



THE NETHERLANDS: Wild Goose Chase TRIP REPORT Feb 2-9, 2005 Text & photos by Adrian Binns

Day 1: Drive from Amsterdam south to Hoek van Holland; **Schouwen - Zeeland:** Stellendam, blind and harbour; Ouddorp fields; Brouwersdam

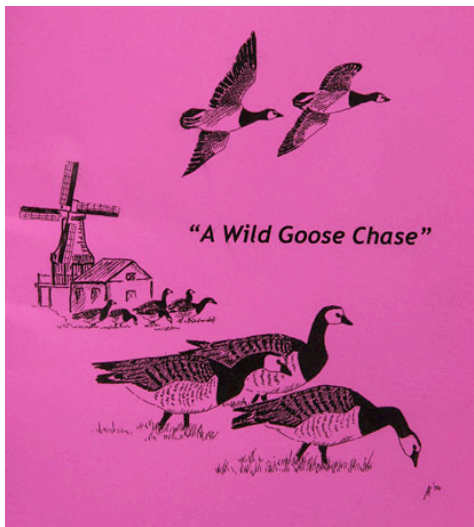
With plenty of room to stretch out and a couple of Naomi's magic pills the Trans-Atlantic flight went by just like that. We picked up our mini van in no time at all and were on our way heading south. When you hear the expression "a mountain out of a mole hill", you realize that it applies in the literary sense to this country. Everywhere we have driven is below sea level and in the Netherlands mountains are literally the thousands of mole hills one sees besides the road as you drive around. The landscape is flatter than a pancake. Bicycles are a common means of transportation and demphels (speed bumps) give mole hills a run for their money, height wise. As the kilometers ticked by we passed a number of common species including Jackdaws, Magpies, Woodpigeons, Eurasian Kestrels and Blackbirds and before we knew it we were at our first destination – Hoek van Holland. Here our target was the House Crow an Asian species that has established itself in this area in recent times more than likely thanks to a few having been ship assisted. A few Carrion Crows were about and the smaller noisier Jackdaws were everywhere as we looked around the train station and harbour, but all we could come up with were Great Tits, Herring and Common Gulls.



Not too far away we scoped the harbour jetty which had thousands of Great Cormorants and large numbers of Black-headed Gulls, and in the pools, Redshanks (*above*), Oystercatcher, Great Black-backed Gull along with a few Common Ringed Plover and a lone

Dunlin. Walking back to the van we check three crows, two of which were Carrion and the 3rd was a House Crow. It dropped down off a perch onto the ground and walked about giving us great views before taking off into a distant tree.

Picking up a sandwich and a map (it always helps) we took a short ferry ride across the Calaandkanaal onto Voorne and then over the bridge to Stellendam on Goeree. Cetti's Warbler was first up, and after getting our bearings and walking amongst the reeds, one responded to the tape only feet away from us. The sulker that it is played hide and seek for 15 minutes but we all got to see it. The Harbour held large numbers of Great Crested Grebes and Gadwall along with Tufted Ducks and Eurasian Coots. The roadside verges here gave us our first taste of the geese that we were here to witness.



Even though it was just a few Greylag Geese we were ready for the onslaught that was to follow. The polders (reclaimed land) around Ouddorp were outstanding. First, a Curlew or two, followed by a few Egyptian Geese and then many more of each species. A large flock of Greater White-fronts and an even larger flock of Barnacle, but the biggest surprise was the mother lode of plovers, no doubt all European Golden Plovers that swirled about the sky. A conservative estimate would be 10,000. Even though it was at a great distance it was a sight to see. Scattered amongst the geese were a few Dark-bellied Brent. Lapwings could be seen 'rowing' in the air in decent size flocks and at least one Common Buzzard was in the area, the first of what would be many on the trip. The numbers of ducks was pretty impressive with hundreds of Eurasian Wigeon, a few

Goosanders and Common Teal along with Pintails and Shelducks. In the narrow channels a flash of cobalt blue indicated that a Kingfisher was darting about and a couple of Little Grebes were also seen in these channels. The report of an early returning Eurasian Spoonbill was of great interest to us, and as a few of us were scoping Bar-tailed Godwits and checking out Little Egrets, Bill found the bird sleeping a field. At dusk we reached the Brouwersdam and found a single Purple Sandpiper amongst a dozen Ruddy Turnstones as well as a family group of Common Eiders roosting on the rocky shoreline.

