

Sweden's Upland Birds

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

2010

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Västerås (Stockholm); transfer Svartådalen.
- Day 2** Svartådalen and Dalarna; overnight Älvdalen.
- Day 3/5** Fulufjället National Park, then Flatruet plateau; overnight Tännäs, Funäsdalen.
- Day 6** Taiga forest, Nipfjället and Norway; overnight Idregården.
- Day 7** Svartådalen.
- Day 8** Transfer Västerås (Stockholm) and fly London.

Dates

Thursday 27th May — Thursday 3rd June 2010

Cost

£1,295 (London/London); £1,195 (Västerås/Västerås)

Single room supplement

£150

Grading

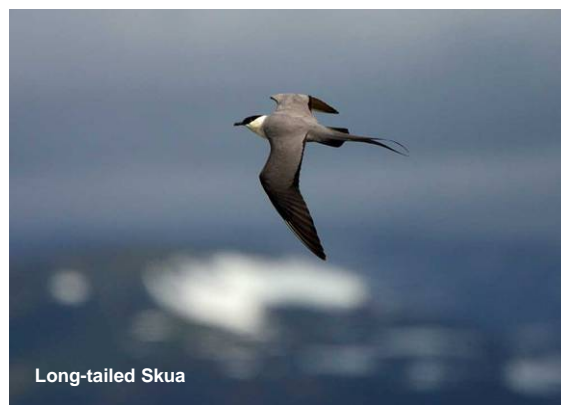
A/B. As well as gentle walks through the woods and pastures of the lowlands, this holiday also includes both full day and half day hikes in the mountains. A love of walking and a reasonable level of fitness are therefore required.

Focus

Birds and other natural history.



Siberian Jays



Long-tailed Skua



Great Grey Owl

Images by Daniel Green, Glyn Sellors & Paul Stanbury



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

This is an 8-day holiday to Västmanland and southern Lapland in search of lowland forest and wetland birds, plus the charismatic avifauna of the magnificent upland and wilderness regions of Sweden.

Lapland must surely be the most evocative, exciting and intriguing region of Scandinavia. Home to the nomadic, reindeer-herding Saami people, it is synonymous with inhospitable wilderness – a wild, untamed yet spectacular upland landscape, accessible only in high summer, outside winter's long and icy grip. It is the high summer, too, when the region's avian visitors move in to breed, capitalising on a phenomenal abundance of insect-life during a short season. It is these charismatic birds, and the magnificent scenery, that epitomise this holiday and, in combination with the taiga and wetland birds that we also hope to see, our itinerary offers a comprehensive range of Swedish bird specialities that includes owls, woodpeckers, grouse and the mountain specialities of Lapland.

We begin, and end, in the lowlands of central Sweden: in Svartådalen and Berslagen. Here attractive farmland is surrounded by lush oak forests and lakes and wetlands lie amongst meadows and pasturelands, grazed by cattle and sheep in time-honoured fashion. Colourful, summer-plumaged Slavonian Grebes, Common Cranes, White-tailed Eagles, Ospreys and Black Terns characterise the wetlands; whilst Honey Buzzards and Goshawks, seven species of woodpecker (including Three-toed, Grey-headed and Black) and such passerines as Red-backed Shrike, Icterine Warbler, Thrush Nightingale, Common Rosefinch and Ortolan Bunting breed commonly. Here also lives the Great Grey Owl, that enigmatic taiga species more often associated with the landscape, dominated by coniferous forest, into which we will shortly be heading. This most sought-after and spectacular of birds can seem remarkably oblivious to human presence and we will pray for a calm night and memorable views! We will also look for Pygmy Owl, plus both Tengmalm's and Ural Owls whose owlets we will hope to see ringed when we visit their nesting sites.

