

Sweden in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

16 - 19 February 2012

Report compiled by Daniel Green



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Day 1

Thursday 16th February

Weather: Cold, and later snowy

Seven happy people arrived at Arlanda and we drove through the countryside in a southwest direction. The first two stops for perched raptors showed just Common Buzzards, but as we stopped by the wetland Hjälstaviken, the next raptor in a treetop was more interesting – an adult White-tailed Eagle! A Fieldfare and a Blackbird are all we saw on a short walk down towards the reed beds. We drove further to reach a feeding station where birdlife is more concentrated. At Ekliden – a countryside garden with bird feeders provided some shelter from the wind and closer views of the first batch of birds; plenty of Mealy Redpolls, Siskins, some Greenfinches and Yellowhammers and a couple of nice Bullfinches appeared for our cameras. Our first attempt to see Pygmy Owl in the afternoon failed, so we headed for the hotel where we were received with a welcoming fire and a nice cup of tea before dinner.

Day 2

Friday 17th February

It was a brilliant morning - the mist rose over a snow-dressed landscape with red hay barns and hoar frosted silver birches at sunrise, as we worked our way through tiny villages with birdfeeders in the gardens. The first Tree Sparrows and Redpolls were sighted. A short walk down to Lake Fläcksjön to view the Viking era runestone (the Odendisa Stone) and the lovely old wooden houses, became a little culture break/history lesson and in the process we saw a “sundog” – a rainbow-like reflection in the sky. Woodpeckers were drumming and Nuthatches were singing, and it was a nice atmosphere outside today; calm, sunny, bright and cold.

On the other side of the lake we stopped to take a short walk into an old growth spruce forest. Soon we reached a clearing with a lot of bird activity. It didn't take long until Nutcrackers were starting to appear on specially prepared perches and rocks in front of us, feeding on hazelnuts and peanuts that are put out for them. Along with the Nutcrackers, plenty of small birds appeared as well. Amongst the more familiar ones were Crested Tits and Willow Tits, Goldcrest and Treecreeper. The Nuthatches were also appealing, being the very clean white-bellied Scandinavian race. While the photographers amongst us stayed by the feeders to fill their memory cards, we took a walk down towards the lake. It didn't take long until a flock of Long-tailed Tits appeared along the roadside - very cute birds with their all-white heads and also a Scandinavian race.

Down by the lake (Fläcksjön) we spotted a White-tailed Eagle in a treetop, soon joined by its partner, obviously a pair of adult birds. They perched much closer than the bird we saw yesterday and they seemed to be in breeding mode because soon they started to call as well - a loud Goshawk-like, repeated call. Another loud call drew our attention to a large, black bird, approaching us in undulated flight, our first Black Woodpecker for the trip – a stunning bird. We got great views as it flew right above our heads and perched for a while in a tree not far away.

Since it was lunchtime we drove up to a forest lake where we sat on an upside down tilted wooden rowing boat and enjoyed hot soup and sandwiches in the sunshine. Then we walked around the lake on paths and tried to find Hazel Grouse but without success. On another feeder by a cottage a bunch of Redpolls, Willow Tits and also some handsome Bullfinches showed.

The afternoon was dedicated to the smallest of the owls. After several attempts we finally located a Pygmy Owl, intensively calling and perched up in a Spruce tree top against the evening sky. A lovely final to a lovely day!

Day 3

Saturday 18th February

We had an early morning rise for the two hour drive north to the Siberian Jay territory. We stopped in the early dawn as we passed the bridge over the large River Dalälven. A flock of 15 Goldeneye swam around in what must be incredibly cold water. It was -22° C when we left the hotel! Up here there's more snow, but a bit milder. A Red Fox was seen well by the roadside. The walk down the forest track took us to yet another little clearing that was soon teeming with birds; Nuthatches, Crested, Coal and Willow Tits came closer than ever to the food we put out for them. Great-spotted Woodpeckers and Common Jays were seen and heard. A walk along the forest track produced a group of Common Crossbills – some of very few this winter. Just as we were about to leave, two Grey-headed Woodpeckers – a male and a female – suddenly sat on one of the fat-baskets (Woodpecker feeders), so we saw at least one of the target species at the site in view. Unfortunately the Siberian-jays stood us up today, – something that hasn't happened in four years and only once before. Very surprising! But birds are birds. We get some comfort by the tasty lunch we prepare – a stir fry over the warming open-air fire.

