

Sweden in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	<u>Fly Västerås and transfer Svartådalen</u>
Day 2	<u>Svartådalen</u>
Day 3/4	<u>Kvismaren</u>
Day 5	<u>Fly Stansted</u>

Departs

September

Focus

Birds, mammals, dragonflies, butterflies and moths.

Grading

A. Gentle day walks only.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code SWE10) or brochure

Highlights:

- Watch up to 20,000 Common Crane fly to roost at dusk, Kvismare Valley
- Migrating flocks of geese include Tundra Bean, Barnacle & Lesser White-fronted
- Join staff ringing migrant Bluethroats, plus a variety of pipits, warblers & buntings
- Pygmy Owl, Capercaillie & Black Grouse in Svartadalen
- Evening excursion to look for Elk... & the rut will be in full swing!
- Dragonflies such as hawkers & butterflies including Camberwell Beauty



From top: Bluethroat, Pygmy Owl, Cranes at sunset.
Images by Daniel Green, Torbjorn Arvidsson & Stefan Oscarsson



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Introduction

As the summer draws to a close, the peaceful forests, lakes and water meadows of central Sweden act as a magnet for thousands of migrating birds as they head south through Scandinavia to warmer climes. Huge flocks of Bean Geese and Common Cranes gather in the farmland, whilst overhead hunt up to a dozen species of raptors, from the diminutive Merlin to the huge White-tailed Eagle. Bluethroat numbers also peak in early September. These attractive birds spend a couple of weeks in central Sweden fattening up before continuing east towards their Asian winter haunts. In addition to an abundance of migrants, the many resident birds will be active and busily putting on weight to see them through the snowy months ahead. Pygmy Owl are at their most vocal in the autumn and up to six species of woodpecker are possible in the forests, along with Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse, Nutcracker and Crested Tit.

To add variety to this interesting tour, we will not only focus on the birdlife, but also enjoy the dragonflies including Baltic, Azure and Green Hawkers, butterflies and moths such as Camberwell Beauty and Light Crimson Underwing and mammals which should include the mighty Elk; the bulls in prime condition and ready for the autumn rutt with a full rack of antlers!

Itinerary

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.

Day 1

Svartådalen (Black River Valley)

We depart London Stansted on a late morning direct flight to the small relaxed airport at Västerås, around 85 kilometres to the west of Stockholm. Here we meet our English-speaking Swedish tour leader, Daniel Green, and transfer to the peaceful meadows, wetlands and forests of Svartådalen (the Black River Valley), less than an hour's drive to the north and our base for the first two nights of the tour. Flocks of Taiga Bean Geese are commonly seen feeding in the roadside fields along with parties of Common Cranes. The wetlands are important refueling stops for a variety of waders and waterfowl, whilst overhead patrol Hen and Marsh Harriers, Rough-legged Buzzard, White-tailed Eagle, Hobby, Merlin and Peregrine.

Our first stop will be at Hjälstaviken, a reed-fringed wetland home to large numbers of birds. Here we will look for Europe's rarest goose, the delicate Lesser White-fronted Goose. This species has suffered badly at the hands of mankind having been almost hunted



Lesser White-fronted Goose (Stefan Oscarsson)

to extinction in days past. The slow recovery of the Lesser White-fronted Goose has been helped by a reintroduction program; indeed the birds we will be looking for at Hjälstaviken are the offspring of these re-introduced birds. The wetlands are also home to an interesting variety of dragonflies.

The highlight of our time in Svartådalen, however, will be the evening at Lake Fläcksjön where hundreds of Common Cranes gather to roost each evening. The sight and sound of these spectacular birds flying overhead backed



Geese at sunset (Daniel Green)

by the setting sun will be a fitting finale to our first day in Sweden. For those who would like to extend the days yet further, however, your leader will offer the chance to enjoy a session or two of moth trapping. There are numerous species to look out for including Light Crimson Underwing, Herald Moth and the colourful Clifden Nonpareils.

Day 2

Svartådalen (Black River Valley)

On the western edge of the Black River Valley, lies the vast pineforest of Hälleskogen, the southern edge of the great Taiga Forests that extend north and east into Russia and beyond. Dotted with tranquil lakes and extensive bogs and mires, this is a fascinating area to explore and home to a much sought after variety of boreal species. Here we look for the huge Capercaillie and its smaller cousin the Black Grouse, the females in particular are often seen along the roadsides in the early morning and evening taking grit. The elusive Hazel Grouse also live in these dense forests. They are notoriously difficult to see, however, and best located by their piercing high pitched whistle! Easier to spot are the Northern Bullfinch, Willow



Lesser-spotted Woodpecker (Daniel Green)

Tit and Crested Tit that are attracted to the forest feeding stations that we will visit today. Nutcrackers and woodpeckers also venture down on occasion.

The gravel roads are also a great place to look for the Camberwell Beauty butterfly. This attractive species hatch a second brood in late August/early September and make full use of the gravel tracks to warm up in the morning sun. For those interested in dragonflies, the wet bogs of this area are home to the attractive Azure Hawker (*Aeshna caerulea*).

