

Birds in Beloveshskaya Puszcza and the Prypjat marshes



Report of a journey through Belarus from 28-5-1999 to 8-6-1999

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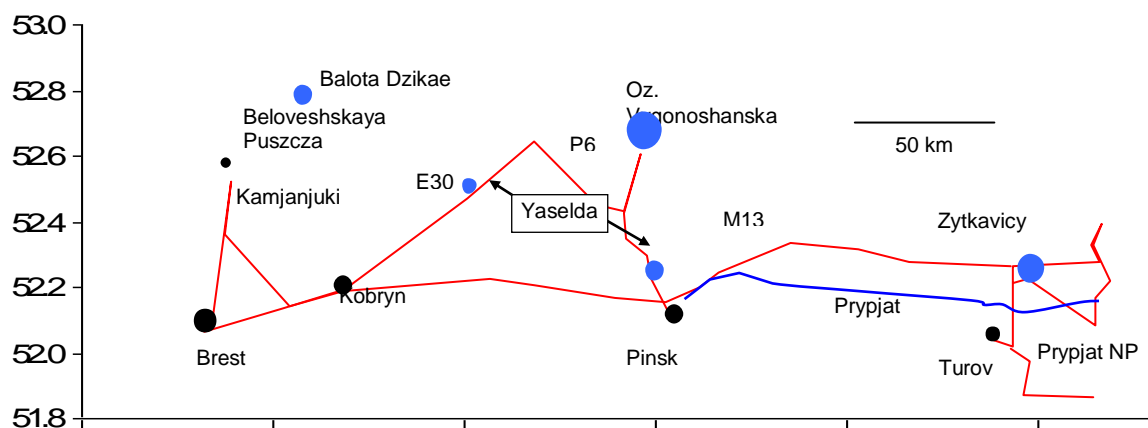
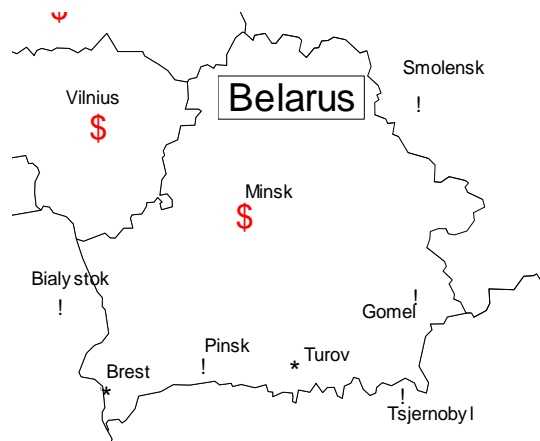
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Introduction

Belarus is a little known country, which still is only rarely visited by western birdwatchers, partly because it is difficult to obtain visa without an official invitation. Yet Belarus offers some of the finest birding opportunities in Europe in often remarkably unspoiled surroundings. The country consists largely of flat sandy lowlands and is traversed by three major river systems: the Berezina, the Prypjat in the south and the Dnepr in the east.^{1,2} The Republic of Belarus covers 207 600 km², i.e. slightly less than the United Kingdom and about six times the size of The Netherlands and is inhabited by well over 10 million people. The country is for about 50% covered by woodland. The northern coniferous forest forms the border of the taiga, further south mixed and broad-leaved forests are present. The climate is temperately continental with relatively cold winters and hot summers, but the harsh extremes are to some extent still tempered by Atlantic influences.



Belarus and the sites that were visited

During our journey three different regions were explored. We first travelled to Beloveshskaya Puszcza for a two night's stay. Beloveshskaya Puszcza is the Belorussian part of the famous Bialowieza forest, which straddles the border between Belarus and Poland. The Bialowieza forest is the last large area of ancient natural deciduous and mixed forests on the European lowland, covering a total of 1500 km². In the second half of the 19th century the Bialowieza forest was incorporated in the estates of the Tsars and strictly protected as a hunting ground.³ The first large scale lumbering was started by the Germans during World War I. After World War II the eastern part (875 km²) came under Soviet rule and was treated as a conservation and game range, and was mostly used for dignitary hunting. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 the independent Belarus Republic has declared the entire Belorussian part of the forest a National Park (NP). About 18% of the NP is treated as strict reserve. The flora is characteristic for the transition zone between taiga (Spruce, Silver Fir) and broad-leaved forests (Oak-Linden-Hornbeam forests, marshy Alder woods and flood-plain forests).



Spruce in Beloveshskaya Puszcza

Bird life of the Beloveshskaya Puszcza is richer and more varied than in any other forest of Central Europe and counts about 250 species, including 160 breeding species.³ Interesting birds are Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar, 8-10p), White-tailed Eagle (Zeearend, 1p), Short-toed Eagle (Slangenarend, 3p), Booted Eagle (Dwergarend, 1p), Golden Eagle (Steenarend, 2p), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend, 10-15p), Hazel Grouse (Hazelhoen, 500-600p), Capercaillie (Auerhoen, 25-30p), Corn Crane (Kwartelkoning, 120-130p), Common Crane (Kraanvogel, 6-10p), Eagle Owl (Oehoe, 5-8p), Great Grey Owl (Laplanduil, 3-6p), Pygmy Owl (Dwerguil, 10-15p), Tengmalm's Owl (Ruigpootuil, 40-45p), Common Swift (Gierzwaluw, 900-1000p), Roller (Scharrelaar, 10-12p), White-backed Woodpecker (Witrugspecht, 110-140p), Three-toed Woodpecker (Drieteenspecht, 60-80p), Red-breasted Flycatcher (Kleine Vliegenvanger, 900-1000p) and an amazing number of Aquatic Warblers (Waterrietzanger, 1200-1300p), about 15% of the world population of this endangered species.

Thereafter Ozero Vygonosch,¹ a shallow (1.5m, 3000 ha) lake on the watershed of the Pripyat basin was visited during a one night stay. Lake Vygonosch forms part of the Oginsky Canal, which links the river Neman and the Yaselda system in the south. Now it has the status of a nature reserve with rather restricted access. Formerly it was a game reserve where Soviet leaders came for hunting. The surroundings are dominated by peat bogs, marshes, Alder flood-plain woods and pine forests on higher ground. According to Alexander Ivanov, a ranger, birds of interest are White-tailed Eagle (Zeearend, 4p), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Great Grey Owl (Laplanduil, 4p), Capercaillie (Auerhoen), Black Grouse (Korhoen) and Common Crane (Kraanvogel).

Finally we travelled to Turov (Turay in Belorussian) to explore the Prypjat marshes, one of the largest wetlands of Europe.^{1,2} In former days the whole southern part of Belarus, an area exceeding the size of The Netherlands,

consisted of peat bogs, mires, marshes and flood-plains. This vast lowland depression is named Polesje and is a continuation of the plains of NE Poland. The river Prypjat, which takes its rise in the north of the Ukraine and flows to the Dnepr over a distance of 670 km, drains Polesje. The catchment area of the Prypjat covers 121000 km²; about 60% are situated in the Ukraine. Until the sixties the Prypjat marshes were more or less united, nowadays about 25 % of the larger tributaries have been canalized and drained.^{1,2} The rest of the system is still (semi)-natural and consists of numerous streams bordered by flood-plains, channels, oxbows, willow thickets and reedbeds interspersed with riverine forests, flooded woodlands, hay fields and meadowlands. Characteristic for the Prypjat system is the yearly inundation, which is caused by the very slight fall of the river and the peak water load in early spring when the thaw melts the snow cover. Both nature and people have adapted to the recurrent floods. Local people have made few attempts to restrain the river. Some banks have been constructed to protect a few villages and pieces of farmland from flooding, but these dikes have been built at a considerable distance from the main course to avoid flow obstruction during spring floods.

At Turov the inundation zone is about 4 km wide on either side of the river and is called "pojma". Pojma's consist of grassland on a sandy undulating soil, dotted with pools, oxbows and an occasional channel. The latter become side courses during the floods. At Turov a bridge is built across the outermost channel to facilitate access to the pojma. As soon as the water level drops flocks of feral geese enter the Pojma and herdsman take cattle and horses to the flood plain, usually from the end of May. The combination of water dynamics and pasturing has created an open scenery with very few trees, thus offering ideal habitat to "meadow birds" (weidevogels). More remote parts of the inundation zone, which cannot be easily reached from villages, are used to cut hay. The hayfields are usually surrounded by very old oak trees, many with scars of scorching by lightning. Dredging activities to allow navigation on the river have created sand dunes at some sites and together with natural sandbanks this offer habitat to Oystercatcher (Scholekster), Little Ringed Plover (Kleine Plevier) and Sand Martin (Oeverzwaluw). The Prypjat is hardly polluted as towns are scant and industrial activities are very limited. Few pesticides and fertilizers flow into the river as their costs restrict a large-scale use in agriculture. In March 1999 many Atlantic depressions penetrated deeply into Central Europe and caused exceptionally heavy snow fall in Polesje. This led to an extremely high spring flood, causing much damage to the villages along the Prypjat. As a result the pojma's were still inaccessible in June. In contrast, spring 1997 saw exceptionally modest floods.

The higher grounds along the Prypjat are used for agriculture and dairy farms by Kolchozes. Forests dominate the scenery further away from settlements. These woods have a (semi)-natural character, are often damp due to the slow drainage and hard to access, as trails are scant. All habitats are represented in the Prypjat National Park (825 km², founded in 1969) east of Turov. Forests comprise about 70% of this NP and enclose massive (8-12 x 35 km) peat bogs and transition mires. The NP further comprises parts of the Prypjat flood plain with flooded forests and marshes, which range from a few ha to more than 200 km². Over 50 species of mammals are found in the National Park, including European Bison (introduced in 1987), Lynx and Wolf. The avifaunistic diversity is amazing, 240 bird species have been recorded. Interesting breeding species are Great White Egret (Grote Zilverreiger), Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar), White-tailed Eagle (Zeearend), Spotted Eagle (Bastaardarend), Common Crane (Kraanvogel), Capercaillie (Auerhoen, 70-100p), Black Grouse (Korhoen), Great Grey Owl (Laplanduil), Terek Sandpiper (Terek Ruiter), White-winged Black Tern (Witvleugelstern), White-backed Woodpecker (Witruispecht), Roller (Scharrelaar) and Azure Tit (Azuurmees).

Itinerary

28-05. By train from Arnhem (18.04) to Duisburg, where the East-West Express is boarded (20.19).

29-05. Via Poznan and Warsawa we arrive at the border station Terespol (13.30 CET). At 15.50 (EET) the train sets off and Brest international station is reached soon. Three of us see their passports leave as the train departs to change under-carriages, but the precious documents can be retrieved after jumping the train. The walk back across the railway emplacement does not yield Crested Lark. A minibus takes us from Brest National station to the Kamjanjuki hotel (Beloveshskaya Puszcza) in about 90 min, where we are welcomed by the keen ornithologists Nikolai Cherkas and Victor Fenchuk. In the evening they guide us across the nearby flood plain of the Ljasnaja Pravaja.

30-05. Pre-breakfast strolls in mixed forests around the hotel. After breakfast bus drive to the smaller reservoir close to the Polish border. Before lunch at the Narevka River we had a short foray into a patch of pristine broad-leaved forest (plot 506) to look for Collared Flycatcher (Withalsvliegenvanger) and White-backed Woodpecker (Witruispecht). The afternoon is spent in a stand of ancient untouched spruce (plot 481) before driving through forests and the villages Borki and Papajaljova to Vybrady. From that settlement it takes a short walk to Balota Dzika (= the great marsh) on the eastern edge of the NP, the stronghold of Aquatic Warbler (Waterrietzanger 1200 pairs). On the way back we stop at the kolchoz near Roubick.