Day 2: Schouwen - Zeeland: Plantureluur; W. of Serooskerke; Neetje Jans; the area between Aagtekerke, Grispskerke and Meliskerke; W of Sabbinge; Goes; Flaauwers

By the time we had finished breakfast (8:15am), dawn had broken and we headed out to the fields east of our hotel on Schouwen to a large wetland known at Plantureluur. Again the sheer volume of birds was overwhelming. Sporadic reports over the last few weeks indicated that two Red-breasted Geese were being seen, but this meant methodically going through the thousands of Barnacle Geese to find them. One by one we searched, but by day's end in spite of a huge flock being relatively close to us, the bird eluded us. About two dozen of the Tundra race of Bean Goose were found along with a single Pink-footed and Bar-headed. There could

possibly have been more, but it is a vast area to cover completely. The spectacle of Curlews, Golden Plovers and Lapwings continued to awe us as they rose in huge flocks more often than not in the thousands, swirling about the overcast sky. On the water Bert located a few stunning Smews. Though the male is rather dapper, the females are very attractive. The far end held about ten Bewick Swans and Mute Swan was also to be found here. After almost an hour and half scanning the area we headed along the south western edge of Schouwen picking out a Red-necked Grebe and several Horned Grebes before stopping at Neeltje Jans along the causeway to Zeeland. Here Bert quickly spotted the Shag on a buoy on the North Sea side and on the other side we encountered several Meadow Pipits perched on a wire fence. Our last stop this morning was into an area between 3 villages in the south western corner of Zeeland, where we scanned and scanned the ploughed and planted fields for Golden Plovers in the hope of coming across a Dotterel that has been here all winter. With the exception of a couple of plovers we could not locate any flock. However we did well with a couple of other birds as Naomi first found a Rough-legged Hawk perched on a fence post, our first one of the trip after coming across about 30 Common Buzzards today, and Bill found a family of two adults and five juvenile Gray Partridge.

Lunch was a quick stop for a sandwich at a petrol station in Middleburg topped off with coffee at Mickey D's. Not too far away we were kept amused watching a group of five gulls, one Black-headed, two Common and two Herring stamping their feet in a short grass meadow, listening for worms. Hitting the north coast of the island a Hen Harrier was new along with almost 100 Avocets, and both Chaffinch and Dunnock seen in a shrubby area, were added to the list. By now the overcast day was beginning to take a turn for the worse as the mist began to roll in. We tried again for the Red-breasted Goose, but had to settle for an immature Spoonbill flying off into neverland along with 4 Greylag Geese. By 4:30pm visibility was rather poor and it was drizzling so we decided to call it day and look for a dinner spot in town.



Day 3: Schouwen - Zeeland: Neeltje Jans; Plantureluur; Phillipsdam - krammersluizen, plaat van vliet; Strijen fields; drive up north to east of Amsterdam. Hoge Veluwe National Park; Leuvenum - de zwarte boer

It was one of those thick pea soup mornings and no matter where we went it seemed as though it was worse there than the previous spot. Black-throated and Common Loon, Red-breasted Goose and Flamingo.....we tried but when you can't even tell if you are even in the right spot, then..... One nice consolation was a Redwing on a front garden lawn just outside Renesse. The Neeltje Jans produced a pair of Sanderlings (we could see about 40 feet in front of us) and while driving, our first Great-spotted Woodpecker flew over the vehicle. Leaving the south we stopped along the causeway at Philipsdam and it looked as though, had it been clear, there would have been a great deal to scope, but alas all we could make out were the hundreds of Oystercatchers and Brant along the edge of the water and a lone Red Knot. Not too far away a stop produced Stock Dove and a calling Chiffchaff. At the Plaat van Vliet hide we still could not see 100 feet in front of us, but did manage a mixed flock of passerines including the ubiquitous Blue Tit, several Goldcrest and Wrens.



By mid day, and the further we got away from the coast, the mist (*above*) was beginning to break up in spots. This was enough to allow us to scan the fields at Strijen for the small flock of Lesser White-fronted Geese that had been hanging out amongst the tens of thousands of Barnacles. One by one we worked through the groups, some of which were massive, methodically checking each Greater White-front and waiting patiently for the flocks to settle down as some clown in this noisy plane did flips above the fields, but all to no avail. A number of Grey Herons and loads of Eurasian Wigeon were in the fields. Buzzards, Common that is, were quite happy perching on various fence posts watching about a dozen Brown Hares hop about and chase each other, but the best bird was a low flying female Sparrowhawk that landed on a gate a short distance from us.

Our options for lunch were few and far between, especially as we could never locate the promised bakery that should be in every town and village – so it was off to Mc Drive once more. By now Bert was getting the hang of the Dutch language and felt he had at least

mastered Mickey D's menu, even if it was in Dutch. I mean how could anyone mess up a fast food order? Confident enough to order from the menu as opposed to by the number, he laid on his best Dutch accent and placed his order. We thought it was a little odd as we watched him quietly walk out with two sodas on a tray and two large brown paper bags. He thought he had gotten away with an extra meal, but when he worked out that he had been charged for two meals (not cheap by the way), he realized that he was not quite ready to order another meal in Dutch just yet.

