

Sweden in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Stockholm; transfer Svartådalen.

Day 2/3 Svartådalen.

Day 4 Drive Stockholm; fly London.

Departs

February

Focus

Birds and photography

Grading

A. Gentle day walks only.

Date and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code SWE02) or see current brochure

Highlights:

- Hawk Owl & Pygmy Owl often resident in winter where we are based
- Goshawk & Rough-legged Buzzard, plus Golden & White-tailed Eagles
- Waxwing, Hawfinch, Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak & Dipper
- Visit feeding stations for Siberian Jay, Nutcracker and Grey-headed Woodpecker
- Hazelhen, Black Grouse & Capercaillie possible
- Chance of Elk, Roe Deer, Red Deer & Red Fox, plus Brown & Mountain Hares
- Superb opportunities for photography
- Led by expert naturalist & photographer guide



From top: Hawk Owl, Hazel Grouse, Winter birding



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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

On this 4-day short break we experience the peace, tranquility, and snow-laden beauty of rural Sweden in winter, as we focus on enjoying and photographing its obliging winter bird specialities. It is a holiday that offers quality rather than quantity; a quality of light (during daylight hours!), and some quality birds and photographic opportunities. Indeed, winter birdwatching in northern Scandinavia is very special. A time when, although a limited number of species is present, such beautiful birds as Waxwings, Crossbills and Bullfinches tend to look even more exquisite in the magical winter light, and when almost every medium-sized bird adorning a tree-top is likely to be something special – a forest grouse, a Nutcracker, a Goshawk or even a Hawk Owl.

Our tour begins in the snow-laden lowlands of Svartådal in central Sweden, less than two hours drive from Stockholm. Svartådal (the Black River Valley) offers a pleasing patchwork of deciduous and coniferous forests, farmland, and lakes and wetlands, frozen and snow-covered in winter. We explore this quiet and generally under-exploited landscape via small, winding roads, looking out for such winter visitors as Great Grey Shrikes and Rough-legged Buzzards. Resident Goshawks, and both Golden and



Nutcracker (Niclas Lignell)



Swedish winter (Daniel Green)

White-tailed Eagles also frequent the area, whilst both Hawk Owls and Pygmy Owls are regularly seen throughout the winter as they sit in the tree-tops waiting for their favourite prey – voles – to show on the ground beneath them. Hawk Owls, in particular, once they have found a reliable source of food, will often stay in the same area for months during the winter, before moving north to their breeding grounds in March. On cold, clear days, the air is dry and icy and the light simply stunning as it turns to picture postcards the pretty, bright, red-painted wooden farmhouses and the glistening white, snow-covered surroundings. On our excursions we won't lack for plentiful snacks and hot drinks, preferably

enjoyed beside an open-air fire; but the bitter cold burns energy and after a full day's birding it is wonderful to retreat into a warm cottage and to sit before a welcoming log fire for a cup of afternoon tea and consideration of the day's sightings.

Day 1

Svartådalen (Black River Valley)

We depart London's Heathrow Airport on an early morning direct British Airways flight to Stockholm. On arrival, we meet our English-speaking Swedish tour leader, Daniel Green, and transfer slowly to Svartådalen (the Black River Valley), a couple of hours to the north-west. En route we will stop for hot drinks and sandwiches, and to watch at a garden feeding station popular with Hawfinches, and also such species as Bullfinch, Redpoll, Nuthatch, Yellowhammer, Greenfinch, Marsh Tit, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Fieldfare, Blackbird, Jay and occasionally Arctic Redpoll, Siskin and Brambling. We will then spend the period just before dusk (it gets dark just after 4pm at this time of year) looking for Pygmy Owls, which may often be seen perched in the tops of wayside Spruce trees.

Day 2 & 3

Svartådalen (Black River Valley)

On each of the following days, after a hearty breakfast, we will head out into the surrounding countryside, taking provisions with us for a typical Swedish winter al fresco lunch – one of the unique features of this holiday! During our winter birding outings, we will not just scan from the roadsides in our vehicle, but will also take walks into the forest and spend time at bird feeding stations positioned in a variety of habitats, each attracting a different range of species. We will focus first on a search for Hawk Owl. These owls may often be seen during the day, perched in tree-tops or on telephone poles, and offering excellent views and photographic opportunities. We will also visit a forest feeding station popular with both Nutcrackers and Grey-headed Woodpeckers. These birds often show really well and at close range, providing further opportunities for photographers and viewers alike. Here, we may additionally hope to see such other species as Crested, Coal and Willow Tits; Bullfinches; Nuthatches (of the Scandinavian race); Great Spotted Woodpecker; and, occasionally, Long-tailed Tits of the Scandinavian white-headed race. Many of these birds have become very tame over the years, and Crested, Willow and Coal Tits will sometimes feed from your hand or sit on your camera lens whilst curious Nutcrackers gather hazelnuts just metres away!



