

Sweden in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

11 -14 May 2017



Great Grey Owl



Wood Sandpiper



Black-throated Diver



Black Woodpecker

Report compiled by Tom Mabbett
Images courtesy of Jon Mercer, Sheila Wright and Simon Bright



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Tour participants: Daniel Green & Tom Mabbett (leaders) with 14 Naturetrek clients

Summary

We enjoyed a superb few days birding around the Black River Valley area. The star bird was undoubtedly the magnificent Great Grey Owl with wonderful close up views. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers around the hotel grounds were special, and a range of wetland species in their breeding finery and views of Capercaillie that couldn't be closer all made for a special short break.

Day 1

Thursday 11th May

After flying from the UK, we landed on time and soon met with Daniel. We then headed off for some birding en route to the hotel. Stopping at a very productive wetland site, we enjoyed a coffee and a snack before walking to a raised tower hide, enjoying many species here. Our first Cranes were trumpeting and seen well with a Whooper Swan sat in a nearby field. Whinchats were singing and showing well with Wheatears nearby, and a field full of Barnacle Geese were enjoyed. Yellow Wagtails of the blue-headed central Europe race and also the *thunbergi* grey-headed race showed very well for us.

Upon reaching the tower, we spent some time enjoying Wood Sandpipers flying over and feeding close by, two Ospreys, a flock of Ruff in their breeding plumage, Spotted Redshank and Little Gull, amongst others, while Bittern was heard booming in the reedbeds.



Osprey

After a brilliant couple of hours we continued on to our hotel and enjoyed dinner before heading out for our evening excursion to look for Great Grey Owl. On arrival, we watched over a small glade. With careful scanning not producing any owls, just a Green Sandpiper displaying, we split up with Daniel heading for another glade nearby. Soon after Daniel had left, Tom's phone rang with news that the owl was there! There is thought to be one pair breeding in this area and Tom's group returned to the vehicle and headed to the other glade. On arrival the bird was on show, but quite a distance away at the far end of the glade. We all enjoyed views of this special bird with some of the group managing to walk along a woodland path to get a little closer. We waited for a while in the hope it would move closer, but after it flew off, we checked the other glade once more before returning for some well-earned rest. On the way, five Elk were enjoyed grazing in a roadside field.

Day 2

Friday 12th May

Some of us were up early for a walk in the grounds of our hotel before breakfast and enjoyed really great views of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker feeding low in Alders. There was a pair here and we enjoyed daily views. Pied Flycatchers were also seen well at a nest site.

After breakfast we headed out and drove to the Norberg area, stopping on the way to enjoy a very close Black-throated Diver; stunning in its breeding plumage. We travelled through mixed forest, making stops and short walks to see what we could find. A Black Woodpecker near to a nest site was great, and Crossbill and singing Redwing up close were enjoyed. We spotted Goldeneye on forest lakes and displaying Tree Pipits before carrying on for lunch at Berglasen.

We enjoyed our lunch with Common Sandpiper and Grey Wagtail nearby before joining up with the local Ural Owl ringers to check a couple of boxes. This study has been carried out for many years and ethical monitoring and provision of boxes has seen the population of Ural Owls do very well in this area. On checking the first box, an adult bird was found sat tight in the box. Three young were present below her but they were too young to ring. We were able to see the adult Ural Owl and enjoyed the rare chance to see this species in the hand. It was soon released of course and flew up onto a nearby branch to watch over us until we left. Giving her some space, we had superb views as she perched in the tree before we left the area. We went on to check one more box with the same results. Again, the young were not ready for ringing so after another close up look at this beautiful owl, we headed for base.



Lesser-spotted Woodpecker

After another delicious dinner we headed back out to try and get better views of the Great Grey Owl, and were not disappointed. On arriving at the glade, it wasn't long before the owl was spotted much closer than the previous evening. We waited to see which way it would fly and to our delight it moved towards our end of the glade! We stood still and waited as the owl treated us to wonderful telescope-filling views. What a bird! We enjoyed superb views for an hour or so with the bird passing very close to us before being lost to view. A special encounter indeed! We enjoyed a coffee here with a Hobby perched on a distant spruce tree before returning to the hotel, en route passing Elk and Brown Hare. It had been a very special evening indeed.

Day 3

Saturday 13th May

We started with an optional walk around the grounds for an hour before breakfast, and again superb views of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker were the highlight. We saw the birds feeding at eye level, calling, drumming and going about their business. Superb!