31-05. Early morning walk in the vicinity of Kamjanjuki hotel, after breakfast to a flooded Alder forest near

Jas'en (not on the map of Beloveshskaya Puszcza³), where Nikolai Cherkas shows us Great Grey Owl (Lapland-uil) on its nest. At 12.20 the minibus departs for lake Vygonoshchanskoe via the E30 / M1 Zabinka, Kobryn to Ivacevicy. From the bus a dozen Montagu's Harriers (Grauwe Kiekendief), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Raven (Raaf 3) and Hoopoe (Hop) are spotted. After turning south (15.00) on the P6 to Celjachany a male Hen Harrier (Blauwe Kiekendief), but no more Montagu's Harriers (Grauwe Kiekendief) are seen. The guesthouse at the S. shore of the lake Vygonoshchanskoe is reached at 16.30. An hour later we find ourselves in three longboats, crossing the lake. A short trail through the pristine pine forest on the N. shore leads to an inaccessible peat bog. At sunset return to the hotel.

01-06. Pre-breakfast stroll around guesthouse, then by bus to a mixed forest (850km², about 110 km² protected) near Celjachany, where Alexander Ivanov took us to a pair of Great Grey Owls (Laplanduilen). The picnic in dry fields about 4 km SW of Celjachany is enlightened by Short-toed Eagle (Slangenarend), a displaying pair and a single Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Hobby (Boomvalk), Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal), River Warbler (Krekelzanger), Barred Warbler (Sperwergrasmus, 2), Red-backed Shrike (Grauwe Klauwier, 3), Raven (Raaf) and Yellowhammer. Just before Pinsk the varied banks of the unspoiled river Yaselda are explored (16.15 - 18.15). In Pinsk (arr. 18.25) we board the Subr-1 ("Bison 1"), a powerful tugboat, which becomes the home for most of us during the rest of the journey. While enjoying dinner on the top deck, dozens of White-winged Black Tern (Witvleugelstern) and Whiskered Tern (Witwangstern) are hunting over the river and hay fields on the east bank, and Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal) sings from the riparian bushes.

02-06. Once the Subr-1 has completed some early morning exercises to fill its water tanks, we cruise down the river at 06.55. Exactly 12 hours later we arrive at Turov, greatly impressed by the superb vistas of a sheer wilderness of waterways, islands, marshes and forests. An attempt to enter the pojma soon ends when the water rushing in the first channel proves impassable.

03-06. In the morning we set out to an ancient broad-leaved forest in the Prypjat National Park south of Bechi in search of Middle Spotted Woodpecker (Middelste Bonte Specht) and Collared Flycatcher (Withalsvliegenvanger). After lunch at the Institute in Turov the afternoon was spent at Hlupin to explore a lowland forest and the fringe of the pojma.

04-06. We drove to a peat moor amidst dry Scottish pine forests and plantations on a poor sandy soil near Hrabau (10.20-12.20). A professional wolf hunter took us to a den with 4 Wolf cubs on a Spruce island in the center of the peat-moor. Wolves are still considered vermin in Belarus. Lunchtime (13.20-15.00) is spent on the elevated N bank of the Prypjat near Ljaskavicy, with a nice lookout over the river and adjacent marshes. The visit to the northernmost pond at Zytkevicy (16-17.00) is abruptly terminated by a massive thunderstorm. The evening saw us at a marshy area 1 km east of Turov (21.30-22.00).

05-06. Pre-breakfast stroll (5.50-7.25) through Zapesochie, the village west of Turov. At 9.30 the Zubr 1 took us to the highest sand ridge of the Turov pojma, where the local ornithologist shows us a fine collection of nests of waders, terns and ducks. Thereafter the boat cruises up to a pojma about 8 km W of Turov. After a heavy thunderstorm we set sail to the western-most pojma, opposite the outflow of the river Sluc. At 16.15 return to Turov (arr. 17.10) and evening stroll through Zapesochie (21.30-22.45).

06-06. At 06.30 we sail downstream to an island (8.00-15.30) in the Prypjat near Hvoensk (Chvaensk), about 15 km from Turov to look for Azure tit (Azuurmees). On the way back the artificial dunes near Pahost are briefly explored. Most of us spent the evening strolling through Zapesochie; others explored a rewarding marsh east of Turov.

07-06. The morning saw us near Simanicy on the SE border of the NP to walk downstream along the Svinovod. Picnic lunch near a lovely pond about 6 km further to the east. Between 14.00 – 15.00 the edge of the vast peat bog (about 100 km²) south of Bechi is explored. After leaving an old boardwalk overgrown by peat moss the going gets very tough and enthusiasm for further exploration soon fades in the heat.

08-06. From Turov (dept 6.00) via Zytkevicy, Pinsk and Kubryn to Brest (arr. 11.30, 318km), with a 45 min breakfast stop (average driving speed 67 km/h). We leave Brest in the East-West night express at 15.15 to reach Arnhem the following morning at 09.10. The warning by Eco Tourist Services that beverages are not for sale on the train is well taken and an amazing collection of snacks and drinks is retrieved from backpacks.

Site characteristics

During the trip three or more participants recorded 168 species, 1 or 2 participants claimed another four. Table 1 lists the species per day; the following is a summary per site. The distribution of a number of species is shown in an appendix (figures 2- 22).

Poland

Birds spotted from the train (see list) included White Stork (Ooievaar, 12+), Marsh (Bruine Kiekendief 7) and Montagu's Harrier (Grauwe Kiekendief 2), a male Kestrel and Great Grey Shrike.

Beloveshskaya Puszcza

Bird life was very rich, in less than 48 hours 117 bird species were recorded in various habitats.

Woodlands

Interesting birds found in non-flooded forests: Honey-buzzard (Wespendief), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Hazelgrouse (Hazelhoen, one flushed), Water Rail (Waterral), Green Sandpiper (Witgatje), Grey-headed Woodpecker (Grijskopspecht, heard and 1 seen well), Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal), Great Reed Warbler (Grote Karekiet) and Red-breasted Flycatcher (Kleine Vliegenvanger, 2 sites). Though none of us did realize it at the time, the most intriguing record consisted of a calling and singing Short-toed Treecreeper (Boomkruiper) near the hotel, reported independently by several participants (see annotations). White-backed Woodpecker (Witrugspecht) and Three-toed Woodpecker (Drieteenspecht) revealed their presence respectively by a freshly barked log with the characteristic cobblestone pattern (plot 506) and excavations in dead spruce (plot 481), but neither was spotted. The Great Grey Owl (Laplanduil) in the flooded Alder wood of Jas'en sat very high on its nest, suggesting that it could be sheltering chicks. Wood Sandpiper (Bosruiter), Black Woodpecker (Zwarte Specht), Red-breasted Flycatcher (Kleine Vliegenvanger) and the rather uncommon Wren (Winterkoning) and Hedge Accentor (Heggemus) were singing nearby.



Great Grey Owl, Beloveshskaya Puszcza

Floodplains

White Stork (Ooievaar), Redshank (Tureluur), several displaying Common Snipe (Watersnip), Yellow Wagtail (Gele Kwikstaart), Meadow pipit (Graspieper), Whinchat (Paapje), Sedge Warblers (Rietzanger) and Red-backed Shrike (Grauwe Klauwier) were recorded on the flood plain of the Ljasnaja Pravaja near Kamjanjuki. At dawn and dusk the rasping call of a Corn Crake (Kwartelkoning), the first of the journey, was heard. The park-like transition zone to the forest edge yielded Hoopoe (Hop), Grey-headed Woodpecker (Grijskopspecht), Woodlark (Boomleeuwerik), Hawfinch (Appelvink), European Serin (Europese Kanarie), Common Rosefinch (Roodmus) and Yellowhammer (Geelgors).

Floodplain of the Narevka (plot 506): River Warbler (Krekelzanger) singing from the forest edge, whereas Common Buzzard (Buizerd), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Hobby (Boomvalk) and a few Common Swifts (Gierzwaluw) wheel around above the forest. The Common Swift (Gierzwaluw) uses natural tree cavities to nest in Beloveshskaya Puszcza.

Lakes and marshes

At the smaller reservoir (plot 677) Great Cormorant (Aalscholver), Grey Heron (Blauwe reiger) and Goldeneye (Brilduiker) were found. Mute Swan (Knobbelzwaan), Black Tern (Zwarte Stern, 80) and White-winged Black Tern (Witvleugels tern 15) appeared to attend nests. Great Reed Warbler (Grote Karekiet 12+), several Marsh (Bosrietzanger) and Sedge Warblers (Rietzanger) inhabit the reedbeds, while Reed Warbler (Kleine Karekiet) and River Warbler (Krekelzanger) are less common. Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Honey-buzzard (Wespendief), Hobby (Boomvalk 2) and White-tailed Eagle (Zeearend) fly overhead. The latter passes twice to the single nest of the NP, on each occasion carrying fish in its talons. Previous groups found Bittern (Roerdomp), Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar), White-backed Woodpecker (Witrugspecht) at the lake,^{4,5} whereas Little Bittern (Wouwaap) and Eagle Owl (Oehoe) appear to nest here as well.³

Balota Dzika is a vast mire comprising 7000 ha of the Baltic / Black Sea water shed. It is fed by water seeping in from the surrounding slopes covered with forests and peat bogs. As we enter the mire Corn Crake (Kwartelkoning), Golden Oriole (Wielewaal), Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal), Savi's (Snor), and several Sedge Warblers (Rietzanger) and Rosefinch (Roodmus) are heard from bushes. Common Snipes (Watersnip) display over the flooded sedge fields and Cranes (Kraanvogel 6+) are heard and seen. About 150 m after crossing a deep canal the first of three Aquatic Warblers (Waterrietzanger) is heard. The bird sings from a minute sedge tussock, but is amazingly difficult to discover in spite of the very open habitat. Its name is aptly chosen: the plain is covered by about 10 cm slowly flowing brownish moor water. Reluctantly we retreat as a heavy thunderstorm breaks, since opportunities to see Aquatic Warblers are far better in the evening.⁴ Woodcock (Houtsnip), Green Sandpiper (Witgat) and Black-tailed Godwit (Grutto), Short-toed Eagle (Slangenarend) have been sighted here.⁴ The map³ points to the presence of Great Snipe (Poelsnip), with Eagle Owl (Oehoe) and Golden Eagle (Steenarend) nesting on isolated spruce-covered islands.³

A definition of mire and bog

bog	Peatland receiving water from precipitation only.	Hoogveen, water-aanvoer uitsluitend door neerslag.
mire	Peatland with some supply of external water, bringing in nutrients.	Veengebied met externe aanvoer van water en voedingsstoffen.

Forest houses

At Kamjanjuki hotel House Martin (Huiszwaluw), Black Redstart (Zwarte Roodstaart), Lesser White-throat (Braamsluiper), Golden Oriole (Wielewaal), Icterine Warbler (Spotvogel), Serin (Europese Kanarie, 2+ pairs) and Rosefinch (Roodmus) are present. Other forest houses yielded Icterine Warbler (Spotvogel) and Serin (Europese Kanarie) as well, and Red-backed Shrike (Grauwe Klauwier).