From here it was onto the motorway heading north east to Netherlands largest National Park, the Hoge Veluwe (*right*). The landscape had changed dramatically as we climbed in elevation to some 70 feet (oxygen please) and we began to see far more trees, these no longer being in short rows but in largish tracts. The Hoge was a mixture of Beech, Larch, Birch, Spruce and Fir forest with carpets of heather and moss. At the entrance gate Bill picked out a few Eurasian Tree Sparrows and amongst the Blue and Great Tits, a Nuthatch. It was late afternoon and very overcast and we were loosing light in our attempt to see Black Woodpecker, Europe's largest pecker. Several Willow Tits, a Short-toed Treecreeper, a small flock of Firecrests along with 17 Red Crossbills kept us busy for a while, but not a sign of the woodpecker at the first stop. Driving the one road through the park we came across a large flock of Chaffinches, Green Woodpecker and a little further into the woods an even larger flock of Bramblings foraging on the ground. It was not until they all took off that we were astounded to see that there were at least 200 of them! As the landscape opened up the further north we went, we stopped when we came across another active flock. This time we located a Marsh Tit and heard the distant drumming of a woodpecker, but never could locate him. A surprise was seeing a large section of sand dunes in the park and about a dozen Ravens flying about the dunes.



A final stop in the park was to see a group of about 15 Red Deer (*above*), all these being stags with massive antlers as they foraged in an open glade. Our last stop of the day, which was also for the first beer of the night, was at a spot where we tried to call in a Tawny Owl. A half hour later, right at 6pm, he responded and put on a nice little show for us flying about the upper canopy calling pretty much all the time.

Day 4: Flevoland: Zeewolde - Wolderwijd; Elzenlaan; **Hilversum:** Goois Natuureservant - Hoogt van Tkruis; Muiden motorway service station; **Flevoland:** Ostervaarsplassen - Ginvandebosch; Grote de Praambult;

We requested, and received, an early breakfast so that we could get out early with Peter, our friend who lives in Almere, which is only a short distance from where we were staying. While the locals may not be accustomed to getting up early, they certainly got a taste of what it is like, when my slice of toast set the fire alarm off. No one moved! It took a while before one or two guests appeared in their pajama's and boxers, and even longer for the fire engine to show up! By then we had pretty much finished our breakfast and headed out on what a crisp but gorgeous day, leaving the staff to sort out the problem.



Peter took us around some of his favorite Flevoland birding spots as well to other areas in search of target birds. We began across from Harderwijk at Wolderwijd scanning the thousands and thousands of Tufted Ducks and Common Pochard (*left*) for Red-crested Pochard. After working the area for a while and seeing a few Smew and Gadwall, we began to pack our scopes into the vehicle. While doing this four Red-crested Pochards flew in and showed well.

A little further south a group of Whopper Swan's flew overhead and about 9 Great White Egrets were seen in the reed beds. On the outskirts of Zeewolde we walked a neighborhood where we had great success with a wide variety of finches, including a group of Goldfinches and Siskins feeding on Alder; Greenfinch; Hawfinch and five Bullfinches that showed their brilliant red breasts as they flew over. Dunnock and Long-tailed Tit rounded out a wonderful half hour. Heading south of Flevoland, Common Buzzards became increasingly numerous, at times we would see four-to-five in a ½ mile stretch, most of which seemed to be on the ground waiting for rodents. We got a chance to scope Whoppers in a field and while looking for a band of Jays that flew across the road, we had half-a-dozen Skylarks fly over. In a neighborhood besides the Hoogt Van Tkruis Nature Park in Hilversum, 3 Long-eared Owls were roosting in a cedar at the edge of someone's front garden. One in particular gave unobstructed views. The Hoogt had numerous tits though the only non-common one we saw was a Willow. Great Spotted Woodpeckers were heard and seen a number of times as we walked through the pines and deciduous woods as was Goldcrest, Red Crossbills and more Siskins. Jay's finally gave great looks and Bill located the Treecreeper, a rarity for the Netherlands which allowed us to check out the field marks on the wing to compare it to the usual Short-toed Treecreeper that one would expect to find here – and we did.

From here we looked for a bakery and eventually found one. Obeying the law, I park 50 yards away in a metered spot that cost one Euro and we all went in to get our goodies. As we came out a Mercedes pulls up on the curb right in front of the door, almost blocking us from exiting the shop, and a gentleman goes right into the bakery for his croissant!

Talk about chasing a bird in an odd place. Rooks (*right*) are not that common here; actually there are only a couple of colonies. The nearest one for us was a besides a motorway rest stop where they nest and feed in the fields. Anyway we found one; eventually having great looks as it foraged besides the van.



It was now onto the large Nature Reserve on Flevoland, Oostervaarsplassen, but not before stopping for a group of Redwings that seemed to have been disturbed by a Sparrowhawk patrolling an intersection. There are numerous places to stop and bird in the Reserve and we began at the southern end and worked our way north. At Ginvandebosch we walked up a slightly elevated area in order to get the best vantage point. It was wonderful to see other people there birding, especially those in their twenties.