We then left early with a packed breakfast and headed to a private area of forest nearby to try for Capercaillie. Driving slowly along the forest track and rounding a corner, people in the lead vehicle saw a male bird in the road but it soon flew off. On walking along the track, a female was seen in flight. We stood and listened carefully and could hear the bizarre popping and guttural display calls of a bird just off the track. This bird was not afraid of humans and in a constant highly charged state. Known as a 'rogue' Capercaillie and due to it not behaving like a normal bird, we were able to have incredible close up views. This hugely impressive bird strutted around a couple of metres from us and we were able to see every detail and witness the display. After a wonderful

encounter we left the bird, but not before Jon had a very close encounter as the bird saw him off! An experience never to be forgotten!

We enjoyed our packed breakfast, tea and coffee, seeing Crested Tits near to us and Green Hairstreak butterflies on the wing.

We continued on, crossing the Black River to the Ekopark Ojesjobrannan. Pulling up before our walk, a Ural Owl flew off a tree stump next to our vehicles. We set off for a short stroll with Green-veined Whites in flight. We heard a Hazel Grouse singing so gathered and waited patiently as this notoriously elusive bird was moving closer



Capercaillie

to us. After a short time and glimpses on the ground, the bird flew across right in front of us. We had a great flight view, more than is often achieved of this smart male bird. We returned to the vehicle after seeing more Crested Tits, and carried on to our lunch spot.

Here at a lakeside, we enjoyed Black-throated Divers, a very showy Camberwell Beauty, and had a lovely lunch in the sun. Afterwards, a walk saw us encounter two more Ural Owls, one being seen very well in the telescope. Also a Woodcock was flushed and a Goldeneye flew from a nest hole high up a tree.

Once back at the vehicles, we carried on to check a quarry for Eagle-Owl and it didn't take us long to locate the adult with two young birds. It was an impressive viewpoint and as we enjoyed the Eagle-Owl family, a Hen Harrier went over.

We returned to the hotel to relax before dinner. After another delicious meal, we went out again to a nearby lake. Before we got to the lakeside we were out of the vehicle for a Wryneck, which gave us the run around but most did enjoy views. At the lake it was a lovely view with Little Gulls and Black Terns over the water, a Marsh Harrier patrolling, and a distant White-tailed Eagle feeding on a fish. We enjoyed this site and then carried on our way, stopping at a few spots to look for Pygmy Owl. Unfortunately we were out of luck with the owl, but roding Woodcock and a Badger were seen. As darkness fell we made our way back to base.

Day 4

Sunday 14th May

This morning we again went out for our last chance to enjoy the Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, and we weren't disappointed. A Whooper Swan also flew across a nearby field.

After breakfast we packed and left, heading to the far end of the lake we had visited last night. Here we enjoyed Marsh Harriers, some more wildfowl including Shoveler and Goldeneye, and Whimbrel was also seen well. Today was about enjoying as much as we could before our flight home, so we headed on our way to another very productive wetland site. Here we enjoyed Slavonian Grebe and Black-necked Grebe in breeding finery, with Wood Warbler and Brambling in the small copse, and a pair of Garganey was also seen.

Our next port of call was a feeding station where we had superb views of Hawfinch coming down to sunflower seeds. Tree Sparrow and Greenfinch was also seen, and a Red Squirrel was enjoying the seed put out. After enjoying the Hawfinch, we made our way to the final stop before the airport; a sandy quarry where we hoped to see Ortolan Bunting. After a short walk we could hear a bird singing, and after some careful searching we were soon all enjoying this smart bird and also learning about its plight in recent years, in part due to how many are eaten! Whilst watching the two Ortolan Buntings, three Hobbies powered in from nowhere to feed in the quarry before carrying on through.

We had time for a relaxed lunch here before carrying on for the airport and arriving in plenty of time for our flight home. It had been a few days jam-packed with special birds and a great range of habitats enjoyed. It was a smooth journey home and we all said our farewells after a super trip with lots of fun along the way.