Villages near Beloveshskaya Puszca

In Borki White Stork (Ooievaar, 4+ nests), Lesser Whitethroat (Braamsluiper), Starling (Spreeuw), Golden Oriole (Wielewaal), Tree Sparrow (Ringmus), House Sparrow (Huismus), Chaffinch (Vink), Greenfinch (Groenling), Goldfinch (Putter) and Rosefinch (Roodmus) were present. The village Jas'en held Wryneck (Draaihals), Red-backed Shrike (Grauwe Klauwier) and Great Grey Shrike (Klapekster). The majestic trees with 22 nests of White Stork (Ooievaar) at Roubick offer a spectacular sight. An Eagle Owl (Oehoe) sheltering two half grown chicks occupies the most impressive nest. Marsh Harrier (Bruine Kiekendief) hunts over the surrounding reclaimed fields, but another thunderstorm prevents further exploration. Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Montagu's Harrier (Grauwe Kiekendief), Black-tailed Godwit (Grutto) and Great Grey Shrike (Klapekster) have been reported here.⁵

Lake Vygonosch

About 77 species were recorded in the area during the one day visit.

The lake

According to Dutch standards waterfowl and fish eaters, i.e. Great Crested Grebe (Fuut, 2) and Grey heron (Blauwe reiger) are scant, as noted previously.¹ Huge beds of pondweeds (fonteinkruiden) *Potamogeton spec.* have attracted Common Pochard (Tafeleend, 20) and a notable (pre-)moult gathering of Mute Swan (Knobbelswaan, 70). Several White-tailed Eagle (Zeearend, 3+ immature, 2+ adult), a few Common Tern (Visdief), White-winged Black Tern (Witvleugels tern), Black-headed Gull (Kokmeeuw) and Pontic Gull (Pontische Meeuw) flew over the lake.

The shore

Bitterns (Roerdomp, 3+) boom from the marshes, where Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal), Reed Warbler (Kleine Karekiet), several Great Reed Warbler (Grote Karekiet), Marsh Warbler (Bosrietzanger) and Rosefinch (Roodmus) held territory as well. In the trees and bushes around the guest house Wryneck (Draaihals, 3), Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (Kleine Bonte Specht, 2), Tree Pipit (Boompieper) and Icterine Warbler (Spotvogel) were seen. The abundance of flowering herbs supports a fine variety of seed eaters: Goldfinch (Putter), Greenfinch (Groenling), Linnet (Kneu), Chaffinch (Vink), European Serin (Europese Kanarie) and the inevitable Rosefinch (Roodmus).

Forests

Cuckoo (Koekoek), Wood Warbler (Fluiter) and Golden Oriole (Wielewaal) are notably common. Another pair of White-tailed Eagle (Zeearend) rests in a tree on the edge of the pristine pine forest along the N. shore presumably near their nest.¹ This wood apparently had never felt the axe and in addition to a fantastic gathering of mosquitoes it supported Goshawk (Havik, nest with 2+ nestlings) and Black Woodpecker (Zwarte Specht). In

the forests to the south Common Buzzard (Buizerd, 3), Honey-buzzard (Wespendief 1m), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend) and Common Snipe (Watersnip). Highlight is a pair of Great Grey Owls (Laplanduil). The two fledglings sat on the ground according to Alexander Ivanov.

Yaselda

This relatively untouched tributary of the Prypjat takes its rise from the Balota Dzikaie mire.

The upper course

When crossing the river near Strygin Montagu's Harrier (Grauwe Kiekendief 6), Marsh Harrier (Bruine Kiekendief 4), Hoopoe (Hop) and small flocks of White-winged Black Tern (Witvleugelstern, 28) were seen from the bus window. Aquatic Warbler (Waterrietzanger) has been sighted in the sedge marshes at Zditov.¹

The lower course

Briefly explored from the P6 bridge. The west bank is used as pasture ground but due to flooding cattle is not present yet. This open habitat supports a fine collection of "meadow birds" (weidevogels), though at a relatively low density. Lapwing (Kievit, 12p), Black-tailed Godwit (Grutto 6p) and Redshank (Tureluur 1p) are attending chicks. Garganey (Zomertaling), Corn Crake (Kwartelkoning, 2+), Common Snipe (Watersnip, 5+), Skylark (Veldleeuwerik), Meadow Pipit (Graspieper) and Yellow Wagtail (Gele Kwikstaart) complete the picture. A brief excursion is made on the highest sandy ridge of the east bank, which is mainly used for hay cutting.¹ The extreme water level limits further access. Among large flocks of White-winged Black Terns (Witvleugelstern 500) hunting over oxbows the odd Whiskered Tern (Witwangstern) and Black Tern (Zwarte Stern) are spotted. Bittern (Roerdomp), White Stork (Ooievaar 50+), Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar), Mute Swan (Knobbelzwaan, 1p), Montagu's Harrier (Grauwe Kiekendief, 3m), Marsh Harrier (Bruine Kiekendief, 3), Common Buzzard (Buizerd) and Common Crane (Kraanvogel, 6) are seen. House Martin (Huiszwaluw) nests under the bridge. The thickets are inhabited by Cuckoo (Koekoek), Turtle Dove (Tortelduif, only the first of the trip), Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal, 5+), Fieldfare (Kramsvogel), several Sedge Warbler (Rietzanger), Marsh Warbler (Bosrietzanger), River Warbler (Krekelzanger), Common Whitethroat (Grasmus), Rosefinch (Roodmus), Goldfinch (Putter), Greenfinch (Groenling) and Reed Bunting (Rietgors). Despite the presence of nice sedge beds Aquatic Warbler (Waterrietzanger) is not recorded, but of course the afternoon is rather unfavourable. A Common Quail (Kwartel) calls from the fields SE of the bridge. Previously the east bank yielded Black Grouse (Korhaan), Short-toed Eagle (Slangenarend) and Red-footed Falcon (Roodpootvalk),¹ whereas Great Snipe (Poelsnip, 3) has been recorded at the bridge.⁵

Prypjat river and National Park

In the Prypjat basin 146 bird species were recorded.

The middle course of the Prypjat between Pinsk and Turov

While cruising down the river and covering a distance of 110 km traffic all day was almost non-existent: 3 vessels, no road-bridges and a single railway bridge were encountered. Most villages and small towns were set back from the main course. Several species were surveyed during the journey (Table 2), which distinguished different habitats. The scenery between Pinsk and the Yaselda confluence was dominated by vast pastures and hayfields, which were still flooded. In this habitat White-winged Black Tern (Witvleugelstern, 10000) was dominant (Fig. 18), followed by Whiskered Tern (Witwangstern, Fig. 17), Black-headed Gull (Kokmeeuw, Fig. 15) and good numbers of Garganey (Zomertaling, Fig 7). Another feature of this section were steep riverbanks with huge colonies of Sand Martin (Oeverzwaluw), the largest (conservative estimate 1000 nests!) not far from the Yaselda confluence. Night Heron (Kwak) was twice seen flying over dense riverine willow thickets.



Northern shore of the Pripjat river.

Progressively those bushes became dominant and the scenery transformed into an endless variety of willow thickets, interspersed with reed beds, natural channels, oxbows, sandbanks and sandy ridges covered by Scottish Pine and birch. The larger trees bordering the main course had often been freshly barked by drift-ice, Beavers have knocked others down. Numbers of fish eating birds such as Great Cormorant (Aalscholver), Grey heron (Blauwe reiger), Great White Egret (Grote Zilverreiger), Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar) rose as suitable nesting trees became available (Fig. 2-5). Garganey (Zomertaling) remained the most common duck, now in oxbows with grassy margins, where fair numbers of Mallard (Wilde Eend, Fig 6) and a few Common Pochard (Tafeleend), Tufted Duck (Kuifeend) and Ferruginous Duck (Witoogeend) were recorded as well (Table 2). The supply of waterfowl in combination with the abundant reedbeds attracted quite a few Marsh Harriers (Bruine Kiekendief, Fig 9). Other highlights included Little Egret (Kleine Zilverreiger), Spoonbill (Lepelaar), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend, 2), a Roller (Scharrelaar), Hoopoe (Hop, 3), Great Grey Shrike (Klapekster, 2), Red-backed Shrike (Grauwe Klauwier), Bluethroat (Blauwborst 2+), Penduline Tit (Buidelmees, 6+) and dozens of Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal), Great Reed Warbler (Grote Karekiet) and Rosefinch (Roodmus). One participant noticed an Azure Tit (Azuurmees) flying over a channel. Often Pied Wagtail (Witte Kwikstaart) and Tree Sparrow (Ringmus) appeared to be associated with nests of White Stork (Ooievaar) in trees.

During the central part of the journey ancient stands of flooded hardwood close up on the river. In their vicinity most White-tailed Eagles (Zeearend, Fig 8, 7+ territories) and 2 Spotted Eagles (Bastaardarend, 2 sites) were spotted. In the occasional secluded side branch, in which water had become almost stagnant, Black-headed Gull (Kokmeeuw, Fig 15) and a few Black-necked Grebes (Goorde Fuut) had settled nesting colonies. In marked contrast, the White-winged Black Tern (Witvleugelstern) was completely absent from these secluded oxbows.



Flooded oaks.

During the final 20 km the vast marshes alternate with flooded hayfields (N bank) and pojma's (S bank) near villages. Counts of waders, i.e. Lapwing (Kievit), Black-tailed Godwit (Grutto) and Redshank (Tureluur) (fig 11-15) reach a maximum here and the Terek Sandpiper (Terek Ruiter) was restricted to pojma's. On the sandy shores Common Tern (Visdief), Little Tern (Dwergstern, Fig 19-20) and Great Ringed Plover (Bontbekplevier) were nesting, whereas migrating waders and terns (majority White-winged Black again), Pontic Gulls (Pontische Meeuwen), Little Gulls (Dwergmeeuwen) and Common Gulls (Stormmeeuw) used shores and sandbanks to rest.

Pojma

On 5-6 we set foot on the ridge along the main stream in the outer pojma at Turov. In no time Tufted Duck (Kuifeend, 4n), Pintail (Pijlstaart 2n, 10 eggs each) and Shoveler (Slobeend, 11 eggs and a single egg of Tufted Duck) were flushed from their nests, while Corn Crake (Kwartelkoning) was heard. Drakes of Common Pochard (Tafeleend) and Garganey (Zomertaling) were seen without finding nests. Yellow Wagtail (Gele Kwikstaart) and Skylark (Veldleeuwerik) were present, in contrast to Meadow Pipit (Graspieper).



Pojma at Turov.

A nearby sparsely vegetated sandy rise housed a mixed association of breeding waders. Nests of Great Ringed Plover (Bontbekplevier, 4n), Terek Sandpiper (Terek Ruiter, 4n), Ruff (Kemphaan, 2n), Common Tern (Visdief, 3n) and Lapwing (Kievit) are shown to us by the local ornithologist. Most Lapwings (3 dozen pairs), Black-tailed Godwits (Grutto, 10p) and Redshanks (Tureluur, 20p) were already attending fledglings. Oystercatcher (Scholekster) and Little Tern (Dwergstern, 12p) still had nests but clutches were not found. Spring 1999 was exceptionally good for Terek Sandpiper and Ruff, respectively 15 and 11 nests were found by the ornithologist in the census area around Turov.



Nest of Terek Sandpiper, Turov.

Other birds of the outer pojma were Short-toed Eagle (Slangenarend, 1-2), hovering in search of Grass snake (Ringslang, *Natrix natrix*) and a resting Caspian Tern (Reuzenster). Black-winged Stilt (Steltkluut)⁵, Marsh Sandpiper (Poelruiter)⁴ or Citrine Wagtail (Citroen Kwikstaart)⁵ were not spotted by us.

