Eagle-Eye Tours

The Netherlands Itinerary

Link: The Netherlands

Tour Overview

Spring in the Netherlands offers great birding in a variety of habitats including the coast, heaths, woodlands, polders (marshland) and lakes. We will also take in some cultural sites and towns. Although the Netherlands is the most densely populated country in Europe, it harbours a surprisingly rich birdlife. Areas such as the Waddenzee, Lauwersmeer, De Hoge Veluwe National Park and Oostvaardersplassen are famed for the sought after species that can be found there. May is the time when many local birds will be breeding, while late migrants are still winging their way north, so the overall list will be excellent.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival

Our Netherlands birding tour begins with arrival at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol where we take a shuttle bus to a nearby hotel. In the evening, we will meet at 6:30pm in the lobby for dinner. Overnight near Schiphol Airport. If you arrive a day or two before the tour, there are many things to do in and near Amsterdam, including a visit to the Keukenhof Gardens, Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh museum, Anne Frank House and much more. Amsterdam, capital of the Netherlands, has more than 100 kilometres of canals, about 90 islands and 1,500 bridges. Small wonder that it’s referred to as the "Venice of the North".

Day 2: Landje van Geijsel and Binnenveldse Hooilanden

After a brief stroll through the hotel’s garden (Lesser Whitethroat, Whinchat, Northern Wheatear and European Goldfinch are all possible), we will visit Landje van Geijsel and Binnenveldse Hooilanden on the way to Arnhem. Landje van Geijsel is a famous birding spot in The Netherlands where many waders and meadow birds can be seen in early spring. Species include Common, Green and Wood Sandpipers, Garganey, Little Ringed Plover, Water Pipit, Black-winged Stilt, Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Curlew, Ruff, Common Snipe, Common and Spotted Redshanks, Common Greenshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Spoonbill, White Wagtail, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Wigeon and Common Teal. Around midday we will stop at Zouweboezem, one of the Netherlands' finest freshwater wetlands. This extensive marsh is an excellent place to look for Purple Heron, Western Marsh Harrier, Bluethroat, Eurasian Spoonbill and a variety of ducks, reedbed birds and marshland species. We then continue to Binnenveldse Hooilanden, a superb wetland reserve created through a partnership between conservationists, farmers and local authorities. Within just a few years, this 300-hectare mosaic of wet grasslands, reedbeds and shallow pools has become one of the country's premier birding locations. Birds regularly seen here include Northern Lapwing, Western Yellow Wagtail, Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Common Snipe, Common Redshank, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Little Ringed Plover, White Stork, Great Egret, Common Kingfisher, Bluethroat and Sedge Warbler. During spring migration, species such as Spotted Redshank, Wood Sandpiper, Ruff, Jack Snipe and Garganey are also possible.

Day 3: De Hooge Veluwe National Park

The morning is set aside for exploring De Hooge Veluwe National Park, with its expanse of sandy heaths, lakes, dunes and woodland. We hope to see European Honey Buzzard, Middle Spotted, Lesser Spotted and Black Woodpeckers, Coal and Crested Tits, Wood Warbler, European Pied Flycatcher, Common Redstart and many more forest species. The more open heaths should produce sightings of Eurasian Hobby, Woodlark, Northern Wheatear and Yellowhammer. Red Deer, European Mouflon (introduced from Corsica) and Wild Boar are also possible. In the afternoon we visit the Kröller-Müller Museum, one of the country’s finest art museums, comprising a wide cross section of modern European art from Impressionism to Cubism and beyond (including Mondrian and Van Gogh), as well as enjoy its sculpture garden, one of the largest in Europe. Common Firecrest and Hawfinch are possible to see here. In the late afternoon we shall explore a bit of the surrounding countryside (or Park Sonsbeek/Zypendaal).

Day 4: Oostvaardersplassen

Today we will have a full day of birding at the Oostvaardersplassen, a nature reserve northeast of Arnhem in a reclaimed part of the former Zuiderzee. This area is justly famous for its wildlife. Red Deer are found, while Konik ponies and Heck cattle have been introduced to help manage this marshland, the largest in the Netherlands, where the birdlife is spectacular. Even Eurasian Wolf has been seen in recent years. We hope to see a variety of waterfowl (including Garganey, Common Pochard and Tufted Duck), Black-winged Stilt, Eurasian Spoonbill, Eurasian Bittern, harriers, White-tailed Eagle, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Bearded Reedling, Cetti's, Sedge, Common Reed and Savi's Warblers, as well as Bluethroat and many more.

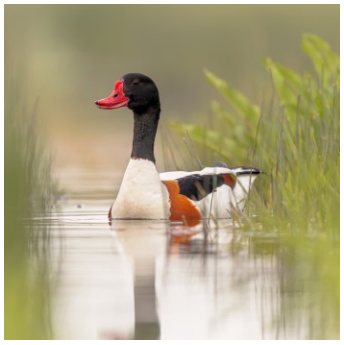
Day 5: Weerribben-Wieden National Park

Today we will visit the Weerribben/Wieden National Park, where extensive marshlands harbour Water Rail, Eurasian Spoonbill, Eurasian Bittern, Purple Heron, Great Reed and Icterine Warblers, amongst others. The nearby village of Giethoorn is extraordinarily picturesque, its slender brown green canals overseen by lovely thatched cottages, shaded by mature trees and crisscrossed by pretty humpbacked footbridges. We shall have lunch in the village before taking a brief walk around the "Venice of the Netherlands". Afterwards, a visit to another local wetland (Wetering West, west of Scheerwolde) may produce a few species of grebe, White-winged Tern, Eurasian Bittern, Bearded Reedling and more.