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Wryneck and Nuthatch

Species Lists

Birds

- Black-throated Diver** *Gavia arctica*: 3 seen with 1 very close and all in breeding finery.
- Red-throated Diver** *Gavia stellate*: heard only.
- Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*: seen.
- Slavonian Grebe** *Podiceps auritus*: c.6 seen on final day - breeding.
- Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*: 3 seen on final day with Slavonian Grebe.
- Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*: a few seen.
- Eurasian Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*: heard booming.
- Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*: a few seen.
- Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*: seen.
- Whooper Swan** *Cygnus Cygnus*: the most commonly seen Swan, seen daily.
- Greylag Goose** *Anser anser*: a flock seen.
- Canada Goose** *Branta Canadensis*: a few seen.
- Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucopsis*: A flock of around c.80 at first wetland site
- Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas Penelope*: a few seen.
- Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*: c.5 seen.
- Garganey** *Anas querquedula*: 1 pair seen on final day.
- Gadwall** *Anas strepera*: a few seen.
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*: seen.
- Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*: 1 drake in fight on day 1.
- Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*: a few seen.
- Common Pochard** *Aythya farina*: a drake on final day.
- Tufted Duck** *Aythya fulicula*: a few seen.
- Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*: regularly seen with around 50 together on final day.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*: 2 seen.
- Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*: 1 seen briefly by some.
- Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus*: 1 ringtail migrating high over.
- Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus*: 1 seen briefly from lead vehicle.
- Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*: c.5 seen.
- Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*: seen daily.
- White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla*: 1 adult seen feeding on a fish and in a tree top.
- Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*: 2 on first day and great views with 1 later.
- Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*: seen.
- Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*: 4 seen - 1 perched and 3 going through.
- Western Capercaillie** *Tetrao urogallus*: amazing views of a rogue bird displaying a few metres from us.
- Hazel Grouse** *Bonasa bonasia*: a male seen in flight close to us.
- Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*: seen.
- Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*: 1 seen.
- Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*: a few seen.
- Common Crane** *Grus grus*: commonly seen - a small flock of c.10 on day 1 and a few pairs thereafter.
- European Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria*: 1 flock on day 1.
- Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*: seen commonly.
- Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*: great to see adult males in breeding plumage.
- Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*: c.6 seen with a flock of 5.
- Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*: c.20 on day 1 in breeding plumage.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: 1 on final day.
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*: a few seen - displaying.
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: common with a flock of c.12 - excellent views.
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: a couple seen.
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: seen.
Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*: common in the area and a few seen on evenings roding.
Little Gull *Larus minutus*: a few seen – c.10 over lakes.
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*: common.
Common Gull *Larus canus*: common.
European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*: just a few seen.
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*: a couple seen on drive on first day.
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: seen at most wetlands.
Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*: a few seen at wetlands.
Black Tern *Chilidonias niger*: c.10 seen over the few days.
Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*: seen.
Stock Dove *Columba oenas*: a couple seen and heard also.
Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*: seen.
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: seen and heard.
Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo*: 3 seen - adult with 2 young at quarry nest site.
Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*: 2 adults seen in the hand and perched nearby when checking nest boxes. 3 seen the following day when walking with telescope views.
Great Grey Owl *Strix nebulosa*: wonderful views of an adult hunting – telecope-filling, prolonged views of this special bird.
Common Swift *Apus apus*: a few seen.
Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: 1 seen and heard.
Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: 1 seen well at a nest site.
European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: 1 seen and heard.
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: seen.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*: seen each day - brilliant views of a pair in hotel grounds with eye-level views feeding, calling and drumming.
Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: a few seen.
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: seen.
Common House Martin *Delichon urbica*: seen.
Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: seen at most suitable habitat and near hotel.
Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*: a few seen.
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*: a few seen.
Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*: great views of two different subspecies close up.
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: a couple seen.
Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: a couple seen and heard.
Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: seen.
European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: seen.
Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*: 1 heard and then seen well.
Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: a few seen well - singing at various sites.
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: a few seen.
Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*: seen.
Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*: very common, seen regularly on all roadsides, lawns etc
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: commonly seen.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*: seen regularly - good views of birds singing.
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: a few seen.
Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: a couple seen.
Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: just 1 seen.
Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*: 1 seen well on final day.
Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*: commonly heard and seen.
Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: heard and seen.
Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*: commonly seen at various sites.
Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*: seen at hotel grounds.
Willow Tit *Parus montanus*: a few seen and good views.
European Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*: a few seen.
Eurasian Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: seen.
Great Tit *Parus major*: seen.
Coat Tit *Parus ater*: seen.
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: a few seen.
Common Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*: seen well with 1 nest building in hotel grounds.
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: commonly seen and heard - noticeably paler than in the UK.
Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: seen daily.
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: seen.
Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: seen.
Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: common.
Northern Raven *Corvus corax*: a few seen.
Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*: common.
Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: a few seen in hotel grounds.
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: seen.
Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: common.
Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: seen very well at a feeding station - at least 4.
Siskin *Spinus spinus*: a few seen and heard regularly.
European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*: seen daily.
European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: just a few seen.
Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*: a few seen.
Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: seen well.
Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: 2 seen well and heard also.
Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*: seen daily.
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: 2 seen very well on the final day.
Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*: a couple seen.
Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*: 1 female seen on last day.

Mammals

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*: seen daily and common.
Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: 2 seen.
Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*: 1 seen well.
Eurasian Elk *Alces alces*: 5 seen well on two evenings.
Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*: seen on two days.
Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*: 2 seen.
Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*: 2 seen with 1 at feeders.
Badger *Meles meles*: 1 seen.

Butterflies

Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Green-veined White *Pieris napi*

Camberwell Beauty *Nymphalis antiopa*

Peacock *Aglais io*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*

Comma *Polygonia c-album*

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Ural Owl