

Sweden in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

12 - 15 May 2016



Three-toed Woodpecker



Capercaillie



White-tailed Eagle mobbed by Marsh Harrier



Great Grey Owl

Report by Andy Tucker & Daniel Green
Images courtesy of Barry Madden



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Tour participants: Daniel Green & Andy Tucker (leaders) with 13 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Thursday 12th May

Our early morning flight out of a slightly foggy Heathrow with SAS was delayed by an hour and twenty minutes but by 1120 we were safely in Stockholm Arlanda airport to be greeted by pleasantly warm sunshine along with our guide Daniel and six participants who had made their way out to Sweden beforehand.

Daniel laid on a tasty picnic spread at Fysingen a short distance to the north of the airport. Tucking in to fresh bread rolls filled with smoked Swedish ham, and the first of Daniel's cinnamon buns, we enjoyed the meadows, reedbeds and lake spread out before us. While Thrush Nightingale called from the bushes up near the farmhouse, Hobby flew overhead and plenty of Wood Sandpipers and Ruff, a couple of Ringed Plovers, Lapwings (plus chicks!) and a few Greylags and dabbling ducks were noted, along with Yellow Wagtail of the northern (Blue-headed) race *flava*. Tree Sparrow, such a rare sight in the UK these days, perched obligingly. Daniel found five or so Temminck's Stints for us and two White-tailed Eagles circled over the distant conifer plantation. Marsh Harrier quartered the reed beds offering good views and as we took a stroll along the track to get better light on the Spotted Redshank, an Osprey was seen flying over the lake carrying a sizeable Bream. Slavonian Grebe, resplendent in breeding plumage although a bit distant, concluded a very satisfying first stop.

Daniel had been tipped off about a rare vagrant and sought opinion on whether to go for it or not. Black-winged Pratincole was too tasty a temptation! A 90-minute drive north-west to Lisjoangar saw us overlooking another wetland and no sooner had we spilled out from the vans, Martin was on to the target. We had timed our arrival perfectly and the pratincole circled helpfully over the lake, at one stage coming reasonably closely overhead for photo opportunities. White-tailed Eagle was also seen here, together with our first Whooper Swans, which we saw in small numbers throughout the stay.

We proceeded to our spa hotel at Sättra Brunn, arriving at 1745. We went straight in to dinner after checking-in. We enjoyed a tasty, fresh salad with prawns followed by beautifully-cooked, tender lamb.

After dinner we headed out to look for owls, driving along deserted roads surrounded by lakes, meadows and forests adorned with carpets of Wood Anemones. Pulling up at a known site for Great Grey Owl deep within the forest, the warmth of the day had given way to a decidedly chilly breeze, and we were joined by several Swedish birders/photographers together with a Dutch couple. Searching all points of the compass as a group, it was Brian, scanning down the length of a damp meadow, who saw distinctive heavy wingbeats catching the setting sunlight in the distance. We followed Daniel down a track to the left, a line of trees keeping us out of sight of the area where the owl had been seen. It wasn't long before the owl was relocated and we all enjoyed watching this magnificent creature perched on an exposed dead trunk not 100 metres away. It took off again, drawing audible gasps of appreciation as it glided across the meadow on those heavy, slow wing beats. It was a magical end to our first day in Sweden!

Day 2

Friday 13th May

Most of us slept like a stone after the early start and long day yesterday, waking up just before an excellent buffet breakfast. Steve had been out early though, noting Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Pied Flycatcher and a range of other interesting passerines in the hotel grounds.

Daniel picked us up and with the temperature a good few degrees chillier than yesterday (the van thermometer hovered between 4 and 7 degrees all day) we headed to Hälleskogsbrännan, an area of forest that had been decimated during the well-publicised forest fires of summer 2014. This area has now been declared an eco-park and nature reserve and, almost two years on, is charred and somewhat stark, although the first colonising plants add a dash of greenery and colour here and there. The countless dead spruce and pines host large numbers of beetle larva which are a highly desirable food source for woodpeckers. Today, we were hoping to find the sought-after Three-toed, although conditions were against us with a biting wind and spells of rain. Our efforts to see the woodpecker were in vain, although we did have a nice stroll and saw Woodlark, a flock of Crossbills and Whinchat. We also witnessed, over coffee and cinnamon buns, some expert Swedish manoeuvring of a heavy gravel lorry and its trailer deep within the park. Hats off to the driver!