Though there were large numbers of Barnacles Geese with smaller numbers of Greylags and 3 Bean Goose as well as a large array of waterfowl, Golden Plover, Lapwings and a few Ruffs, it was really the raptor show that amazed us. First, female Marsh Harriers quartering the reeds, and at one point there were being chased by a Hen Harrier. This was followed by a Merlin on the mudflat, and a Peregrine perched on a log with Red Fox and wild horses and cows all around. Surprisingly, we had at least one Goshawk perched across the marsh which eventually chased a smaller raptor off its perch. The raptor

show continued at the second vantage point which was atop a slippery 15 foot mound where we soon located a distant White-tailed Eagle and watched as it flew laboriously over the marshes. Common Buzzards we seen a lot closer and we had wonderful views of a soaring Rough-legged Hawk. At our third stop, we were treated to three flying White-tailed Eagles, giving us great views of their extremely wide wings and slow wing flaps that end in a slight dihedral. At the northern end, a small group of four Ruddy Ducks were a new addition to our growing list of waterfowl. From here we decided to look for a pair of early returning White Storks, but only found a dozen or so Greater White-fronted Geese, and then for flamingo's but these eluded us on this day. Compensation came in the form of a male Goshawk that narrowly missed us as it flew right across the road in front of the vehicle at eye level.

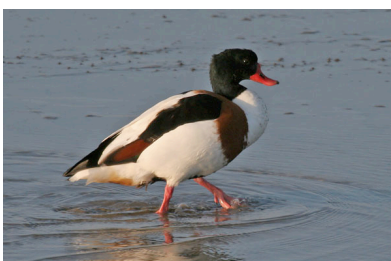
Day 5: Flevoland: Natuurpark Lelystad; **Friesland:** Heerenveen; Horwerd / Ameland Ferry terminal; opp. Bilje; Harlingen; Makkum, Piamm, Gaast, Workum, Hindeloopen, Koudum, Stavoren, Ijsselmeer, Mirns, Oudemirten. **Flevoland:** Zeewolde marshes

Our attempt to get an early breakfast failed as the cook did not set his alarm, so I called the night watchman who promptly summoned the staff, gave them a bullocking and had them produce the goods in next to no time all. In return, I was asked not to set the fire alarm off again!



This morning we were to join Peter and his Flevoland Birding Club in Northern Friesland (an apt name as it was certainly colder than on Flevoland, but not by much) but not before stopping to look at the White Storks (*left*) that were just beginning to build their nest at the Natuurpark. We also found a second pair there. A quick stop two-thirds of the way up for Waxwings (Bohemians over here) was unproductive, but we did find a group of Rooks at a McDonalds!

As we headed towards the northern part of the country, the water channels besides the road had a thin sheet of ice over them. Gulls, mainly Commons, were very evident in the fields and Buzzards yet again seemed to abound. Grey Herons on the other hand were far and few between. We reached the ferry terminal at Holward only 15 minutes behind schedule. Bert figured the 15 minute courtesy rule was in effect (though this was totally foreign to foreign birders) and was somewhat shocked to find the group nowhere in sight. Calling Peter to let him know we had made it, he told us the group was having coffee in the terminal! Five minutes later the scopes were out and the assembled multi-national group had all kind of vocabulary flying, most of which was interpreted as being a great find if the caller was very vocal and enthusiastic, or so we thought. The word *canute* was tossed about more often than a salad, yet there was only one Knot as far as we could see. And how about the chap that let fly with a barrage of verbiage that grabbed all our attentions. Could it have possibly been a first (bird that is) for the Netherlands? The excitement and decibel level lead us to believe that he had found a Great Auk (it is still on the checklist after all) - it turned out to be none other than a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers! The Black-tailed Godwits, that Bill and Bert found for them, did not generate as much excitement. We were not sure why, as those 19 were the first returning birds to the Netherlands this year. Such is the perspective of foreign birders.



The mud flats were covered in waders, ducks and shorebirds – Shelduck (*left*), redshank, curlew, turnstone, dunlin, sanderlings and that lone Knot. A single Snow Bunting was seen on a row of pilings and Rock Pipits flittered about the rock (imagine that) jetty. From here we worked a section of marsh and grazed areas paralleling the Waddenzee to the west searching for Short-eared Owls. The timing was not really the

best as it was a bright sunny day and we were nearing midday, though the Flevolandians insisted that good numbers of them are seen hunting throughout the daylight hours. We could not find one, though did see more Buzzards, Golden Plovers, a Common Snipe and about 30 Shore (Horned) Larks.



After a very quick stop for a sandwich on the go, we worked our way down the southwestern Friesland coast from Harlingen to Oudemirdum, checking on as many flocks of geese as we could for Lesser White-fronted and Red-breasted. The task was daunting, to say the least. Barnacle Geese (*above*) and Greater White-fronted Geese were all over the place in the thousands...tens of thousands...by day's end Bill estimated half-a-million. If only you knew Bill! Those that were close enough to scan with bins or scope were given a thorough going over, but that left far more behind them out of view and large skeins in the air. We probably only covered a fraction of what was out there. Simply an amazing sight to see and in the end it got the better of us. We checked the Waddenzee for any sea ducks but were disappointed by the lack of activity. A little further south we had better luck on the IJsselmeer when we finally located a dozen or so Greater Scaup amongst Great Crested Grebes and Goldeneye.