Next we drive north towards the southern part of Lapland and the Scandinavian mountain range known as the Scands, passing through the farmland valleys of Dalarna and up towards scenic Lake Siljan. This is a culturally rich region of Sweden, endowed with traditional architecture, craft industries and folklore. The landscape now begins to change dramatically and our first stop amongst the mountains will be in Fulufjället National Park. Here, a walk that takes us to a dramatic gorge with a high waterfall may produce our first Rough-legged Buzzards, Siberian Jays and Siberian Tits, whilst Greenshanks breed beside the park's visitors' centre. On Nipfjället, the first of the truly barren mountains, we will look for Whimbrel, Ptarmigan and Snow Buntings, whilst Golden Eagles are always likely above the rocky slopes. Lower down, we will drive through valleys where Red-throated and Black-throated Divers, Velvet and Common Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Wood Sandpipers and Common Cranes all breed on the small lakes and pools by the roadside. Here we are also likely to encounter our first Reindeer, though a great many more will be seen in the mountains.

The Funäsdalen region, the southern outpost of Lapland's special avifauna, will be the highpoint of our tour. We will spend three days here amongst its fresh air, beautiful scenery and northern birdlife, based in a mountainside hotel around which Bluethroats sing during both day and night. Climbing above the birch forest to the open tundra, we will enjoy a day's walk on Flatruet. This is a high mountain plateau with an interesting high alpine flora and fauna, where confiding Willow Grouse, Ptarmigan, Dotterels, Red-necked Phalaropes, Temminck's Stints, Long-tailed Skuas and both Snow and Lapland Buntings, all resplendent in full breeding attire, are amongst the many breeding species. Above, Golden Eagles, Rough-legged Buzzards, Hen Harriers and Merlins command the skies... and, where the mountains rise dramatically to form steep cliffs, we will look out for majestic Gyr Falcons which sometimes breed in the area, as do both Short-eared and Hawk Owls during good Lemming years. At the foot of the mountains we will explore the taiga forest – home to Hazel Grouse, Hawk Owls, Three-toed Woodpeckers, Siberian Jays and Parrot Crossbills – and we may cross the border into Norway to enhance our chances of a Gyr Falcon. Finally, at night (although darkness never descends on these latitudes at this season!), we will enjoy one of Scandinavia's finest shows... at the lek of the Great Snipe. Here, on an alpine meadow at the foot of a great mountain, they perform their peculiar song and dance display, seemingly unaware of our human presence.

After a wonderful time in this magical alpine environment, we must reluctantly return south, perhaps stopping to look for Eagle Owl and Blyth's Reed Warbler en route. Back in Svartådalen for our final night, we have a chance to catch up with any of the owls, woodpeckers or wetland birds that we may have missed on our initial visit, and an option to enjoy some night-time birding in search of such species as Corncrake, Spotted Crake and Marsh Warbler!

Although mammals are not the primary focus of this trip, a good variety may be seen during our birding excursions. Elk (Moose), Roe Deer, Red Deer, Red Fox, both Brown and Mountain Hare and Red Squirrel are all possibilities, whilst in the mountains Reindeer are numerous and can often be seen in large herds on the hillsides, and sometimes at close range as they cross the roads. Lynx, Wolf, Brown Bear, Beaver and Pine Marten are amongst other animal species to be found in the area, but all are elusive and are rarely seen.

Day 1

Thursday

Sättra Brunn, Svartådalen (Black River Valley)

We depart London Stansted on a mid morning direct Ryanair flight to Västerås airport, near Stockholm. Here we meet our English-speaking Swedish tour leader and transfer slowly to Svartådalen (the Black River Valley), about an hour's drive to the north.

En route we will stop for hot drinks and sandwiches beside a small wetland surrounded by oak forest. Here we will look for breeding Slavonian Grebes, resplendent in their summer plumage, and hopefully encounter newly arrived Icterine Warblers. Later in the afternoon we will also visit a site favoured by Ortolan Buntings, before our arrival in the small village of Sättra Brunn where we will settle into our base, the Sättra Brunn Spa and Conference Hotel. This is a most interesting establishment; an old and historic spa hotel that was recently rescued from obscurity by a consortium of philanthropic and entrepreneurial businessmen. The hotel consists of over a hundred red-painted wooden cottages and houses, set in a large park where mature trees attract a wealth of woodland birds. It also has a renowned spa facility, with hot pools both inside and outside!

