



## Eastern Poland – a winter trip

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*I spent 4 days in Poland (19.01.-23.01.2020). The main goal was European Bison and I saw a few other nice mammals as well. Birding was tough. A bit of an exploratory trip; I think the area offers some of the nicest mammalwatching in Europe in winter, which could make it a big site for European mammalwatchers in times where traveling with the train is getting more popular. However, more information is needed on sites in eastern Poland and tourism needs to develop further.*

### Preparations and Logistics

It was a very spontaneous trip, one way with plane, one with the train. A great winter mini holiday with good cheap food and some easy target species with some nice possible extras.

I had a 2WD small rental and was fine, however, it was dry and there was no snow.

There seems to be a heavy bias towards trip reports of people that have seen one of the big carnivores, especially for places like these. However, it would be important to have a complete picture, so if you go, it would be great if you could make a note anyway, for example also in the European Mammalwatching Facebook site. The best trip report for both birds and mammals I found is in Dutch by D'haen et al. (2015) and found on [cloudbirders](#).

Check [ornitho.pl](#) for (rare) birds as well as mammals including the latest Bison sightings.



### The quest for Bison

I picked up the car and drove towards my first mammalwatching spot: The swamps of the Biebrza river in the **Biebrzański Park Narodowy**. This is a reliable area for Elk and indeed in the morning I saw

at least 9 simultaneously from the viewing tower at 53.299656, 22.604072, including one quite close. Another good viewing hide is on the other side of the Swamp near Burzyn (53.275377, 22.457063). I would maybe go to this one early in the morning, as I think chances for other mammals (Wolf, American Mink) are better and the Elks are probably also viable from there or the other place later in the morning. In generally, I would have spend a bit more time in this nice area, it must be amazing with the rare breeding birds (Aquatic warbler, Corncrake) singing!

I proceeded quickly towards **Białowieża** forest. Days are short and start early; at 7 the sun is up, but already at 4 it is getting dark. At my first spot near Osowe I found a herd of European Bison near this viewing tower (52.878815, 23.817587). I also found another herd from here (52.827924, 23.789035), then stopped looking for Bison. I would say the Bison, even without snow, are reliably seen without too much effort. I then spend time spotlighting and spending dawn and dusk at the towers at Kosy Most (small viewing platform 52.802617, 23.827176, big tower with good overview at 52.794220, 23.826611, big parking 52.798829, 23.812281). If you follow the hiking path to the big tower and continue, there is another small viewing platform further down (52.780775, 23.821275). Between these two towers I found some fairly fresh wolf scat. Walkig this trail in late afternoon, it was not very birdy, besides the usual Siskins and a mixed group of tits and treecreepers, but I imagine the morning could be quite good. As it is buffer zone, the habitat does not seem suitable yet for some of the woodpecker species.

Another good overview is from a tower (52.709764, 23.821836) near Białowieża, where there is many guest houses. However, I recommend to book online ahead, I had troubles finding something for the same night and wasted precious day-light hours. Knowledge of English is sparse, even in the tourist office, but German sometimes works.



I did a fair bit of spotlighting. The road leading to Kosy Most is a dirt road, but the stretch where I saw most mammals. The old train line allows a good overview. The otter was under the bridge (52.799580, 23.828419) crossing the Naraweka river. Beware, one is not allowed to continue by car on the road after the bridge!

The road situation is a bit strange, as the public road between Janowo (52.825046, 23.764642) and Tereminski/Pogorzelce (52.825073, 23.764671) is “hidden” on Google maps, as well as Maps Me, but is perfectly drivable and used by locals (also late unfortunately). On this road I did most my spotlighting, finding Roe and Red Deer, Badger and Fox. Outside Pogorzelce I also had a bachelor herd of 3 Bison bulls on an early morning drive. Early morning might be the best strategy, as I think mammals come out late; I never saw Bison in the fields in the evening.



### Other places

I found some nightly Elk right beside the road 100 km South of Białowieża near the Belarussian border at 52.134496, 23.475809 and twitched a Red-breasted Goose near Stężycza 100 km South of Warsaw along the river Vistula, where I saw a *Microtus*-vole running around in a frozen field.

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### Mammal species list

Red Fox
European Otter
European Badger
Eurasian Elk
European Roe
Red Deer
European Bison
<i>Microtus sp</i>
Wolf (scat only)