Similar birds were seen at the inner pojma near Turov, though Little Ringed Plover seemed more common and Red-footed Falcon (Roodpootvalk) was recorded once. At Hlupin, where horses were grazing the pojma, Quail (Kwartel), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Green Sandpiper (Witgat), Common Snipe (Watersnip) and Great Grey Shrike (Klapekster) were recorded. European Bee-eater (Bijeneter)¹, White-backed Woodpecker (Witruspecht)^{1,5} and Collared Flycatcher (Withalsvliegenvanger)⁴ have been sighted there.

Forests in the Prypjat National Park

An island with riverine woodland (old Willow trees along channels, oaks on ridges) near Hvoensk is a traditional site for Azure Tit (Azuurmees), but all we could trace were several Blue (Pimpelmees), Marsh (Glanskop) and Penduline Tits (Buidelmees). The Azure Tit is colonizing the Prypjat basin from the east; the current population estimate is 400-800p⁶. According to the local ornithologist Azure Tits were present in early spring. However as territorial activity is less, some luck is required to spot them in May² or June¹ when most missions failed.^{1,4,5} Other birds at this site were Bittern (Roerdomp), Great White Egret (Grote Zilverreiger), several Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar), White-tailed Eagle (Zeearend, 1p), Spotted Eagle (Bastaardarend, cf. ^{2,5}), Marsh Harrier (Bruine Kiekendief, 3+), displaying Common Sandpiper (Oeverloper), River Warbler (Krekelzanger) and Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal, 5). The center of the island consisted of hayfields with oxbows and pools surrounded by ancient oaks. In this park-like scenery Hoopoe (Hop), a non-territorial Cuckoo (Koekoek), Fieldfare (Kramsvogel) and Red-backed Shrike (Grauwe Klauwier) were discovered, in addition to the omnipresent Corn Crake (Kwartelkoning), Golden Oriole (Wielewaal) and Rosefinch (Roodmus). Though the Cuckoo, like the Common Buzzard (Buizerd), was widely distributed around Turov, both were surprisingly scarce in the marshes

along the main stream. Perhaps the recurrent floods are fatal to their staple food, i.e. voles and rabbits (Common Buzzard) and large caterpillars (Cuckoo). White-backed Woodpecker (Witrugspecht, pair) has been recorded here.⁴ When sailing back Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend, 2) was sighted nearby.

The forest near Hlupin in the vicinity of the floodplain held Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar), Honey-buzzard (Wespendief, 2), Short-toed Eagle (Slangenarend), displaying Common Sandpiper (Oeverloper), Common Swift (Gierzwaluw), Barred Warbler (Sperwergrasmus), several Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal) and Raven (Raaf). While driving to the old mixed deciduous forests on higher ground south of Bechi, a spot for Middle Spotted Woodpecker,⁵ Hoopoe (Hop) and Turtle Dove (Zomertortel, 3) were seen from the bus. Common Snipe (Watersnip), Icterine Warbler (Spotvogel), Wood Warbler (Fluiter), Lesser White-throat (Braamsluiper), Hawfinch (Appelvink), Yellowhammer (Geelgors), Red-breasted Flycatcher (Kleine Vliegenvanger) and Collared Flycatcher (Withalsvliegenvanger) are among the species in the forest. Some participants notice a singing Greenish Warbler (Grauwe Fitis). On the fringe of the adjacent vast peat bog (100 km²) Red-backed Shrike (Grauwe Klauwier) and Wood Sandpiper (Bosruiter) are displaying. Black Grouse (Korhoen, 10+) and Wolf excrements have been sighted here⁴.



Wolf cub, Hrabau.

In the dry pine forests on high ground near Hrabau Goshawk (Havik), Cuckoo (Koekoek), Tree Pipit (Boompieper), Robin (Roodborst), Wood Warbler (Fluiter) and Chaffinch (Vink) were all that could be noted. Undoubtedly an early morning survey would have produced a longer list; the habitat seemed perfect for Nightjar (Nachtzwaluw), Woodlark (Boomleeuwerik) and Great Grey Shrike (Klapekster). A single stop in nearby farmland produced Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Skylark (Veldleeuwerik) and Red-backed Shrike (Grauwe Klauwier, 2).

Farmland on high ground

Near Simanicy we walked along the Svinovod, a fast flowing stream in a shallow valley with hayfields and sparse tilled fields. The wooden bridge offers excellent views of a Greenish Warbler (Grauwe Fitis) holding territory in a few trees. Tree Pipit (Boompieper), Yellowhammer (Geelgors) and Meadow Pipit (Graspieper, 3+ territories) are present, the latter near ditches draining the peat slopes. Turtle Dove (Zomertortel) and Golden Oriole (Wielewaal) are among the birds singing in the adjacent woodland, where Common Buzzard (Buizerd), Honey-buzzard (Wespendief, 2), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend) and Raven (Raaf) take advantage of rising thermals. A few km east of Simanicy hayfields with bushes bordering a pond are the habitat of displaying Wood Sandpiper (Bosruiter) and Common Snipe (Watersnip), Whinchat (Paapje), Red-backed Shrike (Grauwe Klauwier) and Hoopoe (Hop), carrying prey to one of the scattered trees.

Zytkovici ponds

During a brief excursion several pairs of Black-necked Grebe (Goorde Fuut), swimming with chicks amidst the nests of Black-headed Gull (Kokmeeuw), Black Tern (Zwarte Stern), Whiskered Tern (Witwangstern) and 6 drake Common Pochard (Tafeleend) were sighted. A booming Bittern (Roerdomp), Great Reed Warbler (Grote Karekiet), Reed Warbler (Kleine Karekiet), Marsh Warbler (Bosrietzanger) and Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal) were heard.

Urban birds

In the outskirts of Brest along the river Bug the first Great Reed Warblers (Grote Karekiet, 2), Raven (Raaf), Sand Martin (Oeverzwaluw), Lesser White-throat (Braamsluiper, 3) and a female Northern Wheatear (Tapuit) with food for her offspring were noted from the train when border formalities were being completed. The brief visits to Brest and Pinsk produced Feral Pigeon (Stadsduif), Collared Dove (Turkse Tortel), Common Swift (Gierzwaluw) and European Serin (Europese Kanarie). Grey-headed Woodpecker (Grijskopspecht), Black Redstart (Zwarte Roodstaart), Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal), Goldfinch (Putter) and Common Rosefinch (Roodmus) enlightened dawn in Pinsk. In Turov White Stork (Ooievaar), Syrian Woodpecker (Syrische Bonte Specht) and Wheatear (Tapuit) were spotted as breeding birds.

Habitats in comparison to Western Europe

Forests

The species diversity of Belorussian forests was far greater than in the oldest woodlands of the W. part of the Province Noord-Brabant (West-Brabant), where I regularly survey breeding birds. In addition to the variety in trees and forest types, Central European and Taiga elements (Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar), Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend), Great Grey Owl (Laplanduil), Hazelgrouse (Hazelhoen), Green Sandpiper (Witgatje), Wood Sandpiper (Bosruiter), Grey-headed Woodpecker (Grijskopspecht), Thrush Nightingale (Noordse Nachtegaal), Collared Flycatcher (Withalsvliegenvanger), Eurasian Treecreeper (Taigaboomkruiper) added to the greater diversity. Furthermore, Common Swift (Gierzwaluw), Lesser White-throat (Braamsluiper), Wood Warbler (Fluiter), Icterine Warbler (Spotvogel), Spotted Flycatcher (Gauwe Vliegenvanger), Pied Flycatcher (Bonte Vliegenvanger), Golden Oriole (Wielewaal), Raven (Raaf) and Yellowhammer (Geelgors) were more abundant in Belorussian woodlands than anywhere in West-Brabant.

Early morning strolls in mixed deciduous forests west of Kamjanjuki gave the impression that Common Buzzard (Buizerd, 2 nests found), Sparrow hawk (Sperwer), Black Woodpecker (Zwarte Specht), Song Thrush (Zanglijster), most Tit species and Crossbill (Kruisbek) were present in similar densities. On the other hand the density of other species seemed to be low. Stock Dove (Holenduif), Woodpigeon (Houtduif), Green Woodpecker (Groene Specht, not recorded), Wren (Winterkoning), Hedge Accentor (Heggemus) and Blackbird (Merel) were decidedly scarce. The absence of farmland at Kamjanjuki may explain the scarceness of both Columba species, which take advantage from a rich supply of cereals in West-Brabant. The other species are residents or partial migrants and could suffer from harsh winters. This can, however, not explain why only a single Common Redstart (Gekraagde Roodstaart) was recorded during the trip.

The pojma

The pojma offers excellent breeding and feeding opportunities to meadow birds (weidevogels). As the water level recedes after the spring floods the highest ridges emerge as temporary islands and are colonized by ducks, waders, and terns. The isolation of those sites offers protection against ground predators and due to the paucity of nesting trees the density of Hooded Crow (Bonte Kraai, 1 nest found) was amazingly low. Moreover, in contrast to most Dutch situations, the risk of egg loss due to trampling by cattle is initially zero as long as the ridge remains inaccessible. This year the Turov pojma was still inaccessible in early June due the exceptional floods. In addition to the presence of a Siberian species (Terek Sandpiper), other characteristics distinguished the pojma from typical Dutch meadow bird communities. The sandy often rather bare soil attracted Little Ringed Plover (Kleine Plevier), Great Ringed Plover (Bontbekplevier) and Little Tern (Dwergster). Furthermore, the recurrent erosion has created an undulating terrain with very smooth contours. This may explain the absence of Meadow Pipit (Graspieper), which prefers habitats with ditches, dikes or any other unevenness.

Urban birdlife

Turov was visited more often and parts of the adjacent village Zapesochie were surveyed twice in early morning and late evening. Turov differs from towns of similar size in Western Europe in many aspects. Most houses are made of wood, it has a rural character due to many small stables in which one or a few cows are housed. Moreover, potatoes, tomatoes or other crops are grown on almost every parcel of land. Consequently lawns and western style gardens are absent. Birds, which prefer this habitat such as Hedge Accentor (Heggemus), Wren (Winterkoning), Robin (Roodborst) and Blackbird (Merel), were not recorded. The same was true for woodland species Stock Dove (Holenduif), Wood Pigeon (Houtduif), Song Thrush (Zanglijster), Long-tailed Tit (Staartmees), Blue Tit (Pimpelmees), reflecting the absence of forests in the neighbourhood, whereas the Great Spotted Woodpecker (Grote Bonte Specht) was replaced by its Syrian counterpart. The absence of Common Swift (Gierzwaluw) is hard to explain unless the roof construction of the wooden houses does not provide access. The trees offered nest sites to birds feeding in pojma (White Stork) and fields (Rook). The density of Common and Lesser Whitethroat, Icterine Warbler and "true" finches (Carduelis species) seemed rather high, whereas the Wheatear (Tapuit) as urban breeding bird was rather surprising.

Species notes

Night Heron (Kwak)

At three locations adults were flying over willow thickets in broad daylight. Day time flights often relate to food transport and are a strong indication for breeding. Since Night Herons observed in full light normally represent only a tiny fraction of a local population, it is suspected that dozens were breeding in the Pripyat marshes in 1999. The short-legged Night Heron favours shallow temporary pools to prey on fish trapped in the basin as the water recedes. Hence the inundation zones along the Prypjat seem to offer prime habitat. In this light it is remarkable that the Night Heron is not known to breed each year in Belarus and that the population is estimated at 5 pairs at most⁶. In view of the inaccessibility of the Prypjat marshes this could be an underestimate.

