

Poland (Autumn)

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1-4

Bialowieza Forest

Bialowieza Forest is a delight for those who have yearned to see ancient wildwood. In the shady depths of the forest we can find many of the species which were part of our own forest flora and fauna hundreds of years ago, and which are now rare over the whole of Europe. We will be taken into the heart of the forest where awesome Oaks, Limes and Ash trees grow upwards for a hundred feet before they begin to branch. The wildlife remains undisturbed, as only a few people are allowed into these restricted areas each year.

Bialowieza is rightly renowned for its mammal fauna. If there is one mammal that embodies Bialowieza's ancient heritage it must be the majestic European Bison. The story of the Bison is a sad one - yet it is a story with renewed hope. Once widespread in Eastern Europe, they were hunted to the edge of extinction by the beginning of this century. The last Tsar maintained a small population in Bialowieza, and the continued protection of these animals has allowed them to increase slowly over the years so that they are now being re-introduced to other areas. Their immense size belies a placid nature! Other mammals play a big part in the forest's ecology, none more so than Wild Boar. It is their rooting activities which help keep large areas of the forest floor clear of vegetation. We should see families with their stripy piglets in tow! All these trees offer great habitat for no less than eight species of woodpeckers. Black Woodpeckers are quite common and we shall hear their loud ringing cries echoing through the forest. Middle-spotted are common and we should see both White-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers. Other avian highlights include Hazelhen, Hawfinch and Nutcracker. Bialowieza is home to several species of owl and we will spend an evening looking and listening for Tengmalm's, or more likely at this time of year, Pygmy Owl. Poland is well known for its fungi and for the enthusiasm with which the country's citizens exploit this autumnal harvest. Bialowieza has a vast array of species, some quite extraordinary to our eyes, from huge bracket fungi nearly a metre across, to bizarre Earthstars, fine edible Cauliflower Fungus and incredibly beautiful and perfectly formed 'cup' fungi.

Days 5-7

The Biebrza Marshes

Heading northwards, we'll pause at Siemianowka's reservoir. The marshy edges hold flowering Marsh Pea, Larkspurs and purple and yellow cow-wheat, *Melampyrum polonicum*. Marsh Harriers are common and groups of Lesser Spotted Eagles and Buzzards will be passing overhead. On the water are various ducks and grebes and on the shore waders and both Little and Great White Egret. In the evening we will

travel on to Goniadz, where we shall settle in to our hotel which is superbly situated between the north and the south basins of the wonderful Biebrza Marshes. Flocks of Common Cranes, their clarion-like calls drifting across early morning mists, are part of a rich pageant of bird life at this famous site. Birds of prey are plentiful with Lesser-Spotted and occasionally Spotted Eagles as well as the magnificent White-tailed Eagle. Other birds featured here are Merlin, Hawfinch, Penduline Tit, Great Grey and Red-backed Shrike. Of particular interest will be a visit to Kozlowka, an area of Silver Birch Forest. This open mossy forest is more normally found in boreal Russia and is not common this far south. Not surprising then that this will be one of the best places to see Moose. At close range their size really becomes apparent - a bull stands seven feet tall at the shoulder! In September females often have calves with them, these staying close to their lugubrious looking mothers. A tower hide overlooks the vast Red Marsh where Marsh Gentian and Grass of Parnassus will be in flower and Wolves are occasionally seen. The sandy hills surrounding the hide have flowering Carthusian and Maiden Pink, and we shall look for Black Grouse and Crossbill amongst the forest fringes.

Day 8

Depart from Warsaw

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the latest trip report from our tours to Poland in the Autumn. If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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