The next session was a visit to Färnebofjärdens National Park, half way back. Three impressively gigantic Moose suddenly stood by the road! Most days Roe Deer and Red Foxes are seen here and there in the landscape, but these were our first Moose. A short walk in the snow took us into a particular riverside habitat with plenty of dead Silver Birches. Plenty of Great-spotted Woodpeckers appeared and soon an intriguing cluster of Woodpeckers sat around one of the feeders. One Grey-headed Woodpecker, two Great-spots and one male White-backed Woodpecker! This is the first Naturetrek group ever getting to see White-backed Woodpecker in Sweden!!! This near extinct species in this country used to have it's stronghold in this area, where lot's of flooded forest can create the right habitat, with plenty of dead wood. Last years reintroduction program has been successful and the bird is slowly increasing again, being supported by winter feeding stations. On the walk back a (Black-bellied) Dipper sat on the icy edge of the river. More Goldeneyes were seen in the streams as we drove over several small bridges, with streams of fast flowing water below.

Day 4

Sunday 19th February

On our final morning we headed west towards Färna Ekopark. However before that we had to stop for a nice Great Grey Shrike along the road.

The Ekopark is a haven for Woodpeckers and our local expert Michael showed us instant views of a male Grey-headed Woodpecker answering our call and approaching to sit in treetops around us for a good few minutes. If we didn't get good photo-opportunities of this bird yesterday we sure got them today! Deeper into the Ekopark we scanned the part where a hurricane took down a corridor of forest some years ago, along with that, Bark Beetles are infesting the trees, and dying spruce trees create a virtual restaurant for Woodpeckers. A Black Woodpecker called and flew by through the forest, just leaving us with glimpses of its large, all-black appearance. Treecreepers, Goldcrests, Willow Tits and Nuthatches moved around us in the forest, but it isn't until we moved to the south of the felling that we heard suspicious, soft tappings. We moved quietly through the forest and there they were; not one, not two, but three(!) Three-toed Woodpeckers in front of and above us! Two of them were particularly low down on the tree trunks, feeding by chipping off cornflake-like pieces of bark from the trees. Both were males and they seemed to have only a little quarrel, but there are not many problems co-existing in this rich habitat, and they probably aren't quite in breeding mode yet. The birds were really obliging and allowed approaching beyond our expectations. When we'd got the best of them we enjoyed a coffee-break out in the sunshine, because weather had improved again, from heavy snowfall to really nice sunshine and rising temperatures.

Another part of the Eko-park became our final destination and here we got really good views of a Black Woodpecker that showed off and let us hear several of its different calls as it posed up on big Aspen trees in front of us. The feeding station that we started with was now revisited and we got good Bullfinches, Yellowhammers, more Greenfinches, Mealy Redpolls and Siskins, Great, Blue and Coal Tits, Nuthatches and Great-spotted Woodpeckers.

The last target bird of the trip was Rough-legged Buzzard. We searched an area just outside town and yes, there was a raptor sitting, but hey!...it was a Goshawk...a majestic adult male, silvery white below and dark grey on the back. It allowed pictures to be taken from the windows of the van and when it flew, it flew towards us! However it wasn't over. As we scanned the grass fields from a smaller road, we got a Great Grey Shrike extremely close to the road and then the Goshawk was relocated. Soon it perched on a lamp-post by the road. and only got flushed when a pedestrian walked by. Even after that it perched again as we get even closer! We all agreed that we rarely if ever have seen a Goshawk like this, out in the open so close and for such a long time. A third Goshawk (the first – also an adult – was seen flying by from the car earlier this afternoon) flew towards town in front of the van as we drove past the harbour in Västerås!! That concluded the trip as we then had to head for the airport...

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Species List

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

	Common name	Scientific name	February			
			10	11	12	13
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		✓	✓
2	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>			15	
3	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	1	2		
4	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				3
5	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2			
6	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>			✓	
7	Eurasian Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>		1		
8	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>				3
10	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		1		3
11	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		1		
12	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>			3	1
13	Black-bellied Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus cinclus</i>				2
14	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	1			1
15	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	2	1		1
16	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				
17	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>				
18	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	1			2
19	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		✓	✓	✓
20	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓	✓
21	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	1	4	6	✓
22	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		4	5	✓
23	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		6		
26	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		1	1	✓
28	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>				2
29	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓	✓
30	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>		4		
32	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓		
36	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		200		✓
37	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			H	

	Common name	Scientific name	February			
			10	11	12	13
38	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>	30	✓	✓	50
40	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	
42	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	100		200