Spoonbill (Lepelaar)

Adult in breeding plumage on sand-bank with White Storks. In view of the fine habitat it is odd that the Spoonbill is a vagrant to Belarus, with two records only.⁶

Pontic Gull (Pontische Meeuw) *Larus cachinnans*

This taxon has recently been split from the Yellow-legged Gull (Geelpootmeeuw) *Larus michahellis* on the basis of sympatric nesting without inter-breeding near the Black Sea, ecological separation (different nest sites) and differences in shape and structure, colours of bare parts, wing-tip pattern, display and vocalisation.⁷ In some aspects the Pontic Gull may resemble Herring Gull (Zilvermeeuw) rather than Yellow-legged Gull: the mantle is less dark than in Yellow-legged Gull and its feet are often not yellow. This may elicit confusion with Herring Gull. However, if seen well structural and plumage features are diagnostic.^{7,8} Pontic Gull is longer-winged, longer-legged and longer-necked than any other large gull. The head shape has a distinctive “snout” effect, due to the long sloping forehead and the long, thin, parallel sided bill with a very inconspicuous gonydeal angle. Most adult Pontic Gulls lack the fish-eye look of Herring Gull (Zilvermeeuw) since the iris colour is often dark. The black tips of the outer primaries have pale inner webs and in flight these create characteristic, zebra-like black and white streaks. At Turov that distinctive feature could be seen from a distance in flying adults. Second summer birds are characterized by extremely white heads and necks. This was noted in 2nd year birds at Lake Vygonosch and Turov. Since Pontic Gull may at first glance appear identical to Herring Gull, large “Herring-like” gulls seen at a distance or flying by are referred to as *Larus spec.* (Pontic/ Herring?). The status of large gulls in Belarus requires further study.

White-winged Black Tern (Witvleugelstern)

Nest building on the smaller reservoir in Beloveshskaya forest. Though thousands exploited the Prypjat and Yaselda marshes, not a single breeding indication (nest building, food transport) was obtained. In contrast, Black Terns were carrying prey to their young in the channel between Turov and Zapesochie all day, from dawn till dusk. In comparison to the Black Tern the White-winged black tern more often occupies floodplains, temporarily flooded grasslands and small pools.⁹ It seems that the White wings could not (yet ?) start nesting because of the extreme floods in 1999, since the water was still flowing over the inundated fields. When comparing figures with other reports it is important to note that the vast majority of the White wings were recorded while sailing, only a minute fraction could be recorded from land. Moreover, spring 1999 was extremely wet, in a dry year like 1977 numbers are much lower.¹ With a population of 8000 – 30000 breeding pairs Belarus is a global stronghold for this delicate tern.⁶ It becomes even more vital as wetlands in the Ukraine and Central Asia continue to decline due to drainage schemes. The current estimate for Russia is 13000 – 17000 pairs.⁹

Roller (Scharrelaar)

Recent estimate for Belarus 600 – 900 pairs, strong decrease since 1980.^{6,9} A single record of a bird, possibly a migrant flying north over the Prypjat. Not mentioned in previous reports,^{1,4,5} implying that the Roller is (becoming) decidedly rare in SW Belarus.

Blyth's Warbler (Struikrietzanger)

A warbler singing from small Willow and Elm trees along the Beloveshskaya Puszczza reservoir was well seen by a few participants and tentatively identified as Blyth's Warbler (Struikrietzanger). After consulting field guides at home a Marsh Warbler (Bosrietzanger) can, however, not be fully excluded.

Short-toed Treecreeper (Boomkruiper)

Since 1917 no breeding records, but possible presence in the extreme west of Belarus not excluded.^{6,9} Calls and song of a Short-toed Treecreeper were noted independently by several participants near Kamjanjuki hotel in the Beloveshskaya forest on 29-5 and in the early morning of 30-5. None of us realised the significance of the record at the time, because this is the familiar and very abundant treecreeper in the Netherlands.

Treecreeper (Taigaboomkruiper)

The unobtrusive song, a mixture of Goldcrest and Blue Tit, was heard at 5 sites in the forest W. of Kamjanjuki between dawn till 07.00 AM on 30-5. All other prime sites in Beloveshskaya forest and Prypjat marshes were visited rather late on the day, when it becomes difficult to hear Treecreepers.

Species not recorded

Crested Lark (Kuifleeuwerik)

In Belarus 1000 – 1500 p, fluctuating (harsh winters ?) with tendency to decline.⁶ Not seen in potential habitats (railway station, sandy fields near Celjakany), but conditions (hot afternoons) unfavourable.

Tawny Pipit (Duinpieper)

The Tawny Pipit population is estimated at 2000-3000 p.⁶ The sandy fields near Celjakany seemed suitable, but were visited under unfavourable conditions (01-06).

Corn Bunting (Grauwe Gors)

None of the 600-1000 pairs of Belarus⁶ was found, though a Corn Bunting was possibly seen from the bus window on a telegraph wire in the farmland SE of Brest. Not mentioned in two previous reports,^{1,4} but recently reported for Brest and Turov regions⁵. Seems scarce in Belarus.

Other animals

A number of mammals were seen or their tracks (tr.) were spotted: Eastern Hedgehog (Oostelijke Egel), Mole (Mol, burrows), Brown Hare (Haas), Beaver (Bever), Wolf, Fox (Vos, tr.), Otter, Wild Boar (Wild Zwijn, tr), Red Deer (Edelhert, tr), Roe Deer (Ree), Moose (Eland, tr) and finally European Bison (Wisent, tr). The following amphibians and reptiles were found: *Rana temporaria* (Bruine Kikker), *Rana esculanta complex* (Grote Groene Kikker), *Rana arvalis* (Heikikker), Tree Frog *Hyla arborea* (Boomkikker), Fire-bellied Toad *B. bombina* (Roodbuikvuurpad), Green Toad *Bufo viridis* (Groene Pad), Common Toad *B. bufo* (Gewone Pad), European turtle *Emys orbicularis* (Europese moeraschildpad), Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* (Zandhagedis) and Grass snake *N. natrix* (Ringslang).

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Tables

Table 1. List of birds recorded in Belarus between 29-5 and 8-6-1999. Explanation of symbols and letters: + present; (number) seen by part of group; number nest with eggs or young or adult carrying food seen; tr tracks; name¹ species recorded by less than 3 participants; A=1, B=2-10, C=11-100, D= 101-1000, E > 1000 birds; ** exclusively seen from boat; * majority seen from boat; P Poland; m male; f female; ad adult; → single bird.

Nederlandse naam	English name	P	29-5	30-5	31-5	1-6	2-6	3-6	4-6	5-6	6-6	7-6	8-6
1 Fuut	Great Crested Grebe			B	B								
2 Geoorde fuut	Black-necked Grebe						(2)		12				
3 Aalscholver*	Great Cormorant			B	1		168	C	C	C	C		
4 Roerdomp	Great Bittern				2	2	1	1	1		1		
5 Kwak**	Night Heron						2			1			
6 Woudaap**	Little Bittern									1m			
7 Kl. Zilverreiger**	Little White Egret						1ad						
8 Grote Zilverreiger**	Great White Egret						27+			B	2		
9 Blauwe Reiger*	Grey Heron	B	2	2	1	1	105	7	1	6	30		
10 Ooievaar	White Stork	C	B	C	40	40	60	C	C	C	C	B	B

	Nederlandse naam	English name	P	29-5	30-5	31-5	1-6	2-6	3-6	4-6	5-6	6-6	7-6	8-6
11	Zwarte Ooievaar*	Black Stork					1	16	1	2	6	4		
12	Lepelaar**	Spoonbill						1ad						
13	Knobbelzwaan	Mute Swan	6	1	4	74	B							
	Grauwe Gans	Greylag Goose	wild type birds on pojma near white geese considered domestic											
14	Smient**	Eurasian Wigeon						(1m)						
15	Wilde Eend*	Mallard	C	C	13	5	1	110	+	+	+	+		
16	Krakeend**	Gadwall						12						
17	Pijlstaart*	Northern Pintail						5			<u>B</u>	3		
18	Slobeend*	Northern Shoveler						14	+		<u>B</u>	+		
19	Wintertaling*	Common Teal						6	2		2	+		
20	Zomertaling*	Garganey					B	163	+		+	+	B	
21	Tafeleend	Common Pochard				12	20	15		C	+	+		
22	Witooogeend**	Ferruginous Duck						(6)						
23	Kuifeend*	Tufted Duck	B					13		1m	±	+		
24	Brilduiker	Goldeneye			3			4						
25	Zwarte Wouw**	Black Kite						1			1			
26	Grauwe Kiekendief	Montagu's Harrier	2	1m	(1)	12	3	3			(1)			14
27	Blauwe Kiekendief	Hen Harrier				1m								
28	Bruine Kiekendief*	Marsh Harrier	7		2+	5	+	32	1	(1)	1m	3		3
29	Sperwer	Sparrowhawk		1	(2)			1f		(1)				
30	Havik	Goshawk				nest				1				
31	Wespendief	Honey-buzzard			2		1		2		?		3	
32	Buizerd	Common Buzzard	B		4		1		(1)				1	3
33	Zeearend*	White-tailed Eagle			1	7	2	11-14				2		
34	Bastaardarend**	Spotted Eagle						2				(1)		
35	Schreeuwarend	Lesser Spotted Eagle			3	1	4	2	1	1		2	1	
36	Slangenarend	Short-toed Eagle					1		1		1			
37	Torenvalk	Common Kestrel	1m											(1)
38	Roodpootvalk	Red Footed Falcon							1f					
39	Boomvalk	Hobby			4		1							
	Hazelhoen ¹	Hazel Grouse ¹			(1)									
40	Kwartel	Common Quail					1		1	3				
41	Kwartelkoning	Corn Crane (H)		1	3		B	2		C	+	(C)		
42	Porseleinhoen	Spotted Crane (H)					(1)	1		1		(10)		
43	Waterral	Water Rail (H)		1			1							
44	Waterhoen	Moorhen		B	(+)			B	B	B	B	B		
45	Meerkoet	Common Coot			(H)		B	18		C	+			
46	Kraanvogel	Common Crane			6		6							
47	Scholekster	Oystercatcher*						18		+	B	B		
48	Kleine Plevier	Little Ringed Plover*						14	1	1	+	<u>B</u>		
49	Bontbekplevier	Great Ringed Plover						4	+		±	<u>B</u>		
50	Kievit	Northern Lapwing*	+	B	B	B	C	131	+	+	±	C	+	C
51	Kleine Strandloper	Little Stint**						(1)						
52	Krombekstrandloper	Curlew Sandpiper**						(1)						
53	Bonte Strandloper	Dunlin**						(2)						
54	Kemphaan	Ruff*						21	1		±	B		
55	Grutto	Black-tailed Godwit*					B	56	+		<u>60</u>	B	B	5
	Zwarte Ruiter ¹	Spotted Redshank**										(1)		
56	Tureluur	Common Redshank*		2+		1	B	63	+	+	±	+	+	
57	Groenpootruiter	Greenshank					1	1			1			
58	Witgatje	Green Sandpiper		2	1	1	1	4	B					
59	Bosruiter	Wood Sandpiper				1			(1)	1	1		2	
60	Terek Ruiter	Terek Sandpiper*						9	1	6	<u>4</u>	10	1	
61	Oeverloper	Common Sandpiper						4	1	1	B		+	
62	Houtsnip	Woodcock		(1)										
63	Watersnip	Common Snipe		4			B	B	B	B		B	B	
64	Dwergmeeuw	Little Gull*					2	3			3	3		
65	Stormmeeuw	Common Gull**						2						
66	Kokmeeuw	Black-headed Gull*	D	200	1	C	+	<u>1955</u>	+	C	+	+	+	