Back to the polders, we came across an estimated 2000 Eurasian Curlews (*right*) in a field, numbers the likes of which we had never seen before. We reached Zeewolde on Flevoland by the time it was getting dark, and checked the marshes where thousands and thousands of Tufted Ducks and Pochards along with several dozen Smew were settling in for the evening. Two or three Water Rails responded to our tape and we called it an evening.



Day 6: Flevoland: Ibisweg; Oostervaardersplassen – Zeearend Trail; **North Holland:** Den Over, Kleiput Vatrop, Den Helder, De Putten; **South Holland:** Amsterdam Burgemeester Cramer Gracht; Mijdrecht

Driving the roads just south of the Oostervaardersplassen at first light we came across a huge flock of Starlings roosting along the tree lined road and noticed that some of the birds were larger. Soon it was apparent that we had some 30 Fieldfares that had joined this flocked. We watched as they flew about and landed in the ploughed field and back again into the trees. At Oostervaardersplassen we walked the 3 mile Zeearend Trail which leads to the large blind that overlooks the marsh. In one of the maintenance buildings Barn Owls roost and we were able to hear one of them give its eerie screech. Along the trail in a very small wet wooded area we kicked up three Common Snipe, clearly seeing the white trailing edge to the secondaries. At the small blind to the north side of the trail a pair of stunning Bearded Reedlings were coaxed into view, though amazingly they stayed within inches of the ground at all times. There are some birds that really are striking and this species must surely be near the top of the list. Over the ponds Whooper Swans and Greylags could be heard and seen heading for the fields while Shelducks stayed on the water. By the hide, as well as at the channel crossings, Water Rails were very vocalizing very close, but never showed themselves. It was estimated that there were about a dozen heard in all. The path wound its way through woodland where there was considerable activity. Not only were Red Deer with huge racks about but the birds seemed everywhere. A dozen or more Wrens, Robins, Blackbirds, Great, Blue and Willow Tit, Goldcrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Redwings and our target bird, the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker lightly tapping near the top of a dead tree.



The views over the marsh from the rather large two-story Zeearend Hide (*above*) stretched for miles, but alas so did the reeds making the open water a good distance away. However there were four Great White Egrets in view. Back by the car park we picked up a pair of Song Thrushes to go along with several Redwings.

From here we headed north over the Markerwaarddijk that separates the IJsselmeer from the Markermeer to Den Over. It was low tide and though we could see that there were many birds out there we decided to move further around the top to Kleiput Vatrop. Here the birds were just as far out, but we did not have to walk too far to scope them. The tide line was a good 600 yards out and again the birds stretched from one end to the other end, an assortment of thousands and thousands of birds, including spectacular flocks of Dunlins. For us at least, the highlight was a Hooded Crow that was being chased by gulls from the tide line to close to the shore before they gave up.



At Den Helder we looked for Glaucous Gull near the harbor, and after only seeing a few gulls, we split up in different directions to look it. While Bill and I were admiring the Prince William (*left*) a gorgeous galleon ship dating back to 1651, Bert had the bird fly above him before heading elsewhere.

Down the west coast we stopped at De Putten, a large pond besides the road where Lesser White-fronted Geese had been reported in recent days. A first scan of the flock consisted off Greylag, Greater White-fronts, Barnacle and a Cackling Goose. On the second scan Naomi located the Lessers as they seemed to have awoken from their sleep, showing their small heads, orange bills and yellow eye ring very well. This was our 12th goose species and after much searching we were delighted to have finally located them. We were just as happy to show anyone that would come over to where we were, but it took some coaxing to get a lady in a car to come share our excitement. She as it turned out was thrilled to see the Lessers, she knew all about it and was even happier to see the Cackling Goose, something she did not know about. She was going to report to her bird club that evening that three Americans and a foreigner driving a German registered van had found it! Unfortunately two other birders that were no doubt scoping the Lessers from another part of the road, ignored our whistles, shouts and hand gestures (rightly so), so they no doubt missed the Cackling. We had time for one more stop, maybe two, so we wasted no time in getting down to Amsterdam to a parakeet roost. The only problem was that the Rose-rings never showed. With just enough light we made a swing south east of Amsterdam and picked up a pair of Little Owls at a nest box in someone's orchard. It was a great way to end the day.

Day 7: Kampen Fields; Hoge Veluwe; **Zeeland:** Philipsdam, Neeltje Jans

Last night we worked out our plan of attack for today, basically woodland birding in the morning followed by a search in the south for the Red-breasted Goose and the loons which we could not look for due to the heavy mist several days ago. At breakfast a fax came through with news that a Red-breasted Goose was reported about half-an-hour north of where we were. It was in the wrong direction of our itinerary, but....change of plans! Some of us cut breakfast short and in no time we were in the fields north west of Kampen. Since it was first light we checked the goose locations, but only found two or three small groups. The nearest one to the

road held mainly Greater White-fronts with a few Greylag and 'Tundra' Beans thrown in. A surprise was a Ruddy Shelduck in the front row – just another species that had somehow got into the mix. Another one has a few Barnacles mixed in, but by now an incredible number of geese were flying into the fields as the sun rose, coming from having spent the night roosting on the water. We watched as waves of skeins noisily searched for the best location to feed. The task of finding a single Red-breasted seemed once again, daunting. We checked the various flocks and realized that there was only one that held Barnacles and in spite of the fact that it was not a terribly big group of mixed birds in relation to the other flocks, the distance was greater.