Leaving the burnt forest and its uncooperative woodpeckers behind, we took lunch in the shelter of a belt of trees and outbuildings overlooking a large reed-fringed lake, enjoying good close views of Wood Sandpiper and a beautiful drake Garganey. Goodness knows what the hirundines and Black Terns hawking over the lake made of the Arctic conditions!

The Viking era rune stone “the Odendisa stone” – with original rune carvings to tribute a local house wife in the 1.000’s – got a fair share of attention as well.

Back in to the warmth of the minibuses, we picked up a local bird ringer who has been studying Ural Owls for many years – Kjell-åke Källebrink. He was to take us to one of the 50 or so nest boxes that he and his colleagues monitor. Once parked up deep within the forest at a new site near Möklinta, we strolled across a meadow to a nest box 15 feet or so up a tree. The local ringer netted the female and took some measurements while Daniel checked the two chicks. What a magnificent creature and a real treat after such a cold day.

Next we headed back to Sättra Brunn where there was time to warm up and even go for a quick swim/sauna. Charr was on the menu for dinner, and it was excellent.

We all headed out with Daniel again for an evening session, first stopping at a huge sand quarry, where Daniel mischievously asked us to scan for Eagle Owl. Most of us embarked on a painstaking scan of the far reaches of the quarry, looking for suitable undisturbed ledges capable of housing an Eagle Owl nest. It was Denise who declared she’d found it, and all of our eyes were drawn to a hulking mass of rusting silos and conveyor belts just below us in the depths of the quarry. There she was; a spangled mass of brown feathers from the midst of which a pair of sleepy orange eyes gazed at us. A more unromantic setting could not be imagined, yet the owls seem totally unconcerned with the industrial activity and noise all around them, and the quarry workers respect their presence.

We drove along deserted forest roads late in to the evening, stopping periodically to listen for Pygmy Owl, but the evening was chilly and the owls were not playing ball. Roding Woodcocks, and more cinnamon buns, rounded off the day.

Day 3

Saturday 14th May

Local woodpecker expert Michael joined us today in place of Daniel and he seemed upbeat just after breakfast despite the weather forecast, which was for more biting wind and rain. Heading out from Sättra Brunn we braved the elements out of the minibuses to enjoy a group of marvellous lekking Ruff a short drive from the hotel.

From there we headed again to the burnt forest that we had visited yesterday. At just our second stop Norma reported that she had caught a glimpse of our quarry. Michael renewed his tape playback efforts and we all enjoyed the sight of our target bird Three-toed Woodpecker shuffling up the trunk of a dead pine affording very good views. The day ahead suddenly seemed much more promising.

With several other targets and sites to visit, we finished a quick coffee and moved on out of the burnt forest and to an area of verdant green forest punctuated with lakes and small waterways. On one such lake overlooked by Swedish summer houses we came across a beautiful Black-throated Diver in resplendent summer plumage – a real treat.

Black Woodpeckers were next up, a breeding pair affording very good flight views before we left them in peace. Barry managed some excellent flight shots and his blog is well worth a look and read: <http://easternbushchat.blogspot.co.uk/>. These are stunning birds and although widely distributed across large tracts of forest on the continent, no individuals have ever officially made it to the UK.

Another of our woodpecker targets was next to be found for us by Michael. This time it was Grey-headed Woodpecker, the bird remaining perched on a branch and allowing decent scope views for all.

Intermittently through the day Michael attempted to call in Pygmy Owl for us and although the owl was proving uncooperative, we enjoyed the by-product of several tit species being drawn in by its distinctive call. On one occasion we had Blue, Great, Coal, Crested, Marsh and Long-tailed all in close proximity to each other.

After lunch the rain got heavier and there was the odd mention of an early return to the hotel. However we stuck with it and we drove down an unmade road deep in to the forest where we were promised a short forest walk through possible Capercaillie territory. Adroitly, Michael downplayed the chance of a sighting but I did make a mental note of his mischievous smile as we got toggled up in rain gear.

Not five minutes' walk in to the sodden, moss-covered forest, the pacemakers in the party were stopped in their tracks as Michael pointed through the lichen-encrusted pine trunks to a magnificent male Capercaillie strutting his stuff atop a low, rocky outcrop. Some in the party had seen this wonderful spectacle before but for most of us it was a new experience and a mind-blowing one at that. Fuelled with testosterone, he strutted around emitting various high pitched clucks and clicks and fanning his magnificent tail. With all viable hen birds already mated, this male's efforts will go with no further reward this mating season and soon after our departure he will

have resumed his lone life deep in the forest. Forget the owls and woodpeckers; our hour spent in the company of this wonderful creature was worth the effort of the trek to Sweden alone.

