

# BELARUS

## EUROPE'S LAST WILDERNESS



Terek Sandpiper  
(Balazs Szigeti)

Saturday April 28th – Sunday May 6th 2012

Leader: Balazs Szigeti

Group size: 8

Birds: 150-180

Belarus will most probably become one of the prime birding destinations in Europe. Belarus is situated to the east of Poland with a range of habitats which are under pressure elsewhere in Europe. Habitats range from wetlands to primeval oak forests and several thousand hectares of flood plain, raised bogs and mixed forests protected in the form of national parks. The variety of birds includes several species very rarely seen in other parts of Europe: Great Grey Owl, Terek Sandpiper, Aquatic Warbler and the beautiful Azure Tit. Imagine roads taking you through ancient forests, hundreds of meandering rivers and the biggest marshes and fens of the continent, where you hardly meet any traffic or even people. Truly

an unbeatable paradise remaining intact and wild, no wonder Belarus has large populations of European Bison, European Lynx and Wolf. We have found good quality hotels situated close to the best birding sites offering local cuisine, and giving you a chance to witness rural life in small ancient villages. This country is perfectly safe, yet you can experience the taste of an era that is already left behind in most parts of Eastern Europe. Our tour visits three key places: Sporovo Reserve protecting 80% of the world's Aquatic Warbler population, then Pripyat National Park, a paradise for sought after waders offering a unique variety of primarily Eastern species and, finally, Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park adjoining its smaller counterpart, the world famous Bialowieza National Park in Poland.

**Day 1:** Fly to Warsaw the capital city of Poland. After landing at the airport, we travel east to the border with Belarus. Once in Belarus, we drive to Belozersk which is situated close to the reserve at Sporovo where we stay for two nights.

**Day 2:** The marshes and fishponds of Sporovo are home to many exciting birds. Black, White-winged and Whiskered Terns occur over the extensive marshes whilst White-tailed Eagle, Montagu's Harrier, Black and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Great Grey Shrike, Citrine Wagtail, European Penduline Tit and Savi's Warbler are all found here. In the evening, we can witness the characteristic song flight of Aquatic Warblers, one of Europe's rarest songbirds. Telehany Reserve, is nearby where Great Grey Owl, Western Capercaillie and Hazel Grouse reside.

**Days 3-5:** Our next base is near the famous Pripyat National Park. We spend four nights in Turov at a comfortable hotel located on the bank of the river. Turov has a wide range of habitats in a relatively compact area including flooded



Azure Tit (Tim Lindroos)



Great Snipe (Balazs Szigeti)

meadows and marshes. Our main interest is alongside the Pripyat River where rare waders breed including Great Snipe, Terek and Marsh Sandpipers and Black-tailed Godwit. Other breeding waders include Common, Wood and Green Sandpipers. The marshes also hold significant numbers of Eurasian Bittern, Black and White Storks, Savi's, European and Great Reed Warblers and Bluethroat. As dusk falls, Little and Spotted Crakes call and, in riverside scrub, the haunting songs of Thrush Nightingales can be heard. Surely one of the strongest candidates for bird of the trip is Azure Tit as Belarus is the only place in Europe where we have good chances of finding this stunning bird in its breeding habitat along the riparian willow forests of the Pripyat River. Around Turov on late spring evenings Ruffs congregate

in large numbers with Spotted Redshanks and the incessant calls of Corncrakes. We have time to discover the ancient oak, spruce and birch forests where Common Crane, Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Eurasian Wryneck, White-backed Woodpecker and Collared Flycatcher are found along with Grey-headed, Black, Middle Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers, Golden Oriole and Hawfinch. We also visit Beloe Fishponds, home to breeding Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes, Smew, White-tailed Eagle and many water-birds on migration.

**Days 6-8:** Our last base for two nights is in the middle of the famous World Heritage Site, Belovezhskaya Pushcha. We walk amidst ancient trees and focus on woodland species. The fairy tale

woods hold Hazel Grouse, Great Grey and Pygmy Owls, all the European woodpeckers, Crested Tit, Common Crossbill, Collared Flycatcher and raptors including White-tailed, Short-toed and Lesser Spotted Eagle, European Honey Buzzard, Northern Goshawk, Hen and Montagu's Harriers. We always stay alert for the presence of mammals as Elk and Wild Boar are numerous and European Bison still dwell amidst the trees though they are incredibly shy and there is only an outside chance that we might see them.

**Day 9:** After some early morning birding, we cross the border back into Poland. Late afternoon flight back to London where the tour concludes.

Ground Price: £1545

Single room: £150

\*Air Fare: £175

Total Tour Price: £1720

Tour Price Warsaw/Warsaw: £1545

Deposit: £150

\*please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights on pages 5 and 71

This holiday is fully inclusive of flights, accommodation and meals, transport and permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

**Not included:** drinks, insurance, baggage and credit card charges, items of a personal nature and any relevant fuel surcharges. Visa to enter Belarus

Good accommodation throughout Belarus with en-suite facilities. Evening meals based on traditional Russian/Polish cuisine.

Transport by minibuss. Short walks through forest and marshes along flat terrain.