After lunch by one of the forest lakes (the summer home of Black-throated Divers) we will continue our exploration of the surrounding fields and wetlands in search of raptors such as White-tailed Eagle, Rough-legged Buzzard, Osprey and Marsh Harrier. Finally, we return to the forest once more in the evening to

look for the diminutive Pygmy Owl, the smallest owl in Europe and one that ventures out at dusk to hunt small rodents and birds. This is also the best time to spot a mammal or two, in particular we will be on the look out for the mighty Elk (Moose). This huge cervid is common in Sweden and leave the forests in the evening to feed in the adjacent fields and meadows; the bulls will be in prime condition and ready for the autumn rutt with a full rack of antlers!

Days 3 – 4

Kvismaren

Early starts will be the norm on this tour and this morning we will rise early to join a local guide in search of the carpenters of the avian world, the woodpeckers. Whilst up to six species of woodpecker can be found in a single morning, we will be especially looking for the more elusive of the family, in particular Three-toed Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker and Black Woodpecker. Great Spotted, Lesser Spotted and Green Woodpeckers complete the tally, whilst Parrot and Common Crossbills, Woodlark, grouse and a variety of other birds are also possible on this walk.

Next we move to the town of Kvismaren (a journey of around 150 kilometres), for the final 2 nights of the tour whilst we explore the Kvismare Valley. Here a patchwork of farmland, lakes and restored wetland attracts up to 20,000 Taiga Bean Geese. Mixed in amongst this mass are small flocks of Tundra Bean Geese, Barnacle Geese,



Bearded Tit

Greater White-fronted Geese and Pink-footed Geese and even the odd Lesser White-fronted Goose. Overhead we must keep a careful watch for a variety of raptors including many of the species already outlined above, but also Osprey, Honey Buzzard and for the fortunate perhaps even a Pallid Harrier; a rare species but one that does move through the valley in small numbers at this time of year.

On one morning we will rise early and join staff from the Kvismare bird observatory to watch the ringing of Bluethroats and other passerines. These beautiful - but elusive - little chats (of the red-spotted Scandinavian race) spend a couple of weeks in central Sweden fattening up before continuing on to their wintering grounds. In addition to the Bluethroats, commoner species such as Reed, Sedge and Willow Warblers, Bearded Tit and Reed Bunting are often caught, plus the occasional Red-backed Shrike and Redstart.

The main highlight of our time in Sweden awaits at dusk, however, for the sight of the crane roost at Lake Fläcksjön was only a mere taster for the main crane event! Nearly, 20,000 Common Cranes congregate in the Kvismare Valley each September and we will position ourselves under their flight-path at sunset to watch them fly to roost. Backed by the setting sun, the sight of flock after flock of trumpeting cranes passing overhead, joined by equally large numbers of geese and other waterfowl, must be one of the most breathtaking wildlife spectacles Europe has to offer, and a fitting finale to our tour.

Day 5

Fly London

For those who fancy another very early start there will be the offer of a second visit to the ringing station. Finally, after breakfast we must start the drive back to Västerås Airport in order to catch our mid-afternoon Ryanair flight back to London Stansted.

Tour grading

Gentle day walks only. Grade A.

Focus

A general wildlife tour focusing on birds, mammals, dragonflies, butterflies, moths and other natural history.

Weather

The weather in Sweden in September is very much as we experience in the UK. It can be very pleasant, sunny and warm, but equally cool conditions with showers are possible. The mornings and evenings can be cold, however, and frosts are not unusual. In summary, whilst we hope for warm and sunny weather be prepared for anything!

Flights

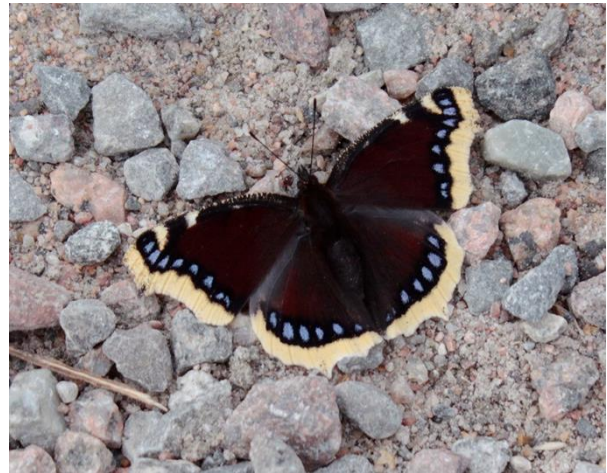
Please note that whilst our preference is to fly directly to Västerås Airport from London Stansted with Ryanair, as flights do not depart daily the Ryanair schedule does not always fit in with our trip dates. If we are unable to fly to Västerås, we will instead take an early morning flight from London Heathrow to Stockholm Arlanda with British Airways or Scandinavian Airlines, and transfer north from there. Whilst the transfer time is a little longer on arrival, the flight timings generally mean that you enjoy the same amount of time in Sweden itself.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday, except for lunch on Day 1 and dinner on Day 5 (i.e. during the journey to and from Sweden). We stay at a comfortable guesthouse in Svartådalen for the first two nights of the tour, where all rooms have private facilities. We then stay at Sörby Säteri (www.sorbysateri.se) in Kvismarens for the second two nights. Here rooms are usually en-suite, but on rare occasions guest rooms may have shared 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



Camberwell Beauty (Daniel Green)

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.

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