Tur, the Slavic name of the Aurochs. Both rivers join with the Pripyat River, which in turn flows into Dnieper and then leads to the Black Sea. Vikings used this water route for communication and their frequent raids on Constantinople.

## **Day 6                      Wednesday 23rd April                      Pripyatsky NP**

Another blue morning as some of the group went for a pre-morning walk around the town. Locals were walking or slowly cycling along the long straight road, lined with blue and white picket fences. Others were buying vegetables, literally, from the back of a lorry, or heading for a bit of fishing as they walked along the street with their rods towards the lake.

We were also heading for the lake after another hearty breakfast, while Gabor sorted out the permits which could take a while. Hundreds of Ruff in their many flamboyant colours were scattered around the area, probing the water's edge or sparking a duel with each other. Full breeding plumage Black-tailed Godwit, Ringed Plover, Wood and Marsh Sandpiper was also part of the assembly. Marsh terns were abundant with quartering Whiskered Terns; a small group of White-winged Black Tern were washing themselves and a Black Tern was spotted patrolling the river.

Gabor joined us twenty minutes later and we continued our journey. However, we didn't get very far as a shout from the bus made us hurriedly get out and look down from the bridge on to a Beaver, which promptly disappeared. Ben and Les had seen it at the same time. For the next half-an-hour or so we watched the Beaver resurface and disappear, acting like a floating log, but it didn't matter it was giving us some excellent views.

From here it was a short way to the forest; crossing a footbridge from the road we entered a very green Spring woodland, reminiscent of our English woodlands, a mixture of Hornbeam, Oak, Hazel, Pine and Birch. The first half of the wood was mainly dominated by Hornbeam with an open understory of Wood Anemones and May Lily. Wood Warblers serenaded us as we walked along the grassy path. A patch of the parasitic plant *Lathraea squamaria* was found in the litter layer as was *Lathyrus vernus*. Leaving this delightful wood, we headed out on a boardwalk through the marshy 'baloba'. The area had a primeval feel, with its peaty bog home to Bog Arum, Marsh Violet and Silver Birch. Part of the bog had been dammed by a Beaver, which had altered the river course. Considering where we were, the mosquitoes were staying at bay, we saw the odd one, but nothing that was effecting our enjoyment of the area.

The walk ended at an old pine, which was around 300 years old, it was also a good site for White-backed Woodpecker, a species at present that had eluded us. Gabor at one point disappeared into the wood, but nothing just some fresh steaming Bison poo. Where were they, were they watching us? After a while we started to head back, Amanda decided she needed a nature stop, and as with all nature stops something always appears, not Bison but a White-back Woodpecker, but the others had gone. Lynx droppings were found along the track, while a *Leucorrhinia rubicunda* liked the back of Ben's trousers as we stopped to admire the 'baloba' once more. By the time we emerged from this lovely woodland, it was time for lunch, so we took the advantage of the tables in the wood to have our lunch.

The afternoon saw us venture into another part of the forest that had older trees, in fact an oak of around 500 years. It would have been around at the time of the Tsar, in fact we were walking in the same forests of the Tsar's. This forest followed the 'baloba' and it was more evident here that woodland management was taking place. Dragonflies *Leucorrhinia dubia* and *Leucorrhinia rubicunda* were abundant in the meadows along with *Lamiastrum galeobolon*, *Chelidonium majus* and *Ajuga pyramidalis*.

After a great deal of searching this morning for White-back Woodpecker we were rewarded with some outstanding views of a bird feeding young, fantastic. In fact this area was quite active with wildlife. A Grey Red-backed Vole was scampering around underneath the bridge; while a Grass Snake emerged from underneath and swam across the peaty water; a Grey-headed Woodpecker posed nicely for us on one of the trees, and a gorgeous *Dolomedes plantarius* wandered across the wooden planks of the bridge.

Some of the group continued along the route to try and look for the old 500 year old oak tree, but due to woodland management work the paths had been rutted. Any sign of a path had gone, let's hope the tree was not in the numerous wood piles that were strewed around the forest area. Les had stayed behind just in case the bird returned, but unfortunately not. Ben disturbed a Pine Marten as we approached the bridge but it had gone before the rest of us could get on to it. We spent a few more minutes at the bridge just in case the bird came back, before heading back to the van and just missing the rain. Thunder had been threatening, but we had missed it. We all had time for a bit of a freshen up before a beer and checklists, and preparation for another delicious dinner.

**Day 7**

**Thursday 24th April**

**Wetlands west of Turaŭ –  
riverbank Prip'yatsky NP**

This morning was yet another blue sky when we all emerged, but we would need jumpers as the air had a bit of chill factor to it from the wind. We were heading for the riparian habitat today along the Pripiat River in search of Azure Tit.

The route to the river channel was quite bumpy in places as the road was mainly a farm track, as the area was mainly agricultural. The river bank was very serene as we stood on the top scanning for any new species, in particular Azure Tit. Wood Sandpipers flew from the small water area that was a harbour to wooden boats, as we made our way along the channel. The water's edge of which, was literally covered with caddis fly larvae, there were thousands. Due to the low water line, they had been stranded and were now working their way back into the water.