	Nederlandse naam	English name	P	29-5	30-5	31-5	1-6	2-6	3-6	4-6	5-6	6-6	7-6	8-6
	meeuw / gull spec.	Herring/Pontic ?					+	+	+	+				
67	Pontische Meeuw	Pontic Gull*					B	1	1	B	6	6		
68	Reuzenster	Caspian Tern**									1			
69	Visdief	Common Tern*	C	10		B	C	126	+	+	\pm	B	C	
70	Dwergster	Little Tern*						51	+		<u>30</u>	B	<u>C</u>	
71	Witwangster	Whiskered Tern*			8		53	510	+		B		1	
72	Zwarte Stern	Black Tern			<u>80</u>	1	5	16	<u>C</u>		<u>30</u>	<u>C</u>	C	
73	Witvleugelster	White-w. Bl. Tern*			<u>10</u>	40	510	12980	90	C	+	+	C	
74	Stadsduif	Feral Pigeon	D	B			C	B			B			
75	Houtduif	Wood Pigeon	C	B	B	B		4	+		+	+		
76	Holenduif	Stock Dove		A	A									
77	Turkse Tortel	Collared Dove	C								B	B		+
78	Zomertortel	Turtle Dove					1	2	3	B	(1)	A	1	
79	Koekoek	Common Cuckoo	B	B	B	B	B	1	2	B	B	1		
80	Oehoe	Eagle Owl			<u>1</u>									
81	Laplanduil	Great Grey Owl				<u>1</u>	<u>1p</u>							
82	Gierzwaluw	Common Swift	D	C	C	C	+	+	+	+		1	B	C
83	Scharrelaar	Roller**						1						
84	Hop	Hoopoe		1		1	1	3	1		1	2	<u>1</u>	
85	Draaihals	Wryneck			(1)	(1)	B					1		
86	Zwarte Specht	Black Woodpecker		1m	B	1								
87	Grijskopspecht	Grey-headed Wp.		1-2	1H			1H						
88	Syrische Bonte Sp.	Syrian Woodpecker									(1)		?	
89	Grote Bonte Specht	Great Spotted Wp.		B	C	+	+		B	B			+	
	Witrugspecht	White-backed Wp.			tr									
90	Kl. Bonte Specht	Lesser Spotted Wp.					2					1		
	Drieteenspecht	Three-toed Woodp.			tr									
91	Veldleeuwerik	Sky Lark		B	B	+	+			+	+	+		
92	Boomleeuwerik	Wood Lark		2	B	1	(1)							
93	Oeverzwaluw	Sand Martin*	B	B			C	<u>1866</u>	+	<u>D</u>	+	+		
94	Boerenzwaluw	Barn Swallow	B	B	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
95	Huiszwaluw	House Martin	C	B	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		C
96	Boompieper	Tree pipit		2	+	+	+		+	+		\pm	B	
97	Graspieper	Meadow Pipit		B	B		B						B	
98	Witte Kwikstaart	Pied Wagtail	+	+	+	+	+	B	+	+	+	B	+	
99	Gele Kwikstaart	Yellow Wagtail		2		2	B	B	+	+	B	B		
100	Winterkoning	Wren			4	2	1		B					
101	Heggenus	Hedge Accentor		(1)	1									
102	Roodborst	Robin		B	+	+	+		+	+			+	
103	Noordse Nachtegaal	Thrush Nightingale			2	1	4	C	+	4	5	7		
104	Blauwborst	Bluethroat**						B						
105	Gekr. Roodstaart	Common Redstart			(1)									
106	Zwarte Roodstaart	Black Redstart		1	1	2		1	1	1	2	1		
107	Paapje	Whinchat		4								1	<u>2</u>	1
108	Tapuit	Northern Wheatear		(1f)	1						(1f)			
109	Merel	Black Bird	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	(1)		+	
110	Kramsvogel	Fieldfare		1	B	+	B	2	2			B		
111	Zanglijster	Song Thrush		B	+	C	+		+	+	1	1		
112	Grote Lijster	Mistle Thrush	2		1	(1)								
113	Snor	Savi's Warbler			1									
114	Krekelzanger	River Warbler			B		1			1	1	1		
115	Sprinkhaanzanger	Grasshopper Warbler						1						
116	Grote Karekiet	Great Reed Warbler		B	C	B	B	C		B	1			
117	Rietzanger	Sedge Warbler		4	1		B	C			+			
	Struikrietzanger	Blyth's Reed W.			(1?)									
118	Waterrietzanger	Aquatic Warbler			3									
119	Bosrietzanger	Marsh Warbler			B		+	B	+					
120	Kleine Karekiet	Reed Warbler			3	2				+				
121	Spotvogel	Icterine Warbler		2	C	C	+	C	+	+	1	+	B	

	Nederlandse naam	English name	P	29-5	30-5	31-5	1-6	2-6	3-6	4-6	5-6	6-6	7-6	8-6
122	Tuinfluit	Garden Warbler		B	C	C	+	B	+	+	1	+	+	
123	Braamsluiper	Lesser Whitethroat		1	2	1		A	→	→	3	3	2	
124	Grasmus	Common Whitethr.		B	B	B	+	B	+	+	+	+	+	
125	Zwartkop	Blackcap		+	+	+	+		+	+			+	
126	Sperwergrasmus	Barred Warbler					2	1	(1)					
127	Fluiter	Wood Warbler		B	C	C	C		B	B			B	
128	Fitis	Willow Warbler		2	1	+	+	B	+	+	+	+	+	
129	Tjiftjaf	Chiffchaff		1	B	+	+	B	+	+	+			
130	Grauwe Fitis	Greenish Warbler							(1)				1	
131	Goudhaan	Goldcrest			+	+	1							
132	Bonte Vliegenvanger	Pied Flycatcher		1	C	C	C		C			B		
133	Withalsvliegenv.	Collared Flycatcher							1					
134	Grauwe Vliegenv.	Spotted Flycatcher		1	B	B	1		B				B	
135	Kl. Vliegenvanger	Red-breasted Flyc.			1	1			1					
136	Buidelmees	Penduline Tit						B		B		B		
137	Glanskopmees	Marsh Tit		1	+	+	+		+			3		
138	Matkopmees	Willow Tit			(+)		+		+	+		+	+	
139	Kuifmees	Crested Tit			+	+	+							
140	Pimpelmees	Blue Tit		B	+	+	+	B	+			B		
141	Koolmees	Great Tit		B	+	B	+	1	+			+	+	
142	Zwarte Mees	Coal Tit		+	+	+	+		+					
	Azuurmees ¹	Azure Tit**						(1)						
143	Staartmees	Long-tailed Tit			C	B			+					
144	Boomklever	Nuthatch		B	B	1	(+)		+			B		
145	Boomkruiper	Short-toed Treecr.		1	1	(1)								
	Taigaboomkruiper ¹	Eurasian Treecr.		(5)	(1)									
146	Grauwe Klauwier	Red-backed Shrike	1	2	B	B	+	A		2	2	2	2	
147	Klaepster	Great Grey Shrike	1			1		2	1					
148	Spreeuw	Common Starling	+	+	+	+	±	C	+	±	+	+		
149	Wielewaal	Golden Oriole		2	B	C	+		+	+	+	+	B	
150	Gaai	Jay	1	1		2		2	+				+	
151	Ekster	Magpie	+	1	(+)	1	+	15	+	+	1	1		+
152	Kauw	Jackdaw	C	1	B		+	B	+					
153	Raaf	Raven		1	H	3	B	1	3	1	(2)	2	1	
154	Bonte Kraai	Hooded Crow	C	B	B	B	B	25	+	+	B	+	+	+
155	Roek	Rook	<u>D</u>	C	B	E	<u>E</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>E</u>	±	±	±		+
156	Ringmus	Tree Sparrow			B			B	+	+	B	+		
157	Huismus	House Sparrow	+	+	+	+	+			+	1			+
158	Vink	Chaffinch	+	+	+	C	+	B	+	+	(1)	+	+	+
159	Appelvink	Hawfinch		2	C	2			B					
160	Europese Kanarie	European Serin		1	2	3	2	2						2
161	Groenling	Greenfinch		1	B	B	B	+	+	+	(+)	+		+
162	Putter	Goldfinch		2	B	B	B	B	+	+	(+)	+		
163	Goudvink	Bullfinch			B				B					
164	Kneu	Linnet		2	B	B	B				(+)			
165	Roodmus	Rosefinch		1	B	C	C	C		B	+			
166	Kruisbek	Crossbill			B	B	+							
167	Geelgors	Yellowhammer	B	C	C	+	+	C	+	+	B	B	C	+
168	Rietgors	Reed Bunting		+	C	+	+	C	C	B	B	+		

Table 2. Distribution of birds along Prypjat river between Pinsk and Turov, 2-6-9. Survey per interval by Hidde Bult.

start time (h)	7.00	9.00	10.00	11.00	12.00	13.00	15.00	16.00	17.00	18.00	Turov
start position (x° x')	26° 7'	26°26'	26°35'	26°45'	26°54'	27° 3'	27° 8'	26°17'	27°26'	27°35'	27°44'
start position (52° y')	7'	9'	8'	7'	9'	9'	9'	9'	9'	7'	4'
Black-necked Grebe (Geoorde Fuut)				2							
Great Cormorant (Aalscholver)			20	18		22	65	13	8	22	
Bittern (Roerdomp)	1										
Night Heron (Kwak)	2										

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start position (52° y')	7'	9'	8'	7'	9'	9'	9'	9'	9'	7'	4'
Little Egret (Kleine Zilverreiger)		1									
Great White Egret (Gr. Zilverreiger)			1	1		12	13				
Grey heron (Blauwe reiger)	1	14	20	7		3	45	3	7	5	5
Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar)		6		2		1	4	1	1	1	
Spoonbill (Lepelaar)		1									
Wigeon (Smient)										1	
Gadwall (Kraakeend)			1				11				
Common Teal (Wintertaling)							2	4			
Mallard (Wilde Eend)		20	10	15	4	1	18	15	6	21	
Northern Pintail (Pijlstaart)								2		3	
Garganey (Zomertaling)	33	22	30	7		15	8	10	25	13	
Northern Shoveler (Slobeend)	3						1		2	8	
Common Pochard (Tafeleend)	1		6			4			2	2	
Ferruginous Duck (Witoogeend)			2		1						
Tufted Duck (Kuifeend)			6						1	6	
Goldeneye (Brilduiker)									4f		
Black Kite (Zwarte Wouw)								1			
White-tailed Eagle (Zeearend)			2		3	5-8	1				
Marsh Harrier (Bruine Kiekendief)	4	1		12		5	8		1	1	
Montagu's Harrier (Gauwe Kiekend.)	2										
Sparrowhawk (Sperwer)	1										
Lesser Spotted Eagle (Schreeuwarend)				1			1				
Spotted Eagle (Bastaardarend)						1		1			
Corn Crane (Kwartelkoning)			1								1
Coot (Meerkoet)	1			1		2	1	3	10		
Oystercatcher (Scholekster)	1	2		1			1	2	1	10	
Little Ringed Plover (Kleine Plevier)	2									10	2
Great Ringed Plover (Bontbekplevier)										4	
Lapwing (Kievit)	10	12		1		1			12	80	15
Ruff (Kemphaan)		1								20	
Common Snipe (Watersnip)	1					1					
Black-tailed Godwit (Grutto)						1	2		2	47	4
Redshank (Tureluur)	2	1	10			2				44	4
Greenshank (Groenpootruiter)		1									
Green Sandpiper (Witgat)			1					3			
Common Sandpiper (Oeverloper)			1	1					1	1	
Terek Sandpiper (Terek Ruiter)									1	7	1
Little Gull (Dwergmeeuw)										3	
Black-headed Gull (Kokmeeuw)	500	50	20	10	800		452	20	53	50	
Common Gull (Stormmeeuw)									1	1	
Pontic Gull (Pontische Meeuw)	1										
Common Tern (Visdief)	1			10		1	2	3	5	104	5
Little Tern (Dwergstern)	1		30							20	15
Whiskered Tern (Witwangstern)	503			10							
Black Tern (Zwarte Stern)	1	1		6				3	5		5
White-winged Black T. (Witvleugelst.)	10000	1020	130	40		1		391	668	730	15
Wood Pigeon (Houtduif)							3			1	
Hoopoe (Hop)		2		1							
Sand Martin (Oeverzwaluw)	1700	150								1	15
Great Grey Shrike (Klapekster)	2										
Red-backed Shrike (Gr. Klauwier)		1									

Table 2. Distribution of birds along Prypjat river between Pinsk and Turov, 2-6-9. Survey per interval by Hidde Bult.

