Sweden's Upland Birds

Naturetrek Tour Report

28 May - 4 June 2009



Red-necked Phalarope



Common Rosefinch



Eurasian Eagle Owl



Siberian Jay

Report by Daniel Green and Jon Stokes



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Day 1

Thursday 28th May

Weather: Mixed - 18° Degrees C

Everyone arrived for our mid morning flight to Västerås, and despite a not to promising weather forecast, we arrived in sunshine. After collecting our transport, we drove about 30 minutes from the airport to a beautiful lake beside a historic Swedish castle. On the lake were our first taste of the quality birds of this part of the world - breeding plumage Slavonian Grebes, breeding Goldeneye, Ospreys and drumming Black Woodpeckers. After an excellent picnic lunch we walked through the castle grounds. Here grew Black Poplars, rare trees in the UK, but here growing as huge roadside trees. As we walked around Castle grounds we found a dead jackdaw, where a branch had fallen off one of the trees overnight; a huge range of pollarded lime trees; perhaps the most ancient ash tree in Europe, a staggeringly large ancient veteran tree growing close to the Castle; false oxslips; a Thrush Nightingale singing in the depths of the woodland cover which took some time to see; more Ospreys, and a huge lake with terns and cormorants.

As we headed back to the vans it became clear that it wasn't just the appearance of rain, as a torrential downpour began which lasted for the next few hours. We drove to our hotel through the storm, and checked into a beautiful spa hotel at Satra Brunn, eating an excellent dinner. Fortunately by the end of dinner the rain had stopped and we went out on an owl hunt. As we approached the vans, very tame Tree Sparrows sat on neighbouring signs and allowed excellent pictures. Then we had a 20 minute drive to a meadow in the woods, where for the last 8 years it has been possible to see one of Europe's most spectacular Owls - the Great Grey. Upon arrival we split the group to increase our chances of finding one of the magnificent creatures, and within 10 minutes we had found one. The whole group got excellent views of this creature over the next two hours, and as the evening went on the one became two, feeding on voles in the meadow. Despite the lateness of the hour, everyone was still wide awake, and this alertness yielded a young bull elk on our drive home, although we fail to find Pygmy Owl at a traditional site. We then finally set off for bed with the echoing calls of Whooper Swans calling from a river bed.

Day 2

Friday 29th May

Weather: Sunny - 20°C

We started early on a beautiful clear and sunny morning. We collected the day's food from a local B&B and set off alongside Flackebo Lake. Here we spotted Ospreys, Black Terns, Yellow Wagtails, a White-tailed Eagle, and several Cranes. Then we headed for the woods for Three-toed Woodpecker - and upon arrival had fantastic views of this stunning bird near their nest hole. Surrounding us were the repeating calls of large numbers of Cuckoo's - a beautiful noise to hear. Then we drove to a small lake in the woods where there was a Black Woodpecker nest with three chicks. The calls of these young birds echoed through the woodlands and eventually the parents came to feed them. We then walked to look for Grey-headed Woodpecker which unfortunately didn't show, but there were masses of butterflies including Camberwell Beauty, Northern Chequered Skipper, Northern Wall Brown and Wood Whites.

We had our picnic lunch by the lake with common frog, Pied Flycatcher and northern Bullfinch. Our next stop was a nest box, this one occupied by a beautiful Tengmalms Owl. Then we drove to find Ural owls. Here ringers were checking nest boxes, but unfortunately the first box had been abandoned, however the female in the second box was present, but heard the ringers coming, so flew to a neighbouring tree where she sat and provided excellent views for the group. Then we set off north on a 2 hour drive to a beautiful hotel on the huge lake Siljan, where the sun was setting in a most dramatic fashion over islands in the lake. Finally after dinner, bed - Phew!

Day 3

Saturday 30th May

Weather: Sunny - 22° C

We awoke to another glorious sun drenched morning, and the view at breakfast looked like the coast of British Columbia, Canada - fantastic! A perry pear in the hotel grounds confused the group, then off on the drive north, to the mountains. First stop by a lake - a Beautiful Black-throated Diver and some Cranes. Then the next stop was by wetland Glysjön with a boardwalk down to the hide, where Brambling's were wheezing from the trees, and cloudberries were growing all over the bog. Whooper Swans, Cranes, singing Redstarts and Redwings added to the list. The group also took advantage of the "open air" Swedish style loo by the lake.

On the next leg of the journey we had a bull elk by the road and arrived at Fulufjället National Park. Here we took a beautiful walk to Sweden's highest waterfall; attempted to see newly discovered world's oldest tree - a 10,000 year old spruce tree, which however is not pointed out to visitors for conservation reasons. The place is nevertheless spectacular with the impressive waterfall surrounded by steep cliffs. Here Ring Ouzels were definitely the crowd-pleasers as males and females showed repeatedly, close and well, along with a male spending a lot of time singing from a perch in a spruce tree top. A pair of Raven had a nest on the rocks where we could actually even see the little naked chicks as they got fed. Then onward north with a quick stop for a huge bull elk, before stopping at a roadside lake, with Velvet Scoters, Greenshank, Yellow Wagtails, Arctic Terns and a very obliging Three-toed Woodpecker drumming from a telephone pole by the road.