Our attention was now turned to finding Azure Tit, Gabor had a pair nesting near the pumping station last year, so this is where we started. After a while our interest was distracted by a nesting Fieldfare, several butterflies that were now flying around, or basking along the sunny river bank as temperatures were starting to soar, such as Map Butterfly, a delightful Wood White with the sun shining behind, Brimstone, Little Blue and Grizzled Skipper the only one for the trip. Suddenly Gabor pointed to the flowering Apple tree and there was a gorgeous pair of the splendid Azure Tit. They were busy pruning the tree and at one point one of the birds posed out on a branch. The brilliant white, complemented by the Azure blue wings, against the pink and white of the apple tree and blue sky was a picture in itself, absolutely stunning.

After our fill and the birds moved on so did we, following the path along the river channel. Golden Oriole sang from the poplars lining one side of the bank. A Lesser Grey Shrike perched on an overhead wire, while we found another pair of Azure Tits flittering around the willows. The morning had flown by, and lunch was now beckoning.

Lunch was taken looking over the marshy lake, listening to the Wood Sandpipers and watching White Storks feed in the surrounding agricultural fields. A brief walk along the other side of the river bank produced a singing Savi's Warbler and a male Penduline Tit nest building. However, in the wind the nest was swinging back-and-forth quite rapidly that the bird had a job to negotiate the nest as well as battling the wind. After which we gradually made our way back towards Turaŭ with a few stops around different water bodies, to see what other waders were among the huge Ruff flocks.

A refreshing cuppa back at the hotel was a welcome break, before heading out to the local ringing centre to see what they had caught. At present there were two Yellow Wagtails and one Wood Sandpiper. The man, who spoke good English, explained what they did at the centre, and said there was around 100,000 Ruff in the area at the moment. The centre was near the lake, so we walked down to the water's edge, watching the Whiskered Terns skimming across the water and a Little Ringed Plover. The fishermen and one woman were out, congregating in one spot, where the water was low and the fish flapping. They were fishing for their evening meal. Fishing seemed to be a big past-time for the locals. In due course we returned back to the hotel for an early dinner as we were out this evening to see if we could see the Great Snipe lek.

There was still good light when we had a bit of a route march to the site, as we had left a bit later than expected. We were heading for an area of sedge, wet meadow, with river channels and reedbeds. Taking our places it was now a case of waiting. Bittern boomed in the distance, Pochard and Garganey fed in the nearby water channels. Black-tailed Godwits performed their display flights before settling down for the evening. Anne then gestured us over to some bushes she was standing near and in front of us in the long grass, heads were bobbing up and down, Great Snipe, excellent. In the evening silence

you could hear them calling. The sound was very quiet compared to Common Snipe. For the rest of the evening we watched and listened to this extraordinary event; witnessing bill clapping, shoulder slapping, running and jumping among the long grass; fantastic spectacle.

Soon the evening light started to change a gentle reminder that it was time to go, several large bats, possible of the *Nyctalus* family, as they are a wet marsh species, but without a detector and knowledge of nesting bats, we could only enjoy the sight of these amazing creatures. The evening was glorious, the setting sun with its enchanting changing colours, turning to a mid-night blue star-covered blanket that covered over our heads. The more we looked up the more stars appeared, incredible. Amanda and Anne had a slow walk back, enjoying the scene enveloping around them and were luckily enough to have Common Snipe drumming overhead, a Corncrake flew in front of them, before landing and calling. Its calls were returned by one or two individual birds, which in turn were joined by Quail, which was so loud it was almost deafening, in the midst of it all there was the faint call of Great Snipe, truly a magical moment for them both, but it was a night for all of us to remember.

## **Day 8**

**Friday 25th April**

**Pripyatsky NP - Beloe Fishponds**

It was another glorious morning with blue skies shining above as we walked out this morning, with a cool wind. We would be spending most of the day around Pripyatsky NP before heading out to Beloe Fishponds. The journey took us past some interesting villages, which we stopped at to admire the decorative and colourful building, noting the red star on one of the side posts. It was while we were travelling through one of these remote villages that Les stopped the van for Waxwings. There was a generous flock of around 100 birds, all twittering away in the trees, very nice indeed.

From here it was a short drive to the start of the old woodland, which was mainly dominated by Hornbeam and Oak, with an open understorey of Yellow Archangel. The colours were amazing, a blazing spring-green, with dashes of yellow. The woodland was quite lively with noise, but the birds were keeping out of sight. Nevertheless, a Grey-headed Woodpecker obliged us on a dead tree, while Large Tortoiseshell and Map basked in the sun along the woodland ride.

The walk took us out towards the forest edge and agricultural fields where Bison and Elk can be seen but not today. A Black Stork flew overhead. However, one of the highlights for this morning was the Syrian Woodpeckers. The van had stopped by another traditional village, and with the morning light it looked very attractive, when a woodpecker flew across our sights. Before long we were watching a pair of Syrian Woodpeckers chasing each other and feeding. The interesting fact was that the male was using a crack in a tree trunk to crack open a nut. He would fly down to the ground, retrieve a nut, place it in the crack and hammer away. Fortunately for us the tree was right next to the fence, next to the road, so we had ring-side seats.

