

Sweden's Upland Birds

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

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

Departs

May / June

Focus

Birds and other natural history

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

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code SWE07) or brochure

Highlights:

- Seven species of woodpecker possible including Three-toed, Grey-headed and Black
- Look for Great Grey Owl, plus Pygmy Owl, and both Tengmalm's and Ural Owls
- Willow Grouse, Ptarmigan, Dotterels, Red-necked Phalaropes, Temminck's Stints, Long-tailed Skuas and both Snow and Lapland Buntings
- Stunning scenery from the lush oak forests, lakes and wetlands of the Black River Valley to Lapland and the high mountain plateaus.
- Enjoy one of Scandinavia's finest shows at the lek of the Great Snipe.



From top: Hawk Owl, Bluethroat, Lapland Bunting.
Images by Stefan Oscarsson, Shutterstock and Glyn Sellors



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

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 Bergslagen. Here attractive farmland is surrounded by 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. 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.



Ural Owl, by Gordon Small



Siberian Jay, by Gordon Small

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 and Siberian Jays, whilst Greenshanks sometimes breed beside the park's visitors' centre. Lower down, we will drive through valleys where Red-throated and Black-throated Divers, Arctic Terns, Velvet Scoters, 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 can 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, Dotterels, Red-necked Phalaropes, Temminck's Stints, Long-tailed Skuas, Ruff and Lapland Buntings, all resplendent in full breeding



Ruff, by Gordon Small

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

Svartådalen (Black River Valley)

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

to the north, and our base for the night. Then, this evening, we will head 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

Svartådalen

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 deciduous 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 White-tailed Eagles, and such passerines as Red-backed Shrike, Icterine Warbler, Thrush Nightingale and Common Rosefinch breed.

After breakfast this morning, we will head out into the surrounding forests as early as we can in search of the region's six 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 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 the scenic village Tällberg, after a drive of 150 kilometres.



Black Woodpecker, by Gordon Small

Day 3 Fulufjället National Park – Funäsdalen

After breakfast we leave Tällberg and drive the 190 kilometres to Fulufjället National Park with just a short leg-stretching coffee-break enroute. Here we will follow a boardwalk through the park's impressive forest and look for a variety of upland birds including Siberian Jay and Brambling. Below an impressive waterfall we also stand a good chance of seeing Dipper, Rough-legged Buzzard and Ring Ouzel. The nearby Visitor Centre is not only a nice place to have lunch but the surrounding forests are home to numerous stunning, summer-plumaged Bramblings. After lunch we will drive a further 140 kilometres to our final destination Funäsdalen.

En route we should keep our eyes open for Black-throated Divers, Velvet Scoters, Wood Sandpipers, Arctic Terns and northern Yellow Wagtails which all breed on the small roadside lakes and pools. Here we are also likely to encounter our first Reindeer, though a great many more will be seen in the mountains. We aim to arrive at our accommodation in Funäsdalen in the early evening. This lovely spot will be our base for the next 3 nights, where Redstarts, Pied flycatchers, Redwings and sometimes Bluethroats sing nearby.

Day 4

Funäsdalen – Flatruet

After breakfast this morning we will drive up 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 Red-necked Phalaropes, Ruff, Long-tailed Skuas 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. We also look for Willow Grouse and Dotterels. 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.



Great Snipe, by Gordon Small

Day 5

Funäsdalen – Flatruet

As the weather in the mountains can be unpredictable, we will keep today flexible and either head up top to further explore the plateau or descend down into the more sheltered valleys. In one such valley a particularly bird-rich lake holds Red-throated and Black-throated Divers, Osprey, Little Gulls, Slavonian Grebes and several species of waders and ducks. Hawk Owls also breed here in good lemming or vole years, whilst both Rough-legged Buzzard and Golden Eagle are more regular. Should we decide to spend more time on the high plateau we can enjoy views of more breeding plumaged Red-necked Phalaropes, Long-tailed Skuas, Bluethroats and Lapland Buntings.

Day 6

Funäsdalen – Flatruet – Älvdalen

We will spend our final morning in the uplands in search of some of the species we may have missed the previous days, hopefully including Siberian Tit. Late in the morning we will begin our 200 kilometre drive south stopping enroute to explore Nipfjället, one final upland area, in search of Ptarmigan and Dotterel. We will then descend to our hotel in Älvdalen for dinner and the night.

Day 7

Svartådalen (Black River Valley)

After breakfast we will check the nearby rivers for divers, Scarlet Rosefinch and possibly Beaver. We will then depart on the long drive southwards stopping frequently enroute to look for such birds as Peregrine Falcon, Eagle Owl and Blyth's Reed Warbler. 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 once again 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 cloudberryes! We should arrive back in the Black River Valley during the late afternoon,



Great Grey Owl, by Gordon Small

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 our guesthouse and enjoy our final dinner in Sweden. This evening, either before or after dinner at the hotel's excellent restaurant, we have another change to visit the nearby site to once again search for Great Grey and Pygmy Owls – a fitting climax to the holiday!

Day 8

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, Common Rosefinch, Black Terns, White-tailed Eagle and Honey Buzzard. If we have time, we may also go in search of such elusive marshland species as Corncrake, Spotted Crake and Marsh Warbler. before driving south towards Västerås airport once again. On our return journey to the airport we will stop for hot drinks 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 or maybe Thush Nightingale. We then continue our journey arriving back at the airport in time to check in for our Ryanair flight, which usually departs in the mid-afternoon, arriving back into London Stansted in the early evening.

Grading

A/B. As well as gentle walks through the woods and pastures of the lowlands, this holiday also includes half-day walks in the mountains, so an enjoyment of walking and a reasonable level of fitness are required. All walks, however, are optional. Please note that we generally make the most of the long daylight hours at this time of year in Sweden, especially as we travel further north, meaning that on some days we can expect both early starts and late finishes!

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).

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday, with the exception of meals during your journey to and from Sweden. 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 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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