



Holland

Wild Goose Chase!

Thursday 1 – Monday 5 December 2011

(5 days)

Thursday 16 – Monday 20 February 2012

(5 days)

Thursday 22 – Monday 26 November 2012

(5 days)

A superb short winter break packed with exceptional birdwatching and led by Dutch birdwatching expert, Arnoud van den Berg. Join us for great flocks of geese, raptors, Black Woodpeckers, Long-eared Owls and more in one of Europe's most birdwatcher-friendly countries.

With its immense flocks of geese and other waterfowl, impressive range of wintering raptors and every chance of the unexpected, Holland boasts some of the finest winter birding in Europe.

From November through to March, the Netherlands's low-lying fields are a haven for geese. All of Europe's recorded wild species have occurred in recent years – in fact our groups have seen the lot! – mingling with the tens of thousands of Barnacle, Brent, White-fronted and Bean Geese which flock to the Netherlands each winter. There are also large concentrations of ducks to enjoy, with parties of wild swans, smartly-dressed Goosanders and often a few Smew amidst masses of more familiar species.

We usually see plenty of birds of prey too. Northern Goshawk, Hen Harrier and Rough-legged Buzzard are always on the cards and there's usually the odd Peregrine and White-tailed Eagle about.

This part of Holland is also blessed with some extensive woodlands and one afternoon will find us waiting eagerly beside a Black Woodpecker's winter roost. With its crimson top-knot and staring white eye, close encounters with this magnificent bird have been a highlight on all our recent tours.

Arnoud van den Berg knows the birds of his native Holland better than anyone, and has led our Dutch tours for us for nearly twenty years.

We stay at an excellent new hotel in the forests near Harderwijk, with good food, comfortable rooms and a warm welcome assured. We usually manage the odd stop for hot chocolate and Dutch apple tart during our days in the field too – something of a tradition on this tour. This is both a cracking trip for beginners as well as one that's just perfect for anyone in search of a rewarding short break that's simply crammed with great winter birding.

Itinerary

Day 1: Our Dutch Wild Goose Chase begins with a morning flight from London to Amsterdam, where Arnoud will be waiting to welcome us.

Our route today will depend largely upon where

the various flocks of geese and other wintering birds happen to be.

Our destination this evening is an excellent new hotel situated in forests not far from the charming old town of Harderwijk. This will be our base for all four nights of the holiday.
Overnight near Harderwijk

Days 2 - 4: Harderwijk stands at the edge of what was formerly the Zuiderzee, enclosed in 1932 to form one vast, shallow lake – the IJsselmeer. Subsequent drainage and enclosure has led to the creation of the now famous Dutch polders. Largest of these is Flevoland, a patchwork of arable land, woods, marsh and open water that quickly earned a reputation as one of Europe's top birding spots.

Winter birding on Flevoland is always varied and exciting. Western Marsh and Hen Harriers, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Common Buzzard are likely at this season, while Eurasian Bittern, European Water Rail and Bearded Reedling are typical of the more secretive marshland species awaiting our discovery. Noisy flocks of geese will be much in evidence and we should see plenty of European White-fronts, along with Barnacle, Greylag and Bean Geese.

The variety of wintering raptors often comes as a welcome surprise to visiting British birders and we have excellent chances of seeing one or two of the scarcer species. Rough-legged Buzzard, Peregrine and the immense White-tailed Eagle have all been present in recent years.

East of Harderwijk, areas of mixed pine, oak and birch in the Leuvenumse Bos are home to an excellent range of forest birds. As we walk the trails looking for Crested and Willow Tits, Short-toed Treecreeper and Common Raven, it's here that we shall again hope to find an active Black Woodpecker roost.

During our stay, one longer day trip out will take us north to Lauwersmeer, in the province of Friesland – arguably the best winter birding spot in all Holland. Amidst a classic Dutch landscape of



Barnacle Geese (Photo: Mike Read)



TRIP DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION: We spend all four nights at an excellent hotel in Harderwijk, comfortable, warm and welcoming, with all rooms en suite.

MEALS: All included in the price. Breakfast and dinner at the hotel. Picnic lunches are a popular 'help yourself' arrangement from the breakfast table. We usually manage the odd stop for hot chocolate and Dutch apple tart too – something of a tradition on this tour!

WALKING: Easy. Short walks over flat terrain (no hills!). Can sometimes be a little muddy or wet underfoot, so sturdy waterproof shoes or boots with corrugated soles for grip are advised.

PRINCIPAL LEADER: Arnoud van den Berg

NUMBERS: Max. 7 clients

PRICES:	2011	£ 1,145
	2012	£ 1,195
Single supps.:	2011	£ 195
	2012	£ 195

Deposit: £ 300 per person

The price is per person, and is fully inclusive of return scheduled flights London*-Amsterdam, all accommodation, meals, entry fees, tips, airport taxes, map, bird checklist & services of the leaders.

The price excludes travel insurance, drinks and other personal expenses.

**It may be possible for us to arrange flights from other UK regional airports. Please enquire for details and any supplement. For those that prefer not to fly, however, Amsterdam can also be reached by ferry or Eurostar. For further details check online at: <http://www.seat61.com/>*

These trips will be operated in conjunction with Limosa Holidays.

meadows and pretty villages dotted with windmills, numbers of geese can run into tens of thousands. If they're present again this winter, we'll also check a couple of sites for roosting Long-eared Owls. In the past, we have sometimes found the odd Short-eared Owl in amongst them too.

Come the New Year, many of the geese have generally shifted south in Holland, so on our February trip we may decide to venture south, to Zeeland. Amidst the milling throngs of White-fronts and Barnacles, we will hope to encounter one of the Holland's small but regular winter parties of the very much rarer Lesser White-fronted Geese. We have seen up to five of these beautiful little Anser, as well as a fine adult Red-breasted Goose on three occasions.
Three nights near Harderwijk

Day 5: We bid a reluctant farewell to our hotel after breakfast and set off for the North Sea coast.

Having enjoyed pretty much another full day in the field, in the late afternoon we catch our flight home from Amsterdam – getting back into London again about the same time as we took off!