After a while, we moved on in search of Bison. We stopped at what is called the '*Mammal Highway*', due to the numerous footprints of all the ungulates that use this track. The track itself was next to an amazing woodland Carr, the atmosphere giving the feel of old primeval forest. We walk quietly, a Fieldfare flew from its nest; perhaps we weren't that quiet. A White-backed Woodpecker bounced low from tree to tree, giving some excellent views and Gabor pointed out in amongst the swampy trees a huge Wild Boar, which didn't hang around too long.

The sun was beating down, and it was time for lunch. As we headed towards our riverside venue, a Swallowtail flew over the van, a new butterfly for the trip, so we stopped for better views. In fact there were lots of butterflies and dragonflies, Green-veined Whites, Orange-tips, Wood White, and Holly Blue, while the dragonflies were all *Cordulia aenea* flying along this sandy track. In fact Amanda and Les decided to walk to the picnic site to take in this array of species. Thrush Nightingale was also heard right next to them as they walked to join the others but could they find it . . . Meanwhile, the rest of the group were enjoying lunch under the shade, some having seen a White-tailed Eagle as lunch was being prepared.

The afternoon saw us visiting Beloe Fishponds, a breeding area for the gorgeous Smew. A distant pair was seen at the back of the lake, but otherwise that is all we would be getting of this attractive species. The lake was mainly dominated by Great Crested Grebes, which were starting to display along with a pair of Goldeneye, but for some of the group it was the singing Great Reed Warbler that was the main attraction. We saw Sand Lizard on the nearby bank.

The day had gone by all too quickly and we made our way back to Turaŭ, keeping our eyes out in case a Bison emerged from the woods or into the fields along the route back. The evening ended with a full hearty meal of several courses that seemed never ending, but they were all tasty so it seemed such a shame to waste the food!

## **Day 8**

**Saturday 26th April**

**Departure back to the UK**

Our return journey to the airport went without hitch and we were soon all on our way to the various return airports.

## **Summary**

Belarus is a country that is slowly coming on the map, so we were all interested to see what it was like, not just in the flora and fauna, but also the general life of people. The forests were amazing, with some excellent sightings of the various fauna. The weather held with high temperatures most days reaching the early twenties. There was some rain but not heavy enough to keep us in the van. Accommodation was really nice; including the food, but life for the normal people particularly in the villages would be very different to what we were experiencing. Even though we found the wooden buildings attractive, not sure we would be saying that in the winter months. Belarus is a fascinating country and we shall be taking back some great memories.

## **Itinerary**

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>18th April Friday</b>	<b>Arrival Minsk - Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest</b>
<b>Day 2</b>	<b>19th April Saturday</b>	<b>Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest</b>
<b>Day 3</b>	<b>20th April Sunday</b>	<b>Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest</b>
<b>Day 4</b>	<b>21st April Monday</b>	<b>Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest - Sporovo Reserve</b>
<b>Day 5</b>	<b>22nd April Tuesday</b>	<b>Sporovo Reserve - Vygonoschansky - Pripyatsky NP</b>
<b>Day 6</b>	<b>23rd April Wednesday</b>	<b>Pripyatsky NP</b>
<b>Day 7</b>	<b>24th April Thursday</b>	<b>Wetlands west of Turaŭ - riverbank Pripyatsky NP</b>
<b>Day 8</b>	<b>25th April Friday</b>	<b>Pripyatsky NP - Beloe Fishponds</b>
<b>Day 9</b>	<b>26th April Saturday</b>	<b>Departure back to the UK</b>

# Systematic List Number 1      Birds

The taxonomic nomenclature and systematic order follows both that of Collins: *Bird Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. A total of 136 species was recorded for the trip. The numbers indicate the dates on which a species was seen.

Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>	this secretive species was seen over a couple of days lurking in the underground around the pine forests (19, 20 and 23)
Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>	only seen on a couple days in agricultural areas (20 and 24)
Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	several individuals were calling around the fields As we were walking back from the Great Snipe lek (24)
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	seen at Sporovo Reserve (22)
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	frequently recorded over the trip (19 - 23)
Whooper Swan Pushcha	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	a pair were first spotted near the marshy areas at (21); a pair flew into the fishpond lake system when we were having our picnic (21)
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	recorded in the latter part of the trip around Prip'yatsky NP
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	common, seen or heard everyday around waterbodies
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	frequently around water bodies (21 - 24)
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	this gorgeous bird was only recorded the once near the marshy water areas where we were waiting for the Great Snipe (24)
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	spotted around the fishpond lakes whilst having picnic (21); and again around the marshy water areas near the Great Snipe spot (24)
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	spotted around the fishpond system near to where we were having our picnic (21); and again around water bodies (24)
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	recorded several times around water bodies (22, 24 and 25)
Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	a pair were displaying on the large lake at Beloe Fishpond (25)
Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>	a distant view of a pair of this stunning bird at Beloe Fishponds (25)
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	recorded frequently over the trip, including several pairs starting to display on the large lake at Beloe Fishpond (25)
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	only distant views recorded on the large lake at Beloe Fishpond (25)
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	frequently recorded over the trip in a variety of habitats (21 - 22, 24 - 25)
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	one of the commonest birds on the trip, seen everyday

Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	mainly heard booming from the reedbeds (20, 22 and 24)
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	common and widespread, seen very day
Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	frequently recorded over the trip around waterbodies (21 - 22, 24 - 25)
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	only recorded on a couple of occasions in marshy, reed areas in the latter part of the trip (22 and 24)
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	recorded around waterbodies (21, 23 - 25)
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	a pair of birds flying around the large lake, an adult and juvenile (19); Gabor spotted one in the distant circling over the floodplains of the Pripyat river (22); several individuals circling above the woodlands around Beloe fishponds (25)
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	recorded everyday around marshy areas
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	occasional sightings of individual male and female birds around wet or agricultural areas (19, 21 and 24)
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	occasional sightings of individual birds around forested areas (20 - 21, 24)
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	widespread and regularly recorded everyday around all habitats
Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	a possible distant sighting of this species high over a forested area, the individual had a light head and tail markings (20)
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	an individual was spotted sitting in trees along the road (19)
Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>	we all got some excellent views of this magnificent species (20)
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	a common species for us, but only a couple of individuals recorded over the course of the trip (19 and 24)
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	one calling in the reedbed area near the fishpond systems where we were having lunch (21)
Corn Crake	<i>Crex crex</i>	one bird flew in front of Anne and Amanda as they walked back to the bus in the twilight, it proceeded to call loudly next to them, then several other birds started to call (24)
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	only the one sighting at Beloe fishponds (25)
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	occasional sightings around large waterbodies (21 and 25)
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	mainly located by call or standing in the middle of the road! (20, 22 - 23)
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	recorded in the latter part of the trip (22 and 24)
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	recorded everyday
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	recorded around the water's edge, Pripyatsky NP (22 - 24)
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	excellent views of this delightful plover at the water's edge of the lake next to Turaŭ (24)

Great Snipe	<i>Gallinago media</i>	we all had exciting moments of this species lekking in the long grass, when we all could get on to it pairs, around 20 were calling, very quietly (24)
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	several individuals recorded over the trip drumming (19 - 20, 22 and 24)
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	this lovely wader was recorded in full breeding plumage and calling, beautiful (22 - 25)
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	sightings of winter and breeding plumage of this lovely species around shallow water edges (22 - 23)
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	regularly seen or heard over the latter part of the trip
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	several sightings of this petite and delicate wader (22 and 24)
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	mainly recorded in the early part of the trip (19 - 20 and 22)
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	a regular sighting often in small groups in the latter part of the trip
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	a single bird spotted feeding in a mixed wader flock (24)
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	large flocks of this species in some fantastic colourful plumage, including a couple of all white individuals (22 - 25); we even had a chance to watch some lekking amongst the group
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	frequently recorded across the trip, seen most days
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	recorded only the once at Beloe Fishponds with some Black-headed Gulls along the shallow water channel in the dry fishponds (25)
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	frequently recorded across the trip within gull flocks around rubbish and agricultural areas
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	a pair recorded at the lake near Turaŭ (24)
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	individuals amongst the tern flocks at the lake near Turaŭ (24)
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	the commonest of the terns regularly seen everyday on the latter part of the trip (22 - 25)
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	large groups of this species with other tern species at the lake near Turaŭ (23 - 24)
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	one or two individuals recorded in the mixed tern flock at the lake near Turaŭ (23 - 24)
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	recorded everyday
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	recorded everyday
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	heard or seen everyday
Great Grey Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>	a female on the nest (22)
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	a bird in one of the basket nests (22)
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	a small group spotted from the van near the motorway (22)

Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	regularly seen or heard over the course of the trip (20 – 21, 24 – 25)
Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	this species was regularly heard, most days, including some excellent views sitting in a tree (19 – 22 and 24)
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	occasionally recorded over the trip in the ancient forest areas (19 – 20 and 23), including some excellent views of this diminutive woodpecker mating at Pushcha Ancient Forest (19)
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	another smashing woodpecker, giving some excellent views on a dead tree at Pushcha Ancient Forest (19, 23 and 25)
White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	a hard woodpecker to get, it taunted us on the first day with its calls (19); however we had some excellent views of this rare species feeding young (23); and feeding low on trees as we walked along the Bison highway (25)
Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	this woodpecker had eluded us all week until the last day, when it gave some outstanding views of it feeding on a hazelnut (25). It was using a crack in a tree, putting the nut in the crack and banging away at it until it
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	the commonest of the peckers seen or heard everyday apart from the last two days
Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>	unfortunately this rare woodpecker was only spotted on the one day albeit briefly (19)
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	this large and rather noisy species was seen or heard for most of the trip (19, 22 and 23)
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	another common species that was mainly heard rather than seen, but showed well when it was spotted (19 – 23 and 25)
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	occasionally spied on telegraph wires over the week (20, 24 – 25)
Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	mainly heard in open plantation habitats (20 – 22 and 24)
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	recorded almost everyday around wooded areas
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	recorded everyday in various habitats
Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	recorded almost everyday around urban, open and agricultural areas
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	recorded almost everyday around agricultural, and areas
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	several individuals only recorded at the beginning and end of the trip (19 and 25)
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	common and recorded everyday
Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>	Andrea found our first sighting of several individuals of this wonderful bird (19); before Les stopped the bus for a large flock c100 in one of the traditional villages near the woodland edge at Prip'yatsky NP (25)
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	occasionally in forest areas (19, 21 – 22)

Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	recorded most days over the week
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	recorded most days over the week
Azure Tit	<i>Cyanistes cyanus</i>	some fantastic views of this sought after and often difficult bird to find along the river bank at Pripyatsky NP (24)
Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	Gabor found a male nest building in the strong wind along the river bank Pripyatsky NP (24); calls were heard around Beloe fishponds but none found (25)
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	recorded around woodlands over two days (20 and 22)
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	recorded most days around agricultural areas
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	recorded everyday
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	first sightings of this migrant were in the latter part of the trip (22 - 24)
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	only recorded in the woodlands at Pripyatsky NP (23 and 25)
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	seen or heard everyday
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	seen or heard everyday
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	mainly located by song in the fresh spring woodlands, the group did get some good views of this woodland species (20, 23 and 25)
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	an individual singing from the reeds at Beloe Fishponds (25)
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	recorded over a couple of days in large reedbeds (21 - 22)
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	regularly heard around reedbed areas, with a good sighting of an individual at the fishpond picnic site (20 - 22 and 25)
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	occasionally recorded over the week (19, 23 and 25)
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	a lovely male was in the apple tree, when we were watching the Azure Tit along the river bank, Pripyatsky NP (24)
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	only recorded in the mature forests (19 and 22)
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	this species was only heard at the beginning and at the end (19 and 25)
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	regularly recorded over the trip around wooded areas
Common Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	frequently recorded around wooded areas (19, 22 - 24)
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	very common, seen everyday
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	common and widespread, seen everyday
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	frequently recorded over the trip, mainly located near nest sites (20 - 22 and 24 - 25)
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	occasionally around urban areas (19, 21 and 23)
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	only the once around the first hotel grounds (20)
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	common, seen or heard everyday

Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	superb views of this delightful bird in the reedbeds at Sporovo Reserve on a morning walk (22)
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	a very skulking bird that sings low in the bushes and thus, this species was only heard (24 – 25)
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	mainly found around buildings (19 – 22 and 25)
Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	an early morning walk pulled out a lovely male flitting around the branches near the forest edge just outside the hotel (19)
Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	a forested flycatcher first located by its loud call (19, 23 and 25)
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	frequently recorded around urban areas (21 – 25)
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	often found with House Sparrows around the edge of urban dwellings (20, 22 and 24 – 25)
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	only on the first day (19)
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Anne pulled the first sighting of this species standing on the post as we drove along (21); then regularly encountered around the agricultural plains (22 – 25)
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	common, seen or heard everyday
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	mainly recorded at the beginning of the trip (19 – 22)
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	recorded display flying as we walked along the edge of the wood back to the van, Pripyatsky NP (25)
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	common, seen or heard everyday
Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	frequently across the trip around buildings
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	regularly encountered at the beginning of the trip (19 – 22)
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	only a couple of sightings of this lovely woodland species (19 and 22)
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	common, seen or heard everyday
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	several individuals around agricultural land on the one day (24)
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	mainly in pairs around wooded areas (20 – 22)
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	common, seen or heard everyday
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	only on the one day around agricultural land (20)
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	occasionally around agricultural lands (20 – 21, 24 – 25)
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	common, seen or heard everyday

## Systematic List Number 2      Mammals

A total of 16 species was recorded for the trip. The numbers indicate the dates on which a species was seen.

Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus</i> sp.	unfortunately this species was mainly spotted dead along the road. There are two very similar species of <i>Erinaceus concolor</i> (Eastern Hedgehog) and <i>E. roumanicus</i> (Northern White-breasted Hedgehog). The latter was included in <i>concolor</i> but now has been spilt. Both are common and widespread, sharing the same habitats. Thus, a closer examination would have been necessary to see which species they were.
<i>Nyctalus</i> sp.		several very large bats possible Greater Noctule Bat (but little is known of this species) appeared flying around the wet marsh area at twilight as we were walking back from the Great Snipe area (24)
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	one was seen along the roadside as we travelled to Pushcha (18)
Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	unfortunately only footprints and droppings were evidence that this elusive creature was around the forests
Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	again another elusive creature, but large number of spraints were recorded on the boat docking area at Sporovo Reserve (21)
Pine Marten watch	<i>Martes martes</i>	remains of droppings were plentiful of this species around the forests during the trip, and Ben was fortunate enough to one scamper up a tree, but had disappeared by the time the rest of the group had reached him (23)
Lynx	<i>Lynx lynx</i>	another elusive creature whose only evidence were droppings on the one day along a wet trail (23)
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	a couple of sightings of this small deer, but it was mainly evident around the forest areas from the numerous footprints
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	this elegant species was spotted among the forest or walking across the path over a couple of days (19 and 20), otherwise the evidence of its footprints gave its presence away on the rest of the days
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	some fantastic views of big male boars running through the forest, as well as a small group near the forest edge (19, 23 and 25)
Bison	<i>Bison bonasus</i>	a small herd was standing around, giving us some excellent if not distant views of this noble animal (19); otherwise evidence of its footprints or fresh steaming dung gave its presence away for the rest of the following days
Elk	<i>Alces alces</i>	the group heard fantastic splashing noises from this huge animal, it was only Andrea who got the full view of the beast that was making all the noise (20)
Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	this gorgeous species was only recorded around the Pushcha ancient forest (19 and 21)
European Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>	a cry from the back of Beaver, made Gabor stop the van, and we watched this creature from the road bridge for around twenty minutes as it kept disappearing and emerging

		for photographs (23); otherwise the evidence of dams and cut trees gave its presence away on the rest of the days
Grey Red-backed Vole	<i>Myodes rufocanus</i>	the first sighting of this attractive rodent was underneath the Great Grey Owl nest, brave or stupid, not to sure (22); then again underneath the bridge crossing the peaty boggy channel (23)
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	individuals recorded running through the ancient forest which it inhabits (22 and 26); a contrast to the usual habitat we record Brown Hares in the UK

