

Go Slow ... in Sweden

Naturetrek 'Go Slow' Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Vasteras and transfer Svartådalen.
- Day 2/5** Birding & natural history excursions around Svartådalen.
- Day 6** Birding around Svartådalen and fly London.

Departs

May

Focus

Birds and general natural history

Grading

A. Gentle day walks only

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code SWE15) or the current Naturetrek brochure

Highlights

- Up to 7 species of owl including Great Grey Owl, Ural Owl & Pygmy Owl
- Search for Three-toed, Grey-headed & Black Woodpeckers in nearby forests
- Breeding Black-throated Divers on the forest lakes
- White-tailed Eagle, Osprey and migrating waders and terns in the nearby wetlands
- Single-centre holiday based in the heart of the 'Black River Valley'
- Just a short direct flight and minimal transfer to our comfortable base
- Led by expert local guide Daniel Green



From top: Ural Owl, Black-throated Diver, the Svartådalen countryside
Cover photos courtesy of Daniel Green & Shutterstock



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Introduction

Central Sweden boasts a peaceful patchwork of boreal forest, lakes, meadows and farmland, all of which are home to an exciting selection of northern birds. We will be based for the duration of this 6-day 'Go Slow' holiday at the comfortable Sättra Brunn hotel, set in beautiful parkland, where guests can enjoy some gentle afternoon birding, or finish the day with a relaxing dip in the heated swimming pool and spa. The quiet roads enable us to easily explore our beautiful surroundings, including the nearby wetlands where we will enjoy a good selection of ducks and waders, many of them resplendent in their breeding plumages, and a large area of forest which supports good numbers of breeding woodpeckers, including Black, Three-toed and Grey-headed. Each day we will return to our hotel with plenty of time to relax during the late afternoon, and then, on at least two evenings, those who wish may choose to accompany our tour leader on a post-dinner excursion to search for the diminutive Pygmy Owl and the mighty Great Grey Owl, which is known to breed nearby ... surely a highlight of the holiday for many!



Three-toed Woodpecker

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

Fly Västerås, transfer Sättra Brunn

We depart London's Stansted Airport on mid-morning direct flight to the tiny airport at Västerås, around 90 minutes west of Stockholm. Arriving into such a quiet airport it will take a matter of minutes to clear security and collect our luggage, whereupon we will be met by our English-speaking Swedish tour leader, Daniel Green, in the arrivals hall. The transfer from Västerås to our base at Sättra Brunn only takes around 30 minutes, but we may choose to stop for a short leg stretch and our first taste of Swedish birding on the way, before taking the rest of the afternoon to settle into our rooms and perhaps enjoy a leisurely walk around the hotel grounds.

Sättra Brunn has attracted spa visitors for over 300 years, and here our cosy accommodation is surrounded by mature trees and parkland. Whilst the rooms here are fairly basic, they are all warm and comfortable with en-suite facilities. The reception area hosts a delightfully warm swimming pool and sauna in which guests can relax and unwind, and the food is simply excellent. Above all, we are perfectly situated for each day's wildlife excursions, minimising our driving distances and ensuring we return to our base each afternoon with plenty of time to visit the spa, relax with a book or perhaps enjoy a quiet walk before dinner.

Days 2 – 5

Excursions around Svartådalen

We will keep plans for the next 4 days flexible to take account of the weather and recent sightings, relying on vast experience and local knowledge of our tour leader to dictate the perfect plan for each day. Svartådalen, or the 'Black River Valley', is situated in the lowlands of central Sweden, and here we are surrounded by farmland, pretty villages and bright, red-painted wooden farmhouses, within easy reach of forests, fields, lakes and wetlands. Each day we will set off after a leisurely breakfast, taking our time and enjoying short, easy walks which will allow us to explore the mixed habitats of our surroundings. We will, of course, take a supply of Swedish cinnamon buns, teas and coffees and delicious, typically Swedish picnic lunches to keep us well fuelled during the day!

We will likely begin our explorations with the surrounding lakes and wetlands of the Black River Valley, which are home to breeding White-tailed Eagle, Osprey, newly arrived Black Terns and a variety of northbound waders including Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Greenshank. The nearby meadows, hedgerows and pasture boast passerines such as Red-backed Shrike and Thrush Nightingale, plus breeding Redwing and Fieldfare which we will see in abundance as we go about our daily excursions. The deciduous forests hold the likes of Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Pied Flycatcher, Wood Warbler, Crested Tit, Cuckoo, Northern Bullfinch and the Scandinavian white-headed race of Long-tailed Tit, whilst the reed beds are home to Marsh Harrier, Bittern and Bearded Tit. If the weather is warm enough, we may also pick out the first returning migrants, such as Great Reed Warbler and Common Rosefinch.