Slowly we scanned from left to right, from right to left and back again, meanwhile small family groups of Greater White-fronts would take off leaving fewer birds to scan. Then, there he was, in the middle of the group wandering about allowing us to view his superb coat – reminiscent of a Harlequin Duck. This was our last major goose of the trip, and quite possibly the highlight.



The success with the goose freed up a great deal of time and allowed us to get into the woodlands at Veluwe by mid morning. It was here that we were able to witness large flocks of Bramblings and Siskins feeding on the Larch cones at the top of the trees. At times the noise was deafening with birds all around us. The regular tits were very noticeable and we came across many Willows, a Marsh, one Crested and several Coal Tits, to complete the tit family list. A Black Woodpecker was heard calling and this beast of a bird, a female, was tracked down in the top of a tree and seen flying around for a minute or two before disappearing into the woods. Great Spotted Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper, Goldcrest and Eurasian Nuthatch (*left*) rounded out an excellent hour of birding.

It took a couple of hours but we made it back to the Zeeland area, where the mist this afternoon was not as bad as last Friday, at least allowing us to scope some distance out. Looking for Flamingo's at Philipsdam was a bust though we did get a good laugh when I stopped someone to ask if they spoke English, "Certainly" was the reply. "Have you seen any Flamingo's" I asked, "Many, many" he replied. I was onto a winner here, so I asked, "Can you tell me where?" pointing to the shallow bodies of water around the sluice gates. "Not here, back in my home country" was his reply. He was German. There's always a comedian about, even in the middle of nowhere! We did get an odd pairing of Canada and Cackling Goose here. At Neeltje Jans we had eight Razorbills, one of which was relatively close in; a Common (Harbour) Seal; good numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers; Shag (same one as last week, different location); two Lesser Black-backed Gulls, one of which may well have been the nominate race; a large group of Dunlins and Grey Plovers as well as two Bar-tailed Godwits and.....Bert located the loons that we had driven all the way to see. Side by side comparisons of Black-throated (Arctic) and Great Northern (Common) Loon showing not only a size difference (Arctic was about $\frac{3}{4}$'s the size of Common) but also structure, with the head and bill being a different shape and finally the very obvious white flank patch. Today was one of those days that could not have worked out any better.

Day 8: Flevoland: Lepersplassen; drive to Amsterdam

Fog got the better of us this morning. It was as dense as the one morning earlier in the trip. Unfortunately it meant that we could not look for the flamingos. We made a token stop on the pier near Lepersplassen and were able to see a female Smew and half a dozen Snow Buntings besides the road and on the rocks, before deciding that it was best to head for the airport. A quick stop to adjust a few things near the entrance to the pier turned into an international incident as a lorry driver (the only other vehicle on this lonely stretch of road) decided he didn't like where we parked. After perfectly understanding the universal language (hand gestures), he wanted to make sure that I really understood how he felt, and got out from his cab and let fly with a barrage of some language I could understand. Having got that out his system he and his lorry melted into the fog. As it turned out we needed the extra hour to get to the airport as the fog had traffic crawling for at least half the journey.



SYSTEMATIC LIST of SPECIES SEEN

The first number represents the maximum number of that species seen in a single day
The second number represents the number of days that that species was seen, out of 8 days

BIRDS:

Black-throated Diver (Arctic Loon)

1 at Neeltje Jans

Great Northern Diver (Common Loon)

1 at Neeltje Jans

Little Grebe

Scattered and widespread

Great Crested Grebe

Common, widespread and seen daily

Red-necked Grebe

1 west of Serooskerke in Schouwen

Slavonian Grebe (Horned Grebe)

6 in Zeeland

Shag

1 at Neeltje Jans, seen on 2 occasions. 1/2

Great Cormorant

Very common, seen daily

Mute Swan

Common, seen daily

Black Swan (introduced)

1 south of Amsterdam; 2 in North Holland

Bewick's Swan

The largest group of 20 was seen in Zeeland. 20+/3

Whooper Swan

While Bewick's were seen in the south, Whooper's were in the north. 30/3

'Tundra' Bean Goose

20+ at Plantureluur; 6 at Kampen. 20+/4

Pink-footed Goose

1 at Plantureluur in Zeeland

Greylag Goose

Abundant and widespread with many thousands seen daily

Bar-headed Goose

1 at Plantureluur in Zeeland

Lesser White-fronted Goose

14+ just east of the De Putten pond

'Russian' Greater White-fronted Goose

Anser albrifrons albrifrons, abundant and widespread with many thousands seen daily

Canada Goose

A flock of 30+ south of Amsterdam; 1 at Philipsdam. 30+/2

Cackling Goose

1 at De Putten and 1 with a Canada at Philipsdam. 1/2

Barnacle Goose

Abundant and widespread with many thousands seen daily

Red-breasted Goose

1 at Kampen

'Dark-bellied' Brent Goose (Brant)

This is the Russian subspecies *Branta bernicla bernicla* common species over here.