## Systematic List Number 3      Butterflies

The taxonomic nomenclature and systematic order follows both that of *Collins: Butterflies of Europe*, Tolman and Lewington. A total of 16 species was recorded for the trip. The numbers indicate the dates on which a species was seen.

Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	several individuals were recorded on the one day along a sunny sandy track, towards the picnic site (25)
Green-veined White	<i>Artogeia napi</i>	common and widespread across the trip, seen every day
Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	recorded along forest glades across three days (20, 22 and 25)
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	common and widespread across the trip, seen every day
Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>	recorded over several days in the latter part of the trip (22, 24 and 25)
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>	a bountiful abundance of this striking hairstreak if caught in the right light, several were all feeding on <i>Cardamine pratensis</i> in the grassy meadow (22)
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	recorded most days across the various habitats in sunny spots
Little Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	only a couple of individuals recorded over the course of the trip (22 and 24)
Map Butterfly	<i>Araschania levana</i>	recorded over several days in the latter part of the trip (22, 24 and 25)
Camberwell Beauty	<i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>	a delightful individual was admired as it quartered along a grassy patch near the road (19)
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	recorded mainly around forest areas (19 and 22)
Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>	common and widespread across the trip, seen every day
Large Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>	frequently recorded along sunny rides and tracks across the course of the week (20 – 23 and 25)
Comma	<i>Polygonum c-album</i>	occasionally recorded in sunny spots around forest tracks (19, 22 and 25)
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	recorded only the once across the holiday dancing in the dappled light of the forest edge (25)
Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus warrensis</i>	only a single individual was recorded briefly along the riverbank (24)

## Systematic List Number 4      Odonata

The taxonomic nomenclature and systematic order follows both that of BHP – *Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Britain and Europe*, Klaas-Douwe B Dijkstra. A total of three species was recorded for the trip. The numbers indicate the dates on which a species was seen.

Downy Emerald	<i>Cordulia aenea</i>	several individuals patrolling the sunny grassy route along towards the picnic area (25)
White-faced Darter	<i>Leucorrhinia dubia</i>	several individuals emerging and resting on the riparian vegetation (22 and 23)
Northern White-faced Darter	<i>Leucorrhinia rubicunda</i>	several individuals emerging and resting on the riparian vegetation (22 and 23)

## Systematic List Number 5      Reptiles and Amphibians

The taxonomic nomenclature and systematic order follows both that of *Collins: Reptiles and Amphibians of Europe*, Arnold. A total of eight species was recorded for the trip.

Fire-bellied Toad	<i>Bombina bombina</i>	unfortunately this species was only heard around marshy water edges
Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>	common around marshy water edges and wet meadows
Marsh Frog	<i>Rana ridibunda</i>	a very common species around riparian channels and pools, often serenading us as we searched around
Edible Frog	<i>Rana lessonae</i>	another common species around marshy water edges or found in wet areas
Sand Lizard	<i>Lacerta agilis</i>	one or two individuals spotted around sunny sandy areas
Common Lizard	<i>Lacerta vivipara</i>	several individuals spotted basking in the sun around wooded areas
Four-lined Snake	<i>Elaphe quatuorlineata</i>	Les spotted this species swimming away among the reeds
Grass Snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>	a common species regularly seen around wet areas

# Systematic List Number 6      Flora

The systematic order and nomenclature follows that of Cassell's: *Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe, 2003*, and Plants of Belarus. This is not a comprehensive listing, and thus the list will be extended on further trips.

## **Lycopodiophyta (Clubmosses)**

Marsh Clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata*      sporadic in clumps around boggy and damp areas

## **Sphagnaceae**

*Sphagnum* Moss      common and widespread around boggy areas

## **Polypodiophyta (Ferns)**

Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*      common around woodland areas

## **Pinaceae (Pine)**

Norway Spruce *Picea abies*      common and widespread  
Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*      common and widespread

## **Cupressaceae (Cypress)**

Juniper *Juniperus communis*      occasional around moorlands

## **Taxaceae (Yew)**

Yew *Taxus baccata*      occasional in the ancient woodlands

## **Salicaceae (Willow)**

Eared Willow *Salix aurita*      around boggy water meadows, shrub like in appearance  
Goat Willow *Salix caprea*      wet areas  
White Willow *Salix alba*      marshy areas and river side edges  
Grey Willow *Salix cinerea*      river channels, and marshy areas, associated with birch  
(no common name) *Salix dasyclados*      river channels, wet edges  
River Willow *Salix viminalis*      river edges and lakes

## **Populus (Poplar)**

White Poplar *Populus alba*      regularly encountered  
Aspen *Populus tremula*      a common species around the forest