Bullfinches (Anders Stahl)



Left: Crested Tit, right: Siberian Jay (both by George Reekie)

At another feeding station at a garden feeder in the southern part of Svartådalen we should see Hawfinches and magnificent Bullfinches amongst a host of other finches, tits and thrushes. Throughout the day we will also look out for such winter visitors as Rough-legged Buzzards and Great Grey Shrikes, as well as such resident raptors as Golden Eagles, White-tailed Eagles and Goshawks. We will also keep our eyes open for Waxwings (and even the occasional Pine Grosbeak), which can appear in any garden in the picturesque small villages of the valley.



Waxwing (courtesy of Shutterstock)

At dusk our focus once again turns to owls, looking again for Hawk Owls, and also for Pygmy Owls. Both species are regularly seen throughout the winter as they sit atop their favourite look-out points and watch for voles, their favourite prey. Hawk Owls, in particular, will often stay in the same area for months during the winter, once they have found a reliable source of food.

On one morning we will walk in the forest in search of Hazelhen, Black Grouse and perhaps, even, Capercaille. We will also look out for Goshawks, and both Golden and

White-tailed Eagles, whilst occasionally Three-toed or Black Woodpeckers are encountered here. Mammals, too, will not be overlooked during this holiday, for we have a good chance of encountering such common species as Elk, Roe Deer, Red Deer, Red Fox, both Brown and Mountain Hare, Red Squirrel, Stoat, Weasel and Mink, and a slim chance of one of the more elusive residents - a Lynx, Wolf, Beaver, Otter or Wild Boar! We will also have fun deciphering their tracks.

During our stay we will also head north for a couple of hours to a feeding station for Siberian Jays at Ockelbo, which also regularly attracts Grey-headed Woodpecker and other species. As we enjoy the curious Siberian Jays, we will again be treated to an outdoor feast by grilling some locally-produced sausages over an open fire. Hopefully satisfied with rewarding views and photographs of the Siberian Jays, and fortified by our al fresco meal, we will begin our drive back to Svartådalen, stopping briefly enroute at the River Dalälven for Dippers (of the Black-bellied race).

Day 4

Fly London

Since our return flight to London Heathrow does not depart until mid-afternoon we have a few hours this morning to complete our exploration of the snowy forests, meadows and marshes of Svartådalen. We will leave the exact itinerary to our local guide, however, allowing a little flexibility to perhaps take one last look at the owls or another visit to a feeding station or perhaps a final search of the forests for grouse.

Finally, around midday, we must make the two hour drive back to Stockholm's Arlanda Airport for our direct flight with back to London Heathrow.



Sunset over Svartadalen (Daniel Green)

Grading

Grade A. Gentle day walks only. Although none of the walks are 'strenuous', we will be spending plenty of time in the field birdwatching and photographing on foot. We will also make relatively early starts each day, in order to make the most of all the daylight hours available to us. Please note that since the weather will be cold and we will be walking through snow for much of the tour - which can be tiring - an average level of fitness is required to get the most out of this holiday.

Focus

Birds and photography; perhaps a few mammals.

Weather

Temperatures here in mid winter range from 0°C to -20°C. Snow conditions, too, can be very variable. Expect very cold weather, though be aware that the 'dry cold' experienced here can feel a lot more comfortable than the 'wet cold' we get in England!

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list that will be sent to you on booking. Warm clothing – with lots of woolen layers, warm hats, scarves and gloves – will be absolutely essential! Good waterproof walking boots with snow gaiters are the preferred footwear outdoors. Wellington boots with warm socks are a good alternative, although some people find Wellingtons cold.



Swedish-style al fresco lunches!

Food & Accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday, except for meals whilst you are travelling to and from Sweden. This is a single centre holiday based at 'Salbohedgarden', a comfortable and characterful guesthouse a short distance for the main birdwatching sites. All rooms used by Naturetrek have their own private facilities.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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