On one day, we will spend the morning in the burnt forest of Hälleskogsbrännan. This area suffered a devastating forest fire in 2014, and although still charred today and somewhat stark, the first colonizing plants are now returning. The area has now, admirably, been declared an eco-park, as the burnt spruce and pine trees are home to large quantities of beetle larvae, a highly desirable food source for woodpeckers. Several pairs of breeding woodpeckers have since taken up residence here, and we will make a particular effort to seek out Three-toed, Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers during our visit. The nearby lake is a good spot to look for Common Cranes, Slavonian Grebes and Black-throated Divers, the latter both resplendent in their summer plumage, as well as to enjoy a typical Swedish picnic lunch! Meanwhile, within the woodlands, Crossbill, Woodlark, Black Grouse and perhaps even Capercaillie are also possible.



Black Woodpecker (Gordon Small)

Depending on the adults' breeding success, on another day we hope to join local ringers as they ring Ural Owl chicks. Since the adult birds usually roost in the nest boxes alongside their young, we hope to be treated to rare views of these majestic owls. Eagle Owls are also known to breed in the area, and if they too have been successful this year, we will also pay a visit to their nesting site.



Great Grey Owl (Stefan Oscarsson)

Returning to Sättra Brunn in the mid to late afternoon each day, we will have plenty of time to relax before dinner. Then, on at least two evenings during our stay, our tour leader will offer an optional evening excursion. Several pairs of Great Grey Owls are known in Svartådalen, and we will visit one or two sites during our holiday where we hope to have the great privilege of watching one of these magnificent birds hunting and swooping through the nearby meadows. Then, turning our attention from the mighty to the diminutive, we will next try to locate a Pygmy Owl. These tiny owls emerge around dusk, and although tricky to find, our leader will know the very best places to look! As we later make our way back to Sättra Brunn, it will be worth keeping an eye on the fields alongside the road, as European Elk often emerge from their daytime cover in the forests to graze at around this

time, and we can look out for Wild Boar too. Should we take a moment stop by the water, Beavers can sometimes be seen around dusk, and if we stand quietly and listen, we are likely to hear the distinctive calls of Bittern, Spotted Crake and Water Rail.

Day 6

Fly London

Since our return flight to London is usually scheduled to depart in the mid-afternoon, we should have a few hours this morning to enjoy a final leisurely exploration of the forests, meadows and wetlands of Svartådalen. Then, after lunch, we will make our way back to Västerås in plenty of time to check in for our flight back to London Stansted, which is due to arrive in the early evening.

Tour grading

Grade A. Gentle day walks only, covering short distances over easy terrain. We plan to leave our accommodation after breakfast each morning and return in the mid-afternoon. Optional evening excursions (after dinner) will also be offered.

Focus

Primarily birds, plus other natural history.



Slavonian Grebe (Gordon Small)

Weather

The weather in Sweden in May is very much as we experience in the UK. It can be very pleasant, sunny and warm (even hot on occasion) but equally cool conditions with showers (or even snow!) 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!

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. This is a single centre holiday based at Sättra Brunn (<http://satrabrunn.se/en/>), a unique hotel with comfortable (if fairly basic) en-suite rooms, excellent food, free Wi-Fi, and a delightful heated swimming pool and spa.

Flights

For this tour we fly directly to Västerås Airport from London's Stansted Airport with Ryanair. Whilst we appreciate that Ryanair is not everyone's first choice of carrier, they do offer the only direct flight between the UK and Västerås, which greatly reduces our travel times on the first and final days. Further, the arrival process at Västerås is how air travel should be – from the wheels touching down we are usually on the road within half an hour! We find that this, along with Ryanair's excellent punctuality and baggage delivery record, greatly outweighs the benefits of using any other carrier for this particular tour. All Ryanair flights booked for this holiday include both hand and hold luggage, priority boarding and your choice of seat (please just mention your seat request at the time of booking, or as soon as possible afterwards, and note that any requests are subject to availability at the time of booking your flight).



Birding around Svartådalen

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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