After a hot shower and dinner, we went back out with Daniel in dryer conditions and enjoyed a second rendezvous with a Great Grey Owl, with views equally as good and with a different perspective to those enjoyed on our first evening. Three Elk were seen very well en route off to the left of the road. Driving away from the owl site we all saw Wild Boar well, before trying once again for Pygmy Owl, this time successfully. The evening, and what had turned in to a real 'red letter day', was rounded off by watching beavers from a bridge in the gathering dusk. Magic.

Day 4

Sunday 15th May

Our departure from our pleasant accommodation at Sättra Brunn coincided with a welcome improvement in the weather this morning, and we made the most of it with a session at a large, reed-fringed lake. We wondered what today's leisurely drive to the airport would bring us in the way of birds new to the trip. From a raised vantage point on the leeward side of some farm buildings, we scanned the expanse below us. Our first new bird was Red Kite which cruised past and gave good views. Peregrine was also in the vicinity and could be seen periodically chasing groups of Ruff and putting up Spotted Redshank and Wood Sandpiper. Temminck's Stints and Garganey were also present, and we enjoyed a White-tailed Eagle being mobbed by a Marsh Harrier.

We moved on to lunch overlooking another large lake where the chilly wind whipped in from the right, leading most to seek shelter in a small wooden cabin. Common Crane was seen well here and Pied Flycatcher was seen by a few in the group.

We later stopped at a bridge over a gushing river, enjoyed breeding Grey Wagtails and seeing a Hawfinch come to a garden feeder. We bade farewell here to Terence and Rosemary who were making their way home overland and sea.

Our final stop was at an old sand quarry area in search of the increasingly rare Ortolan Bunting. We weren't that positive about our chances due to the wind but Daniel duly weaved his magic and we all enjoyed good sightings – a fitting finale!

A cold beer was enjoyed back at Arlanda airport after we had safely negotiated the automated check-in and bag drop; the flight was full and just slightly delayed.

We had had a wonderful few days in Sweden with excellent company and some great birding!

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			12	13	14	15
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	
2	Taiga Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>		2		
3	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	
4	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	✓			✓
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		✓	✓
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓		✓	✓
8	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>		1	✓	✓
9	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓		✓	✓
10	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓	✓	✓
11	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			1	
12	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>			1	
13	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	1			✓
15	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓		✓
16	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓			✓
17	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>				✓
18	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓			
19	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1			✓
20	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	2		2	1
21	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Western Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>			1	
23	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓			✓
24	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓			
28	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			✓	
29	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	✓	✓		
30	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓	
31	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	✓		✓	✓
32	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓		✓	✓
33	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			✓	
34	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			✓	
35	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓	
37	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	5			3+
38	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Black-winged Pratincole	<i>Glareola nordmanni</i>	1			
40	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
42	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓			
116	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓		✓
43	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>				✓
44	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>		✓		✓
45	Rock(Feral) Dove	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>			✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			12	13	14	15
46	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓	
47	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	h	h	h	
49	European Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>		✓		
50	Great Grey Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>	1		1	
51	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>		2		
52	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	1			
53	European Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>			1	
54	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓		✓
55	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>		1		
56	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	1	
57	Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>			1	
58	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>			2	
59	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>			1	
60	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				1
61	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓			
62	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		✓	✓	
63	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1			
64	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	
67	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	
68	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>			✓	
69	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓	✓	
70	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>			✓	
71	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			✓	
73	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓		
75	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			h	
76	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓		
77	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓		✓
78	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓		✓
79	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓	
80	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
81	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	h	h		
82	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓			
83	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	h	h	h	
84	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			✓	
85	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			h	
86	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓	
88	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓	✓	
89	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓	
95	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓	✓	
96	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			12	13	14	15
97	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	h			
98	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
99	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		1	✓	
100	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓			
101	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓		
102	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
104	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		h	h	✓
106	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
107	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>				✓
108	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓	✓
109	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓		
110	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓	✓	
111	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
112	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓		✓
113	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓	
114	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓	✓
115	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>				1

Mammals

1	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>			1	
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		3	1	
3	Eurasian Elk	<i>Alces alces</i>			1+3	
4	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			1	
6	Eurasian Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>			2	

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Black-winged Pratincole



Ural Owl chick