Finally we arrived at our hotel in the mountains where the lovely bedrooms contained very comfortable beds. After dinner some went for a walk by the river which revealed an arctic hare, whilst others used the sauna and pool.

Day 4

Sunday 31st May

Weather: Sunny - 20° C

For early risers the arctic hare was present outside the hotel and after breakfast we set off for the top of Flatruet plateau. First stop a roadside lake where two Red-necked Phalarope were seen swimming. The two became four and soon we were all out of the vans enjoying these beautiful birds. An unusual call yielded 2 Broad-billed Sandpipers displaying over the bog, and Golden Plover and Arctic Terns added colour to the bird soundscape. A Willow Grouse was flushed along the short walk. A distant juvenile Golden Eagle then graced the morning sky and some neighbouring Cranes called their haunting song.

Driving further up the plateau we saw our first reindeer. Due to a local Sami village, these beasts had bells on them, reducing their sense of wilderness, but not their beauty. A walk over the plateau yielded a willow patch heaving in the very beautiful Red bottomed bumblebee - *Bombus monticola*, a species of these Swedish uplands. After a short walk, our searching was rewarded with a beautiful male Bluethroat who sang his heart out from a small belt of willows. This glorious bird was a target species for many of us and nobody could complain about the quality of the views.

Onwards to lunch which we had by the only huts on the plateau, which provided some shelter from the cool breeze. After lunch, during which Lapland Buntings wheezed and displayed, we set off over the plateau. Another Broad-billed Sandpiper displayed, and Dunlins were seen overhead. A limestone outcrop was covered in the flowers of Purple Saxifrage and again was covered in bumblebees and surprisingly a Painted Lady butterfly perhaps the most northerly example of a vast migration occurring across Europe over the last few days, with an estimated 100 million butterflies being on the move. A nearby pool held six Phalarope which allowed very close approach and overhead three Long-tailed Skua were seen. A larger lake held two Long-tailed Duck, some beautiful male Ruff and one of the Skuas allowed close approach delighting the photographers. Finally our last stop of the afternoon yielded two beautiful Dotterel, who approached to within 10 feet of some of the group.

So home for dinner, stopping occasionally for some more reindeer. The dinner was excellent and afterwards an intrepid group set off into a now chilly evening to seek out Great Snipe. Unfortunately over dinner the wind direction has now changed to the north, an exceptionally cold direction in this part of the world. Great Snipe are curious and rare birds with traditional lekking points, and it was for one of these we aimed. Slipping on the snows, wading through streams and generally freezing to death, we approached the now darkening hillside with little expectation. How wrong can you be!!! As we arrived, three snipe landed on the lek but were initially hidden. However their curious lekking call came from the boggy tussocks. Then one was spotted in a small willow, then another, then they fought, jumping high in the darkening evening, but clearly visible. Others flew, revealing the diagnostic white squares on their tails. The excitement continued for 30 minutes, then eventually the cold got the better of us and we headed home. At least 4 birds were seen and at the same time several Woodcock was roding over our heads.

Day 5 Monday 1st June

Weather: Cold - overcast 10 ° C

Due to the lateness of the hour last night, we set off at a reasonable time today - only 7am. This was to increase the chances of seeing Capercailles, although we should have stayed in bed as we failed to find any!

However our action enabled us to arrive early at the small village where Siberian Jays were known to occur. After half an hour we finally found a family group of four which could not have been more co-operative. Feeding on food scraps and even taking food from the hand, these beautiful birds were for many the 'bird of the week', an exceptional chance to see these almost mythical birds of the north.

We then drove back over the Flatruet plateau, where we found a Great Grey Shrike, more reindeer and some pale butterwort flowers. We then arrived at the Storsjön delta for lunch and found a colony of some 24 Little Gulls, among Black-headed Gulls and Arctic Terns. From a watchtower at closer view we found a couple of male Ruff, Greenshanks, Wood Sandpipers and another 3 Broad-billed Sandpipers. An Osprey on the nest, plus a couple of Red-throated Divers and Red-necked Phalaropes were also seen.

We went back over the plateau once again, stopping to look for closer Phalarope and Dotterel. Unfortunately both species were hiding, but there were now five Painted Ladies around the huts. Then home, dinner and the log call, although everyone was fairly exhausted, one of the guides even falling asleep during the gathering - although at least not while he was actually talking.

Day 6 Tuesday 2 June

Weather: Cold 4 °C - snowing lightly

It was the start of our return south today. We began by exploring a meadow just north of the hotel, where Bluethroats were singing and waders were playing on the river. However the weather had deteriorated and now light snow was falling and the piercing northerly wind stopped us from being out too long.

We then drove south and failed to locate Siberian Tit in a well known site, but did locate a Lesser-spotted Woodpecker. Then onwards to a mountain called Nipfjället - here we had 2 more Siberian Jays while we had lunch, four Rock Ptarmigan on the mountain top, two Shorelarks for some of the group, and Dotterels for others, but we were eventually beaten by the cold and went off the hills down to our hotel.