Later in the evening, either before or after dinner at the hotel's excellent restaurant, we will head back out into the field in search of Great Grey and Pygmy Owls. The former is an enigmatic taiga species that is more often associated with the conifer-dominated landscape into which we will shortly be heading; however, we have a good chance of encountering this most sought-after of owls in Svartådalen tonight. With luck and a calm night, views of this spectacular bird can be memorable, for it is a species that can seem remarkably oblivious to human presence!

Day 2

Friday

Älvdalen

Svartådalen, situated in the lowlands of central Sweden, is comprised of attractive farmland studded with pretty little villages of bright, red-painted wooden farmhouses surrounded by lush oak and conifer forests, and lakes and wetlands that lie amongst meadows and pasturelands grazed, unintensively, by cattle and sheep. Black-throated Divers, Common Cranes, White-tailed Eagles, Ospreys and Black Terns characterise the wetlands; whilst Honey Buzzards and Goshawks, and such passerines as Red-backed Shrike, Icterine Warbler, Thrush Nightingale and Common Rosefinch breed commonly.

After breakfast this morning, we will head out into the surrounding countryside as early as we can in search of the region's seven species of woodpecker. Wrynecks are likely to be heard and seen, so too are Three-toed, Grey-headed and Black Woodpeckers. We will also join local ringers as they carry out their work on Tengmalm's and Ural Owls, ringing the young owlets to be found in the forest nesting boxes.

We explore this quiet and generally under-exploited landscape via small, winding roads, and on foot, before enjoying a typical Swedish picnic lunch. Then, after a short siesta, we will drive northwards through the farmland valleys of Dalarna – a culturally rich region of Sweden, endowed with traditional architecture, craft industries and folklore – and past scenic Lake Siljan. We will overnight in Älvdalen, after a drive of 240 kilometres.

Day 3

Saturday

Tännäs, Fulufjället National Park

After breakfast we leave Älvdalen and drive the 70 kilometres to Fulufjället National Park. Here we will enjoy a 'boardwalk' around the park's impressive forest and look for Wood Sandpipers, Siberian Jays, Siberian Tits and Crossbills. Below an impressive waterfall we stand good chances of seeing Dipper, Rough-legged Buzzard and Ring Ouzel as we stop here for a while to admire the scenery. We will also visit the newly-established visitors' centre, to which avian visitors include stunning summer-plumaged Bramblings, and enjoy a cup of coffee before driving a further 80 kilometres to a nesting area of Siberian Tits where we will have our picnic lunch.

En route, as we drive through the lower valleys, Red-throated and Black-throated Divers, Velvet and Common Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Wood Sandpipers, Common Cranes and northern Yellow Wagtails may all be found breeding on the small lakes and pools by the roadside. Here we are also likely to encounter our first Reindeer, though a great many more will be seen in the mountains.

After lunch we drive on for another hundred kilometres to Funäsdalen, and check in to our accommodation in Tännäs where Bluethroats often sing just outside the hotel rooms. We will spend three nights here, based in the Skarvruets fjällhotell.

Day 4

Sunday

Tännäs, Fulufjället National Park

After breakfast this morning we will climb above the birch forest to the open tundra, and enjoy a day walking on Flatruet. This is a high mountain plateau with an interesting high alpine flora and fauna, where confiding Willow Grouse, Ptarmigan, Dotterels, Red-necked Phalaropes, Ruff, Temminck's Stints, Long-tailed Skuas and both Snow and Lapland Buntings, all resplendent in full breeding attire, are amongst the many breeding species. Above, Golden Eagles, Rough-legged Buzzards, Hen Harriers and Merlins command the skies... and, where the mountains rise dramatically to form steep cliffs, we will look out for majestic Gyr Falcons which sometimes breed in the area, as do both Short-eared and Hawk Owls, and Hen Harriers, during good Lemming years. Mammals may also be seen, with Reindeer particularly common.

Finally, at night (although darkness never descends on these latitudes at this season!), we will enjoy one of Scandinavia's finest shows... at the lek of the Great Snipe. Here, on an alpine meadow at the foot of a great mountain, they perform their peculiar song and dance display, seemingly unaware of our human presence.

