

Flevo Birdwatching

birding tours in the Netherlands



Date: 31st of July 2021

Excursion: Oostvaardersplassen

Guide: Pim

Around 8am I met Sue & Mark at their hotel close to the station of Almere Centrum. The weather doesn't look like summer, more like autumn. It was raining heavily. But when we drove to the east and came closer to the nature reserve "Oostvaardersplassen", part of the national park New Land, weather was improving.



On our first viewing point we already saw one of the most amazing birds in the area. A White tailed eagle was first sitting in a tree and suddenly flew away. His nickname is "flying door" due to it's wingspan around 2.30 metres.

"White-tailed eagles usually live most of the year near large bodies of open water, including both coastal saltwater areas and inland freshwater, including wetlands, lakes, bogs and rivers, and require an abundant food supply and old-growth trees or ample sea cliffs for nesting. This raptor is both a powerful apex predator and an opportunistic scavenger, mainly subsisting on fish and birds (largely

water birds) amongst nearly any other available prey. They are considered a close cousin of the bald eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus), which occupies a similar niche in North America”.

Source: Wikipedia.

We also saw the first few Red deer of the day and a group of Heck cattle.

“Heck cattle originated in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s in an attempt to breed back domestic cattle to their ancestral form: the aurochs (Bos primigenius primigenius). In the first years of the Weimar Republic, the brothers Heinz and Lutz Heck independently started their extensive breeding-back programmes”.

Source: Wikipedia.

Above the field we saw lots of Sand martins and also some Common swifts and House martins. We saw some Great egrets and far away some Eurasian spoonbills flew over.



On our next stop we made a hike to some bird hides. The first bird hide was occupied by some breeding Barn swallows, what a cute birds!





Great cormorant – Oostvaardersplassen.



Barn swallow – Oostvaardersplassen.



Great egret & Grey heron – Oostvaardersplassen.

During the hike we heard Wren, Short toed treecreeper, Common chiffchaff and Blackcap. We saw two Raven, not so common in the area.

From a “spotters hill” we saw about five Black necked grebe. We also saw some very orange ducks called Ruddy shelduck. Also a Bar headed goose was present, they normally live in the Himalaya region.

“The bar-headed goose is one of the world’s highest-flying birds, having been heard flying across Mount Makalu – the fifth highest mountain on earth at 8,481 m (27,825 ft) – and apparently seen over Mount Everest – 8,848 m (29,029 ft) – although this is a second-hand report with no verification”.

Source: Wikipedia.

We drove to the visitor centre for a walk of about 2.7 miles. First we walked through willow forest and saw and heard lots of Goldfinches, also we heard Greenfinch. From a bird hide we saw Pied wagtail, very common bird al over The Netherlands.



The next part of the walk was in an area that looks like the Serengeti. Thousands of Red deer and wild horses have eaten away lots of the young trees and after decades the wood disappeared. In the near future there will be less big mammals and the vegetation will grow again.





Konik horses – Oostvaardersplassen.

We arrived at a large bird hide. On the right we saw a group of Konik horses and in front of the hide we saw hunting Western marsh harriers, male and female!





Western marsh harrier – Oostvaardersplassen.

Far away there was a lot of panic, a White tailed eagle was getting closer.



White tailed eagle – Oostvaardersplassen.



Probably one of the rarest birds we saw on the excursion was a group of 10 Black winged stilts! What an amazing legs for a bird.

“The breeding habitat of all these stilts is marshes, shallow lakes and ponds. Some populations are migratory and move to the ocean coasts in winter; those in warmer regions are generally resident or short-range vagrants. In Europe, the black-winged stilt is a regular spring overshoot vagrant north of its normal range, occasionally remaining to breed in northern European countries. Pairs successfully bred in Britain in 1987, and after a 27-year hiatus there were two instances of successful breeding in Southern England in 2014. 13 young were fledged in southern England in 2017”.

Source: Wikipedia.



Black winged stilt – Oostvaardersplassen.



From a next bird hide we saw Common pochard & Tufted duck. We walked back to the visitor centre and got a glimpse from a female Bluethroat on the path.

We also saw Common linnet and a juvenile Stonechat.

At the visitor centre Sue & Mark had their lunch. After the lunch we drove to the “Oostvaardersdijk” next to the big lake called Markermeer, part of the IJsselmeer.

We saw many Common terns, Black headed gulls and Smew gull.



Common tern – National park New Land.

We made a short walk to a bird hide where we saw a few Western marsh harriers and also Great egret and Grey heron.



Grey heron – Oostvaardersplassen.



From the “Oostvaardersdijk” we saw about 1250 Pied avocets and also from the car a large group of Ruffs. The water is very low so it’s a warders paradise!

We also saw two groups of Eurasian spoonbills, about 250 birds!!

It was now time for our last stop at this full day of birdwatching. We visited the southern part of the nature reserve. We saw a large group of Red deer and a male Heck cattle. Far away there was also a group of around 125 Konik horses.

We saw plenty of Greylag geese today but here were also some Barnacle geese present.



Barnacle goose – Oostvaardersplassen.



Red deer – Oostvaardersplassen.



Heck cattle – Oostvaardersplassen.

This was the end to a full day of birdwatching. We were extremely lucky with the weather!



Photos & text: Pim Julsing.