Day 6: Dwingelderveld National Park and Fochteloërveen

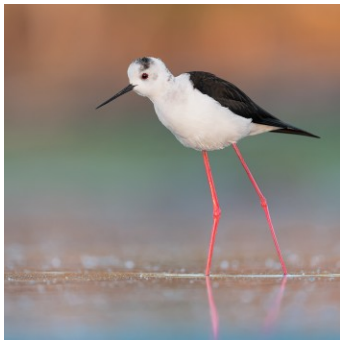
In the morning, we will bird in and around Dwingelderveld National Park, a large heathland, surrounded by forests. Some of the more common species include Eurasian Skylark, Meadow Pipit and Yellowhammer, while Common Crane, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Eurasian Hobby and Red-backed Shrike are possible. After lunch, we will visit Fochtelooërveen for afternoon birding. Species here will be similar to those at Dwingelderveld National Park, including Common Crane. Overnight at Leeuwarden.

Day 7: Lauwersmeer National Park



Today we spend all day in the Lauwersmeer National Park in the extreme north of the Netherlands. The tidal flats, freshwater lakes, marshes and meadows are full of birds such as Common Shelduck, Red-necked Grebe, numerous shorebirds including male Ruff, Whiskered Tern, Montagu's Harrier, Bearded Reedling, larks, Bluethroat, wagtails, pipits and more. An effort will also be made to locate White-tailed Eagle, which has bred here in recent years. We will try to time our arrival at the tidal mudflats to coincide with the greatest concentration of birds. Overnight in Leeuwarden.

Day 8: Noord Holland



We spend a leisurely day driving via the Afsluitdijk to the province of Noord Holland, stopping at viewpoints along the dyke. We will walk along the dyke at Wieringen, overlooking the Waddenzee, before ending up at Den Helder for the night. A variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, terns and gulls can be expected along the dyke and there will likely be some migrant passerines. Overnight in Den Helder.

Day 9: Texel

We take a ferry to Texel (pronounced "Tessel"), the largest of the famous Frisian Islands, while keeping an eye out for Harbour Seal, Common Eider, terns and gulls while on board. Stuck out in the Waddenzee, Texel is the westernmost of the string of islands that band the northern coast of the Netherlands. Some twenty-five kilometres long and up to nine kilometres wide, Texel is a mixture of natural island – in its southeast reaches – and reclaimed polder, mostly on the western side. Overall, it's a flat landscape of green pasture land dotted with chunks of woodland, speckled with small villages and protected by long sea defences. The west coast boasts magnificent stretches of sand that reach from one end of the island to the other. Behind the beach, a belt of sand dunes widens as it approaches both ends of the island. In the north it spreads out into two nature reserves – De Muy and De Slufter – the latter incorporates Texel's finest scenery in a tidal inlet where a deep cove of saltmarsh, lagoon and dune has been left beyond the sea defences, exposed to the ocean. Target species include European Turtle Dove, many species of shorebird including Eurasian Dotterel, Little Tern and Eurasian Spoonbill, as well as scarce and rare birds that the island is famous for. We will visit a few nature reserves, as well as a couple of picturesque villages; Den Hoorn is probably the prettiest place on the island, while Oudeschild still boats a working harbour with a small fishing fleet. Overnight in Den Helder.

Day 10: De Nollen, Zwanenwater and Hondsbosche Zeewering

Today we will visit the nature reserve De Nollen south of Den Helder for a short morning walk. This former bulb field has been transformed into a small reserve with low dunes and small waterbodies. Here we may find Water Rail, Sedge Warbler and Bluethroat. We continue south to Zwanenwater nature reserve, located in the dunes near the coast, where we can expect a variety of waterfowl, Eurasian Spoonbill and passerines such as Lesser and Common Whitethroats, Common Nightingale, Bluethroat, European Stonechat and Northern Wheatear. Further south, we visit the Hondsbossche Zeewering. Over the North Sea on one side of this high seawall we should see terns and gulls, while on the other side, a few ponds across the road may harbour waterfowl and shorebirds. We will also visit Zuid-Kennemerland National Park. This area consists of pristine woodlands, dunes and lagoons where we can expect a variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and passerines, including Western Marsh Harrier, Wood Lark, Common Grasshopper Warbler and Common Nightingale. We then return to Amsterdam for our farewell dinner. Overnight near Schiphol Airport.

Day 11: Departure

Our Netherlands birding tour ends today. You can depart anytime today.

What to Expect

Overview

In general, the tour is not strenuous, although there may be a few long days. The pace will be slow or moderate, allowing time for us to fully enjoy the places we visit. We will be looking for a variety of birds in different habitats, but we also plan to take in some cultural sites and towns. Language won't be a problem, as just about everyone speaks good English.

Accommodation & Food

The Netherlands has excellent infrastructure and good hotels. Most meals will be at a restaurant, but on some days, we may have a picnic lunch. In the evenings we will eat at the hotel or a nearby restaurant, where we will enjoy a fine meal, review the day's bird list and discuss the itinerary for the next day.

Walking

Most walking will be on relatively level ground at a relaxed pace. The longest walk is in Dwingelderveld National Park and is approximately 3 kms (2 miles) in distance.

Driving

Most days will have a moderate amount of driving to get to our next destination.

Climate

Spring weather can be variable, but temperatures should generally be moderate. Some rain is likely. A packing list will be provided prior to departure.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes
• All accommodation
• All meals & soft drinks
• Ground transportation
• One guide with 4 - 5 participants, 2 guides with 6 - 10 participants
• Park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include
• Flight to and from start/end location
• Travel Insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Alcoholic beverages