Day 5

Monday

Tännäs, Fulufjället National Park

As the weather in the mountains can be unpredictable, today will either offer a further chance to get to any regions we may not so far have been able to reach, or will allow additional time in the most beautiful and rewarding areas. After all, both the scenery and the birds of this region are rather special. Breeding plumaged Red-necked Phalaropes, Dotterels, Long-tailed Skuas, Bluethroats and Lapland Buntings, for example, are not species of which one may easily tire! We spend our third and final night at the Skarvruets fjällhotell in Tännäs tonight.

Day 6

Tuesday

Idregarden

We will spend most of today exploring the taiga forest at the foot of the mountains searching for Hazel Grouse, Hawk Owls, Three-toed Woodpeckers, Siberian Jays and Parrot Crossbills – and we may cross the border into Norway to enhance our chances of a Gyr Falcon (so bring your passports!).

In the afternoon we will explore Nipfjället, the last of the truly barren mountains, looking for Golden Eagle, Whimbrel, Ptarmigan, Ring Ouzel and Snow Bunting. We will then descend to our hotel in Idregarden for dinner and the night.

Day 7

Wednesday

Sätra Brunn, Svartådalen (Black River Valley)

After breakfast we may offer an optional early morning excursion if we need more time to track down Siberian Tit in the ancient mountainside forests around Nipfjället. We will then embark on the long – 350-kilometre – drive southwards, which we will take quite slowly as we stop to look for such species as Peregrine Falcon, Eagle Owl and Blyth's Reed Warbler en route. We will also look for any of the lowland species that we may have missed during the first part of our holiday, hoping that we'll be lucky the second time around.

As we head back into Dalarna, we will stop at one of Sweden's most scenic spots, Tällberg. Here, as we enjoy the fine views over the large Lake Siljan, we will celebrate (hopefully!) our success in the uplands with Waffles, whipped cream and cloudberry!

We should arrive back in the Black River Valley during the late afternoon, and may have time for a little birding by the wetlands of Lake Fläcksjön, where we will be once again amongst breeding Common Cranes, White-tailed Eagles, Ospreys, waders and Black Terns, amongst other lowland wetland species.

We will then settle back into the Sätra Brunn Spa and Conference Hotel and enjoy our final dinner there, as well as, perhaps, an evening visit to the spa. After dinner, we may also offer a late night return to the Black River Valley in search of such elusive marshland species as Corncrake, Spotted Crake and Marsh Warbler and a last look for Svartådalen's owls.

Day 8

Thursday

Fly London Stansted

After breakfast, you may spend the first part of the morning at leisure, unless you would prefer a final look around Lake Fläcksjön for Wrynecks, Icterine Warblers, Red-backed Shrike and Honey Buzzard.

Then, around mid-afternoon, we must drive south to Västerås airport in order to catch our direct mid-evening flight with Ryanair back to London Stansted, arriving 2230 hours.

Grading

A/B. As well as gentle walks through the woods and pastures of the lowlands, this holiday also includes both full-day and half-day walks in the mountains, so an enjoyment of walking and a reasonable level of fitness are required. All walks, however, are optional.

Focus

Birds and other natural history.

Weather

As we visit a wide variety of altitudes during the course of this tour, and may experience both sunny and cloudy weather (rain, and even snow), you must expect a very wide range of temperatures on this tour: from 25+°C right down to below freezing!

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list that will be sent to you on booking. You will need to bring both warm-weather and cold-weather clothing (including woollen layers, a warm hat and gloves) on this holiday. You will also need waterproofs, and both a pair of good walking boots and a pair of Wellington boots as well (several walks are over very wet ground).

NB - Please note that Ryanair have a strict weight limit of 15 kg per person on hold luggage (10kg per person for hand baggage)! Additional weight can be 'bought' at the airport at check-in for £12.00 (15 Euro) per kilo.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. We will be staying in comfortable countryside hotels and guesthouses, the rooms of most of which offer private en suite facilities.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this tour, you will need to read the Naturetrek booking conditions carefully and then complete and return a booking form, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you wish to take out insurance with us please also include this with your booking. Should you have any questions about the tour, please call us on 01962 733051.

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