## **Juglandaceae (Walnut)**

Walnut *Juglans regia*      mainly recorded around villages and urban areas

## **Betulaceae (Birch)**

Silver Birch *Betula pendula*      very common and widespread  
Downy Birch *Betula pubescens*      possible over-looked; it could have been this species in some of the more boggy areas visited rather than *B. pendula*  
Common Alder *Alnus glutinosa*      recorded around river channels and open water bodies

## **Corylaceae (Hazel)**

Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*      often the dominated species with oak in the ancient woodlands  
Hazel *Corylus avellana*      regularly recorded across the trip

## **Fagaceae (Oak)**

Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*      occasionally recorded across the week  
Common Oak *Quercus robur*      often the dominated species in the ancient woodlands visited

## **Urticaceae (Nettle)**

Stinging Nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i>	common
<b>Loranthaceae (Mistletoe)</b> Mistletoe <i>Viscum album</i>	very common, particularly on Silver Birch
<b>Aristolochiaceae (Birthwort)</b> Asarabacca <i>Asarum europaeum</i>	only the kidney-shaped shiny green leaves found around the woodland floor, Pripyatsky NP
<b>Polygonaceae (Dock)</b> Curled Dock <i>Rumex crispus</i> Broad-leaved Dock <i>Rumex obtusifolius</i> Japanese Knotweed <i>Peynourtria japonica</i>	meadows and waste areas meadows and waste areas scattered sightings of invasive weed
<b>Caryophyllaceae (Pink)</b> Greater Stitchwort <i>Stellaria holostea</i> Umbellate Chickweed <i>Holosteum umbellatum</i>	around woodland edges scattered sightings along woodland paths and rides
<b>Nymphaeaceae (Water-lily)</b> Only leaves of <i>Numphaea</i> and <i>Nuphur</i> from this family found around the various boggy marshes and river channels	
<b>Ceratophyllaceae (Hornwort)</b> Rigid Hornwort <i>Ceratophyllum demersum</i>	slow-moving streams
<b>Ranunculaceae (Buttercup)</b> Marsh Marigold <i>Caltha palustris</i> Yellow Anemone <i>Anemone ranunculoides</i>  Wood Anemone <i>Anemone nemorosa</i> Hepatica <i>Hepatica nobilis</i>  Creeping Buttercup <i>Ranunculus repens</i> Meadow Buttercup <i>Ranunculus acris</i> Corn Crowfoot <i>Ranunculus arvensis</i> Goldilocks <i>Ranunculus auricomus</i>  Lesser Celandine <i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>	common around water margins and reedbeds this delightful woodland flower only recorded around Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest common amongst the ground flora in the woodlands scattered sightings of this lovely plant around Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest damp meadows meadows mainly around the edges of agricultural fields a similar species to above, [but leaves lack the three segments in the leaves], found around woodland edges shady woodland areas
<b>Papaveraceae (Poppy)</b> Greater Celandine <i>Chelidonium majus</i>	damp wetland edges
<b>Brassicaceae (Cruciferae)</b> Garlic Mustard <i>Alliaria petiolata</i> Cuckoo-flower <i>Cardamine pratensis</i> Hairy Bittercress <i>Cardaine hirsute</i> Shepherd's Purse <i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	woodland edges common wet meadows scattered sightings around open areas scattered around agricultural and wayside edges
<b>Grossulariaceae (Gooseberry)</b> Blackcurrant <i>Ribes nigrum</i>	Fen Carr and damp woodland
<b>Saxifragaceae (Saxifrage)</b> Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage <i>Chrysosplenium oppositifolium</i>	damp areas, woodlands, general acid soils
<b>Rosaceae (Rose)</b>	

Meadowsweet <i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	damp meadows
Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	common
Agrimony <i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	scattered specimens, meadows
Silverweed <i>Potentilla anserina</i>	scattered around woodland edges and meadows
Wild Strawberry <i>Fragaria vesca</i>	woodland rides
Wild Pear <i>Pyrus pyraster</i>	scattered specimens around open woodland edges
Cultivated Pear <i>Pyrus communis</i>	mainly around village gardens
Crab Apple <i>Malus sylvestris</i>	scattered specimens around open woodland and village edges
Rowan <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	scattered recordings around forest areas
Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	regularly encountered across the week
Blackthorn <i>Prunus spinosa</i>	scattered records around clearings in the forest
Bird Cherry <i>Prunus padus</i>	only recorded around Belowezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest

### **Fabaceae (Legume)**

Spring Vetch <i>Lathyrus vernus</i>	scattered recordings in the woodland flora in the forests at Prip'yatsky NP
White Clover <i>Trifolium repens</i>	scattered records in various habitats
Red Clover <i>Trifolium rubensinosus</i>	scattered records in various habitats
Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil <i>Lotus uliginosa</i>	marsh areas

### **Oxalidaceae (Wood sorrel)**

Wood Sorrel <i>Oxalis acetosella</i>	common and widespread in forest edges
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### **Geraniaceae (Geranium)**

Hedgerow Crane's-bill <i>Geranium pyrenaicum</i>	agricultural and disturbed edges
Dove's-foot Crane's-bill <i>Geranium molle</i>	similar to above
Common Stork's-bill <i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	scattered records in various habitats