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start position (52° y')	7'	9'	8'	7'	9'	9'	9'	9'	9'	7'	4'
Magpie (Ekster)	1		2	4		1		1	3	3	
Rook (Roek)									150	80	50
Hooded Crow (Bonte Kraai)	1			3		2		3	6	4	

From 14.30 to 15.00 sailing was stopped for a lunch break. The real numbers are higher since a single observer easily overlooks birds. During the journey 106 species were recorded (cf table 1).

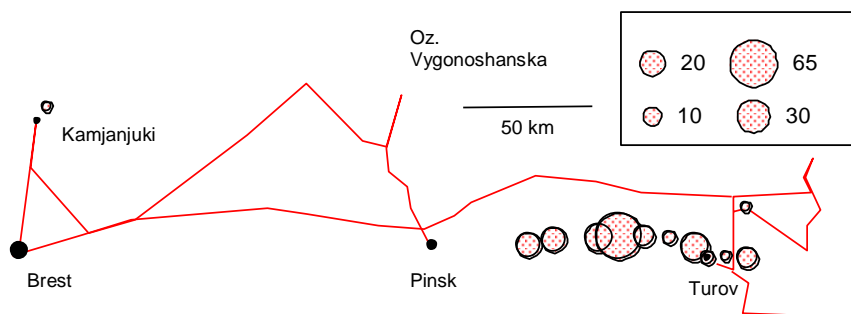


Figure 2 Great Cormorant (Aalscholver)

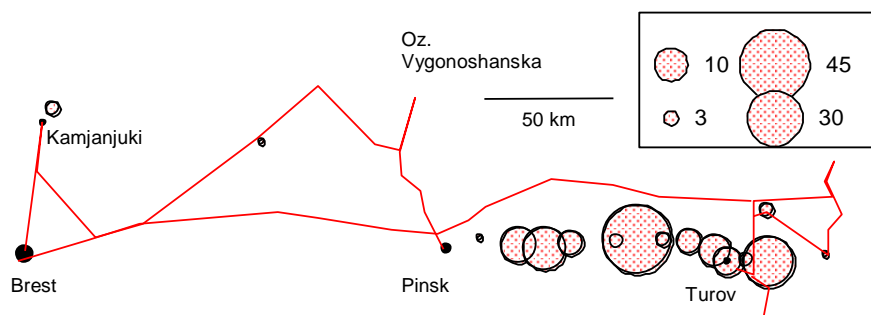


Figure 3 Grey Heron (Blauwe Reiger)

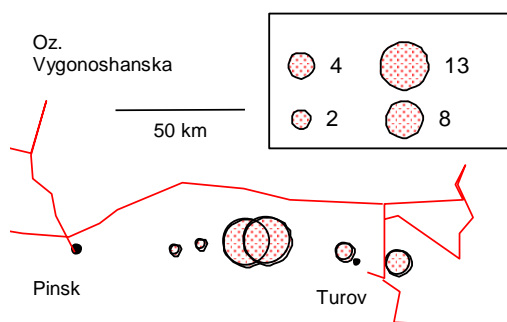


Figure 4 Great White Egret (Grote Zilverreiger)

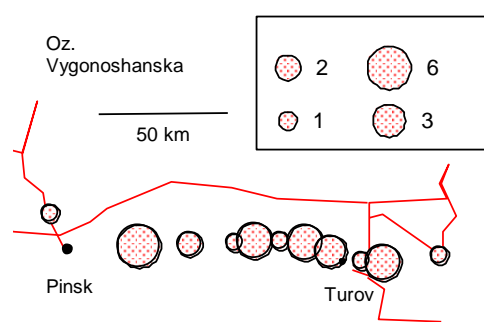


Figure 5 Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar)

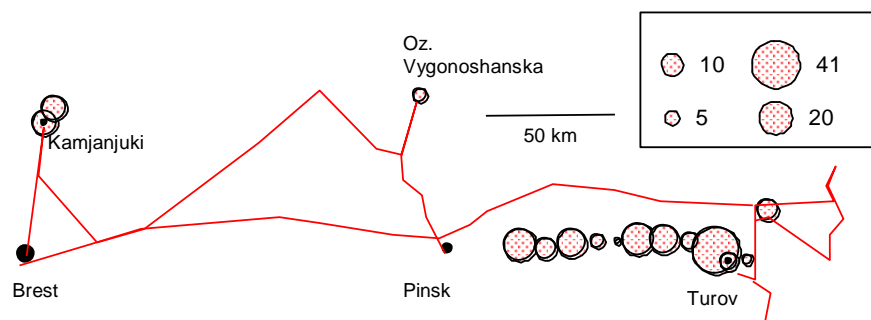


Figure 6 Mallard (Wilde Eend)

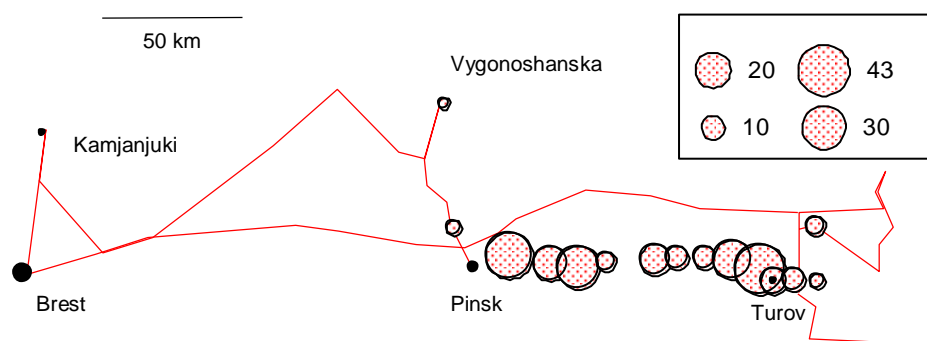


Figure 7 Garganey (Zomertaling)

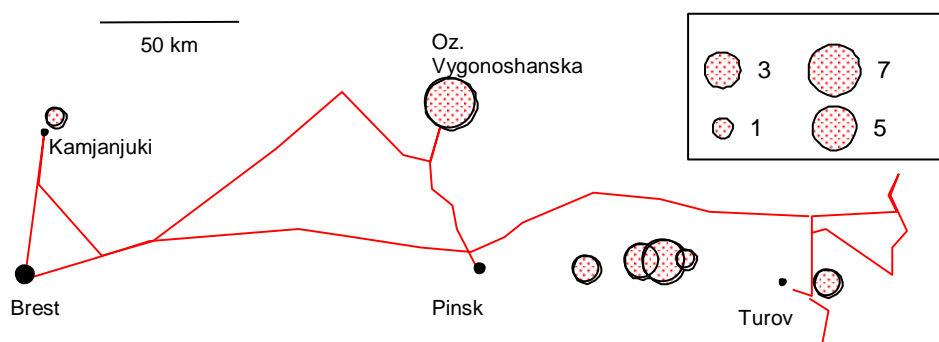


Figure 8 White-tailed Eagle (Zeearend)

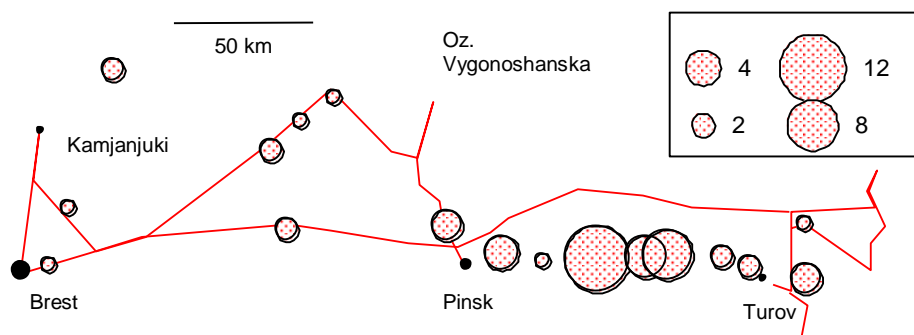


Figure 9 Marsh Harrier (Bruine Kiekendief)

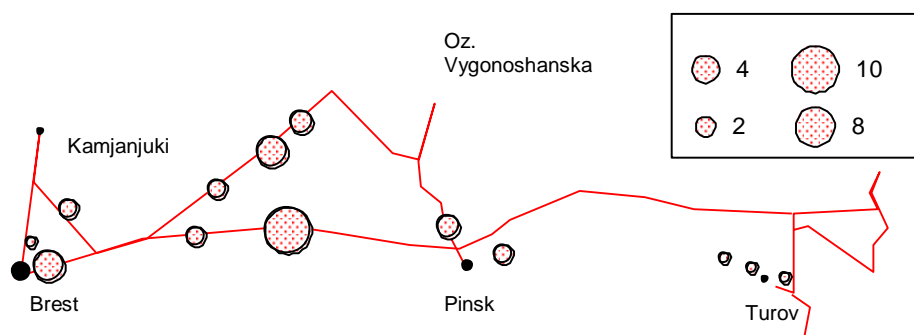


Figure 10 Montagu's Harrier (Grauwe Kiekendief)

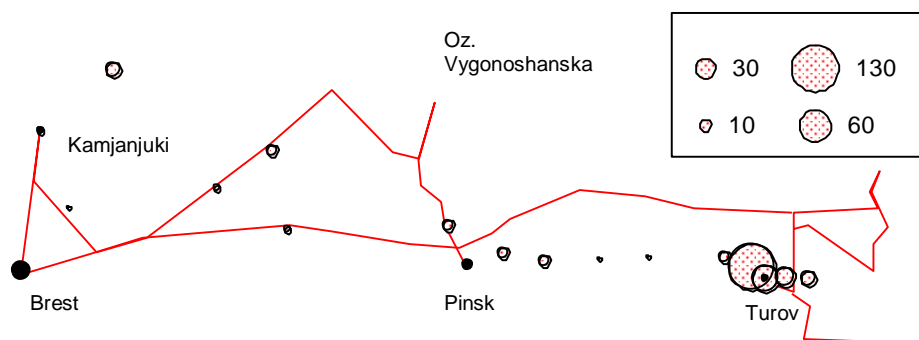


Figure 11 Lapwing (Kievit)