Widespread with hundreds seen on most days

Black Brant

This is the rare North America race *B. b. nigricans*, 1 at Makkum and 4 near Den Helder

Egyptian Goose

Seen daily in numbers up to 60+. Widespread

Ruddy Shelduck

1 at Kampen

Shelduck

Common and widespread, seen daily

Red-crested Pochard

4 at Wolderwijd

(Common) Pochard

Seen daily. Common to abundant with huge rafts seen.

Tufted Duck

Common to abundant, usually seen in association with Pochards

Greater Scaup

At least a dozen on the IJsselmeer

Ruddy Duck

4 at Bovenwater, seen on 2 occasions

Common Eider

6 at Brouwersdam; 20+ at Holwerd; 9 at Den Over; common at Neeltje Jans. 60/4

Smew

6 at Plantureluur; common in Flevoland. Stunning bird. 45+/6

Common Goldeneye

Widespread. Seen daily in numbers up to 40+

Goosander

Mergus merganser is the European version of Common Merganser. Scattered and widespread. 40+/4

Red-breasted Merganser

Scattered and widespread with good numbers at Neeltje Jans. 25/5

Gadwall

Abundant at the Stellendam Harbour. Scattered and widespread elsewhere.

Eurasian Wigeon.

Abundant with a capital A. Seen daily

Northern Shoveler

Scattered. Most common at Oostervaardersplassen. 100+/4

Mallard

Common, seen daily

Northern Pintail

Seen daily in small numbers. 100+ at Oostervaardersplassen

Common Teal

Scattered and widespread. 80+/6

(Black-crowned) Night-Heron

1 south of Amsterdam

Little Egret

Scattered in Zeeland. 10/4

Great White Egret

9 at Zeewolde; 7 at Oostervaardersplassen. 9/3

Grey Heron

Common, seen daily. Often in fields and along roadsides.

White Stork

2 pairs at Natuurpark Lelystad

Eurasian Spoonbill

1 adult at Ouddorp; 1 juvenile at Plantureluur/ flauwers

White-tailed Eagle

4 at Oostervaardersplassen

Marsh Harrier

3 at Oostervaardersplassen

Hen Harrier

The is is the European subspecies of Northern Harrier. Single females west of Serooskerke, Oostervaardersplassen and Zeeland. 1/4

Common Buzzard

Very common with 30-50 seen daily

Rough-legged Buzzard (Rough-legged Hawk)

1 in southwest Zeeland; 2 at Oostervaardersplassen. 2/2

Eurasian Kestrel

Common and widespread, seen daily

Merlin

2 males at Oostervaardersplassen

Peregrine

At least 1 at Oostervaardersplassen

Grey Partridge

7 in southwest Zeeland

(Ring-necked) Pheasant

Common. More numerous in the south. 50+/6

Water Rail

Up to a dozen heard at Oostervaardersplassen. h/3

Moorhen

Scattered and widespread. Seen daily

Eurasian Coot

Abundant. Seen daily

Eurasian Oystercatcher

Common to abundant. Seen daily

(Pied) Avocet

80+ west of Serooskerke on Schouwen

Common Ringed Plover

5 at Hoek van Holland; 1 at Plantureluur. 5/2

European Golden-Plover

Common to abundant, with huge flocks seen. Seen on 7 days.

Grey Plover (Black-bellied Plover)

100+ at Neeltje Jans

Lapwing

Abundant. Seen daily

(Red) Knot

1 west of Philipsdam. 1 at Holwerd. 1/2

Sanderling

2 at Neeltje Jans. 200+ at Holwerd. 200+/2

Purple Sandpiper

1 at Brouwersdam

Dunlin

Abundant on the mudflats in North Holland. Seen on 6 days.

Ruff

About 14 at Oostervaardersplassen

Common Snipe

1 at the Stellendam blind; 1 at Blije; 3 on the Zeearend Trail. 3/3

Black-tailed Godwit

19 at Holwerd

Bar-tailed Godwit

50+ at Ouddorp; 8 at Flauwers; 2 at Neeltje Jans

(Eurasian) Curlew

Common to abundant, sometimes in flocks of several thousand. Seen Daily

Redshank

Very common on mudflats and marshes. 100's/5

(Ruddy) Turnstone

Up to 30 seen along coastal areas. 30+/6

Little Gull

3 south of Amsterdam

Black-headed Gull

The most abundant gull. Seen daily

Common Gull

The most common gull. Seen Daily

Lesser Black-backed Gull

2 *Larus fuscus graellsii* at Neeltje Jans, one of which may well have been *fuscus*, the nominate race

Herring Gull

Common. Seen daily

Glaucous Gull

1 at Den Helder harbour

Great Black-backed Gull

Scattered and few. 12/4

Razorbill

8 at Neeltje Jans

Rock Pigeon

Common. Seen daily

Stock Dove

Up to 10 seen daily in the Zeeland area.