### **Euphorbiaceae (Spurge)**

Sun Spurge <i>Euphorbia helioscopia</i>	recorded in open areas
Wood Spurge <i>Euphorbia amygdaloides</i>	regularly encountered in forest and shady areas

### **Aceraceae (Maple)**

Field Maple <i>Acer campestre</i>	regularly encountered across forest areas
Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	regularly encountered across forest areas

### **Tiliaceae (Lime)**

Small-leaved Lime <i>Tilia cordata</i>	scattered records in various habitats
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### **Thymelaeaceae (Daphne)**

Spurge Laurel <i>Daphne laureola</i>	woodland areas
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### **Violaceae (Violet)**

Early Dog-violet <i>Viola reichenbachiana</i>	wet areas [lacks white spur, which is found in <i>V. mirabilis</i> ]
Marsh Violet <i>Viola palustris</i>	marshy, boggy areas
Field Pansy <i>Viola arvensis</i>	common around disturbed and agricultural areas

### **Araliaceae (Ivy)**

Ivy <i>Hedera helix</i>	common around shady habitats and woodlands
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### **Apiaceae (Umbellifer)**

Hogweed <i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	waste areas
Ground Elder <i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>	shady habitats

### **Ericaceae (Heather)**

Heather <i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	boggy pine forest areas
Bearberry <i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	acid pine forests
Bog Bilberry <i>Vaccinium uliginosum</i>	acid pine forests
Bilberry <i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	acid pine forests
<b>Primulaceae (Primrose)</b>	
Creeping Jenny <i>Lysimachia nummularia</i>	frequently recorded around damp areas
Chickweed Wintergreen <i>Trientalis europaea</i>	several specimens in the ground flora of the open woodland
Hornbeam	
<b>Oleaceae (Olive)</b>	
Ash <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	specimens scattered around the woodland areas
<b>Menyanthaceae (Bogbean)</b>	
Bogbean <i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	only recorded the once along a forest pool (20)
<b>Rubiaceae (Bedstraw)</b>	
Field Madder <i>Sherardia arvensis</i>	only recorded in open areas, Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest
Woodruff <i>Galium odoratum</i>	occasional sightings in the forests
Goosegrass <i>Galium aparine</i>	occasional sightings around waste areas
Crosswort <i>Galium laevipes</i>	only recorded along woodland ride at Pripyatsky NP (23)
<b>Boraginaceae (Borage)</b>	
<i>Pulmonaria mollis</i>	make a note of why different from <i>augustifolia</i>
<b>Lamiaceae (Mint)</b>	
Pyramidal Bugle <i>Ajuga pyramidalis</i>	meadow area Pripyatsky NP (23)
Yellow Archangel <i>Lamiastrum galeobolus</i>	common woodland flora plant
Ground Ivy <i>Glechoma hederacea</i>	common and widespread
Red-dead Nettle <i>Lamium purpureum</i>	common around waste lands
Gipsywort <i>Lycopus europaeus</i>	lakeside at Azure Tit site, Pripyatsky NP (24)
<b>Scrophulariaceae (Figwort)</b>	
Toothwort <i>Lathraea squamaria</i>	scattered sightings in woodland litter across both Belovezhskaya Pushcha Ancient Forest and Pripyatsky NP

### **Plantaginaceae (Plantain)**

Greater Plantain *Plantago major*  
Ribwort *Plantago lanceolata*

scattered records  
widespread

### **Caprifoliaceae (Honeysuckle)**

Common Elder *Sambucus nigra*  
Guelder Rose *Viburnum opulus*

scattered sightings across the trip  
scattered sightings across the trip

### **Asteraceae (Composites)**

Dairy Bellis *perennis*  
Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*  
Coltsfoot *Tussilago farfara*  
Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*  
Dandelion *Taraxacum officinalis*

common and widespread  
scattered records around meadow areas  
common around disturbed areas and roadside verges  
only recorded in the latter part of the trip  
common and widespread

## **Monocotyledons**

### **Alismataceae (Water-plantain)**

Common

Water-plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*

scattered sightings of this species in the bog mires

### **Potamogetonaceae (Pondweed)**

Numerous species of this family around the acid boggy water areas, but closer identification and waders were needed for identification of specific species

### **Liliaceae (Lily)**

Lily of the Valley *Convallaria majalis*  
May Lily *Maianthemum bifolium*  
Solomon's Seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*

regularly encountered in the forests  
a common woodland plant in the understory  
regularly encountered in the forests

### **Iridaceae (Iris)**

Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*

numerous across the water, marshy habitats visited, but all in leaf

### **Araceae (Arum)**

Bog Arum *Calla palustris*

common in the boggy ponds

### **Poaceae (Grass)**

Common Reed *Phragmites australis*  
Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*  
Wood Melick *Melica uniflora*

typical plant of reedbeds  
common coarse grass around road verges and waste land  
common delicate grass found around woodland paths

### **Typhaceae (Bulrush)**

Lesser Bulrush *Typha angustifolia*  
Bulrush *Typha latifolia*

ponds and lakes  
ponds, lakes and river channel

### **Orchidaceae (Orchids)**

Helleborine *Epipactis sp.*

only the leaves were found in the woodland ground flora