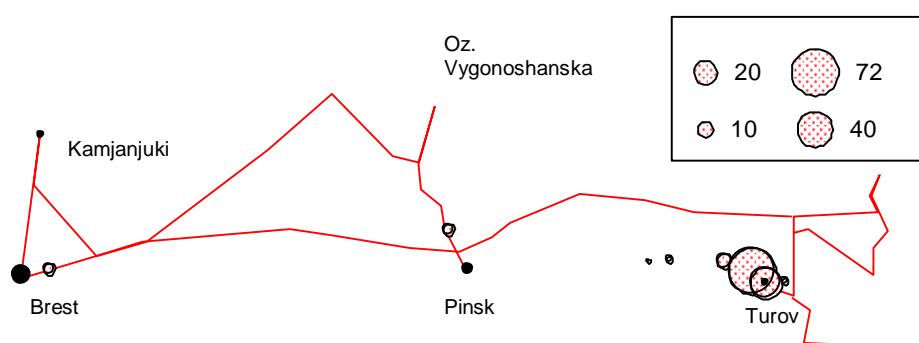


Figure 12 Black-tailed Godwit (Grutto)

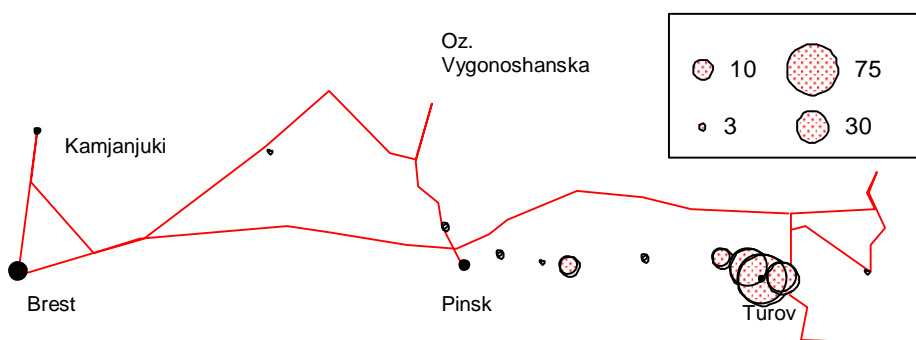


Figure 13 Redshank (Tureluur)

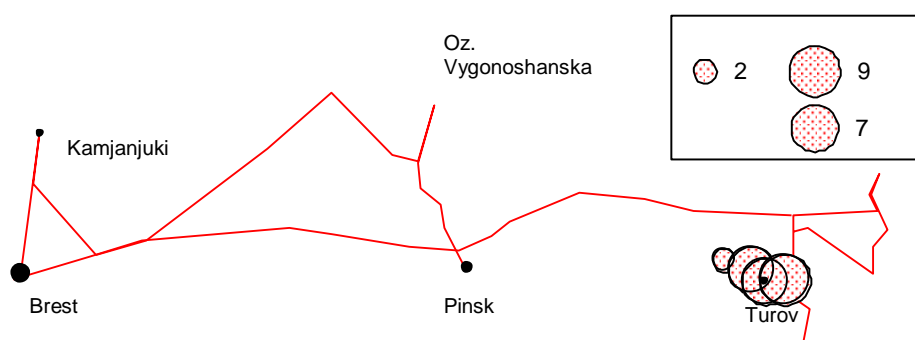


Figure 14 Terek sandpiper (Terek ruiter)

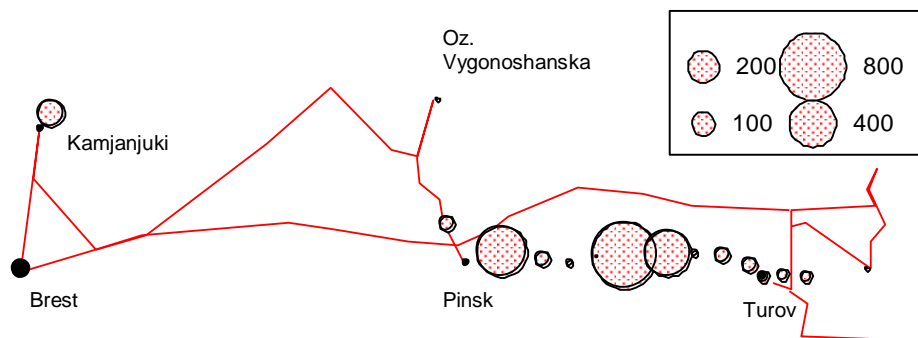


Figure 15 Black-headed Gull (Kokmeeuw)

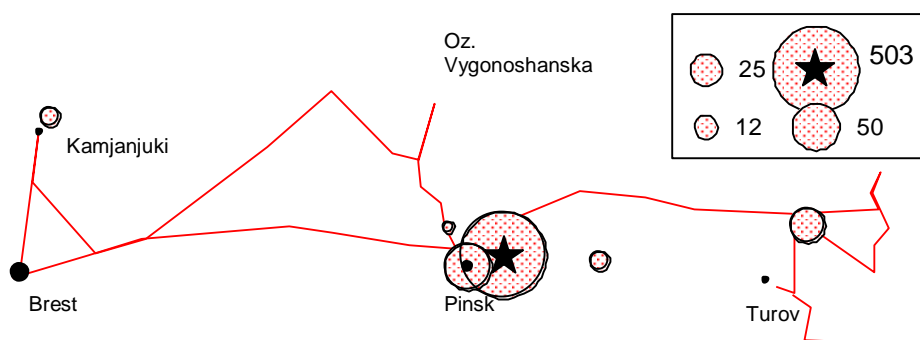


Figure 16 Whiskered Tern (Witwangstern)

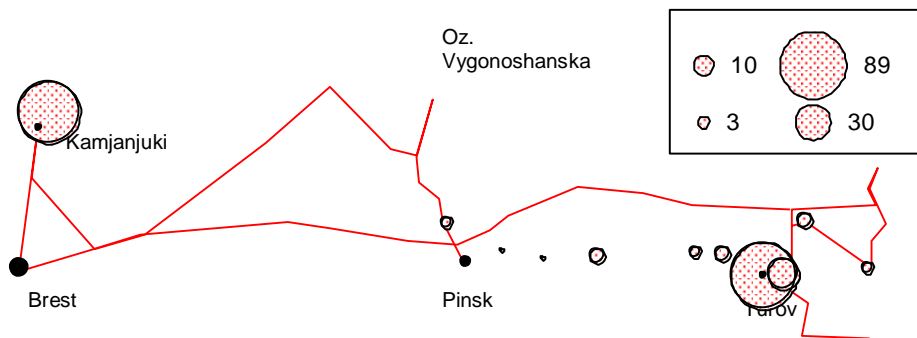


Figure 17 Black Tern (Zwarte Stern)

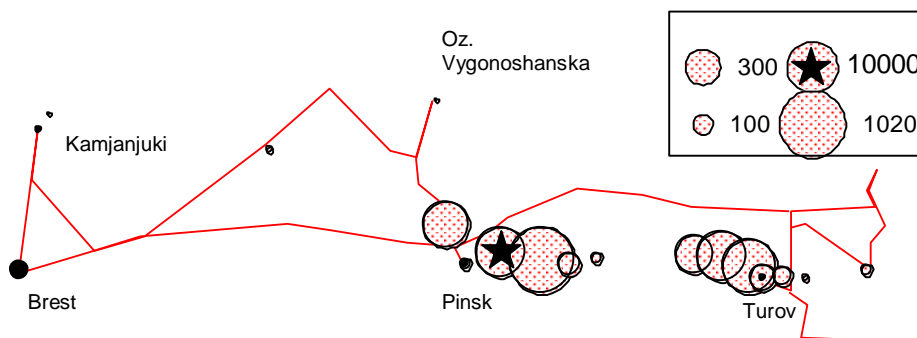


Figure 18 White-winged Black Tern (Witvleugelstern)

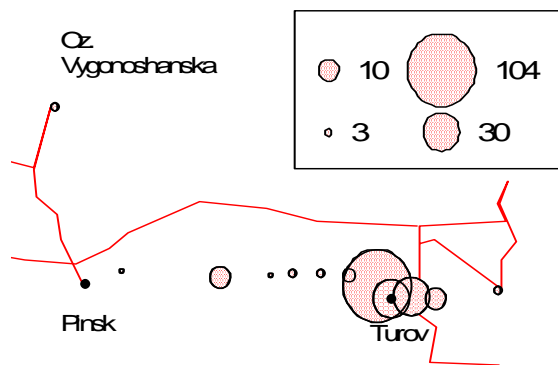


Figure 19 Common Tern (Visdief)

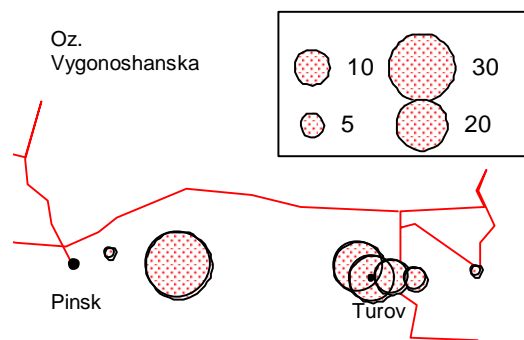


Figure 20 Little Tern (Dwergstern)

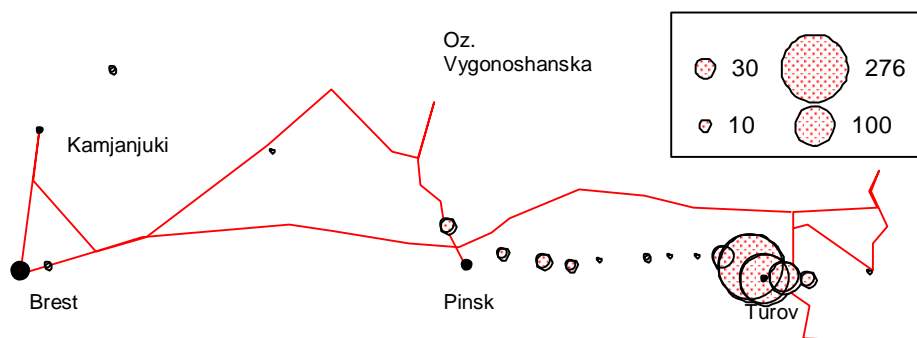


Figure 21 "Meadow birds" (Weidevogels): Oystercatcher (Scholekster), Lapwing (Kievit), Ruff (Kemphaan), Black-tailed Godwit (Grutto) and Redshank (Tureluur).

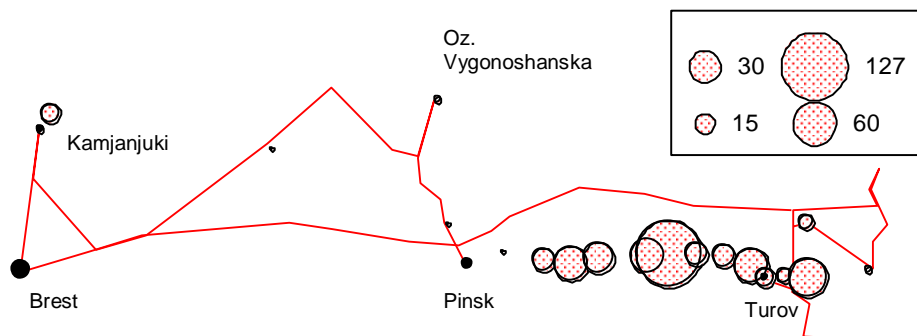


Figure 22 Fish eating birds (Piscivores, viseters): Great Cormorant (Aalscholver), Grey Heron (Blauwe reiger), Great White Egret (Grote Zilverreiger) and Black Stork (Zwarte Ooievaar).