Woodpigeon

Common and widespread. Seen daily

Eurasian Collared Dove

Widespread, though mainly in towns. 30+/7

Barn Owl

1 heard at the nature center at Oostervaardersplassen

Little Owl

A pair at a nest box in an orchard at Mijdrecht

Tawny Owl

1 at de Zwarte Boer, Leuvenum

Long-eared Owl

3 at Hoogt van Tkruis, Hilversum

Common Kingfisher

1 at Ouddorp; 1 along the Zeearand Trail at Oostervaardersplassen. 1/2

Green Woodpecker

1 at Hoge Veluwe. 1/2

Great Spotted Woodpecker

1 in Zeeland and the Zeearand Trail; 5 at Hoogt van Tkruis; 2 at Hoge Veluwe. 5/4

Skylark

5 flyovers in Southern Flevoland. 1 over Kampen (Red-breasted Goose site)

Shore Lark (Horned Lark)

A flock of about 30 in the fields north of Bijle.

Meadow Pipit

6 near Neetlje Jans; Pairs on Flevoland. 6/3

Rock Pipit

5 at Holwerd

(Winter) Wren

2 at Krammersluizen; 2 at Hoge Veluwe; 12 at Zeearand Trail . 12/4

Dunnock

1 west of Serooskerke; 2 at the Badhotel; 2 at Zeearand Trail; 1 at Hoge Veluwe. 3/4

(European) Robin

Widespread in small numbers. 10/5

(Common) Blackbird

Common. Seen daily

Fieldfare

30+ along Ibisweg near Oostervaardersplassen

Song Thrush

2 at the visitors center at Oostervaardersplassen

Redwing

Scattered. Several flocks. 40/4

Cetti's Warbler

1 at the Stellendam blind

Chiffchaff

1 at Krammersluizen

Goldcrest

Scattered in woodlands and shrubs. 6/4

Firecrest

A small group at Hoge Veluwe

Bearded Reedling

2 at the small blind along the Zeearend Trail.

Long-tailed Tit

1 at Zeewolde

Marsh Tit

1 at Hoge Veluwe, seen on 2 occasions

Willow Tit

Up to 10 seen in a day in woodlands. 10/4

Crested Tit

1 at Hoge Veluwe

Coal Tit

5 at Hoge Veluwe

Blue Tit

Common. Seen on most days in small numbers

Great Tit

A little more numerous than Blue Tits. Seen daily

Nuthatch

Up to 4 at Hoge Veluwe; 1 at Hoogt van Tkuis. 1 at Zeearend Trail. 4/3

Treecreeper

1 at Hoogt van Tkuis; a rare find

Short-toed Treecreeper

A few in woodlands. 1/4

(Eurasian) Jay

30+ around Hilversum and Hogt van Tkuis. 1 at Hoge Veluwe. 30+/2

Common Magpie

Very common. Seen daily.

Jackdaw

Abundant, usually in large flocks. Seen daily

House Crow

1 at the Hoek van Holland

Rook

1 at Muiden. 25 at Heerenveen. 25+/2

Carrion Crow

Very common. Seen daily

Hooded Crow

1 at Kleiput Vatroop.

Raven

15+ at Hoge Veluwe

Starling

Widespread. Seen daily

House Sparrow

Not as many as one would have expected. 40+/5

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

8 at Hoge Veluwe

Chaffinch

Widespread. Seen on all but 1 day.

Brambling

200+ at Hoge Veluwe on 2 occasions.

Greenfinch

1 at Zeewolde

Eurasian Goldfinch

About 15 at Plantureluur and Zeewolde

Siskin

12 at Zeewolde; 4 at Hoogt van Tkuis. 100's at Hoge Veluwe. 100+/2

Red Crossbill

18+ at Hoge Veluwe; 3 at Hoogt van Tkuis

Bullfinch

5 at Zeewolde

Hawfinch

1 at Zeewolde

Snow Bunting

1 at Holwerd; 5 at Lepersplassen

MAMMALS:**Red Fox**

1 at Oostervaardersplassen

Common Seal

1 at Neeltje Jans

Red Deer

14 at Hoge Veluwe; 100's at Oostervaardersplassen

Roe Deer

1 besides the road in South Flevoland; 4 at Oostervaardersplassen

Tarpan 'Konik Wild Horse'

About 100 at Oostervaardersplassen

Aurochs 'Heck Wild Cow'

Good numbers at Oostervaardersplassen

Brown Hare

Up to 6 seen daily in Zeeland; common in the Strijen fields and Makkum. 13/5

Rabbit

1 seen near Strijen. About 6 at Neeltje Jans of dubious origin