After an excellent fillet of beef dinner and a sampling of the local ciders - (woodberry - excellent; cranberry - OK; apple and pear - great; tangerine and chilli - horrid; lime and cactus - truly disgusting) some of us went for a walk by the lake. This was an amazing experience because along with Black-throated Divers, we had beaver at a range of only a few feet walking over a path, scent marking and generally ignoring us totally. Amazing! Then local info had four of us off on a bear hunt, although we didn't find any.

Day 7 Wednesday 3rd June

Weather: Cold and clear in the morning (4°C), warming as we went south

We started with a return visit to the beaver pool for those who weren't up last night, and luckily they were still about - there even being two this morning, which were seen to have a beaver kiss. How sweet.

Then the drive south...a few short stops gave some of the clients' views of Honey Buzzard and Goshawk.

We eventually stopped mid morning for waffles and some retail therapy in gorgeous little village of Tällberg at lake Siljan - a very traditional Swedish old time village with a fantastic view over the big crater lake, with Rosefinches calling around the flowering gardens. At the coppermine in Falun we had lunch where we could see a surprisingly active Eagle Owl preening and looking around on the cliffs. Then on to Sätra Brunn hotel again, this time having enough time to try the spa bath, which at 35°C was like getting into a huge bath tub. Fantastic!

We then had our final dinner before setting off to look for Great Grey Owls again. One owl was a bit more elusive tonight but still showed well, and we celebrated the end of the trip with an excellent local cheese and Swedish Cloudberry wine. Finally on our return home we had our final mammal tick of the trip - a badger, which was unfortunately run over. Then again a final unsuccessful look for Pygmy Owl before bed...

Day 8

Thursday 4th June

Weather: Cold and overcast with a hint of rain

Our last morning birding at nearby Lake Fläcksjön in the Black River Valley, started cold and damp but despite this we managed some excellent birds before the airport. First up a singing River Warbler which displayed well, then Osprey, White-tailed Eagle, Hobby, Black Terns, singing Icterine Warbler, three Rosefinches, 2 of them beautiful males, and a cracking Thrush Nightingale. Wryneck was also heard.

We returned then to the hotel, packed up and set off for the airport. However we still had time to pack in a stop for Ortolan Buntings, which were singing beautifully in an abandoned sandpit. Having checked the bags in we left the airport for our final picnic by a lake with singing Icterines plus a Reed Warbler, the final new bird of the trip, just 20 minutes before we took off for home.

Finally back to the airport and our final farewells, before setting off home after a truly excellent week in this beautiful country.

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Species Lists

Birds

		May/June									
	Common name	Scientific name	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	
1	Black-throated Diver	Gavia arctica		1		2					
2	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus	1								
3	Slavonian Grebe	Podiceps auritus	6								
4	Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	3			2			3		
5	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	✓						5		
6	Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	6								
7	Whooper Swan	Cygnus cygnus	2	4	3			2			
8	Greylag Goose	Anser anser	✓								
9	Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	✓	✓					✓		
10	Barnacle Geese	Branta leucopsis							3		
11	Wigeon	Anas penelope			2				10		
12	Teal	Anas crecca			2	3	2	✓			
13	Gadwall	Anas strepera			4	3		5			
14	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos						2			
15	Pintail	Anas acuta	4	3					2		
16	Shoveler	Anas clypeata							2		
17	Pochard	Aythya ferina		2							
18	Tufted Duck	Aythya fulicula	2	6	1	2	3	2	5		
19	Long-tailed Duck	Clangula hyemalis				2	1				
20	Velvet Scotor	Melanitta fusca			2			7			
21	Goldeneye	Bucephala clangula	10		2		4	4			
22	Red-breasted Merganser	Mergus serrator					2	2			
23	Goosander	Mergus merganser	1		1		2	1			
24	Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus						1			
25	Goshawk	Accipiter gentilis						1			
26	Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus		2					2		
27	Honey Buzzard	Pernis apivorus		1							
28	Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo	✓	✓				3	✓		
29	Rough-legged Buzzard	Buteo lagopus					1				
30	White-tailed Eagle	Haliaeetus albicilla		2					1		
31	Golden Eagle	Aquila chrysaetos				1					
32	Osprey	Pandion haliaetus	1	2			5		3		
33	Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	1	1	2	1	1	2	1		
34	Hobby	Falco subbuteo							1		
35	Merlin	Falco columbianus					1				
36	Willow Grouse	Lagopus lagopus				2	1				
37	Ptarmigan	Lagopus mutus						4			
38	Capercaillie	Tetrao urogallus		1							
39	Pheasant	Phasanius colchicus		1							
40	Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	✓								
41	Coot	Fulica atra	✓								
42	Common Crane	Grus grus	1	3	2	4	2	1	5		
43	Dotteral	Charadrius morinellus				2		1			
44	Grey Plover	Pluvialis squatorola				2					
45	Golden Plover	Pluvialis apricaria				<u>-</u>	1	✓			

			May/June								
	Common name	Scientific name	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	
46	Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus				✓	1	✓			
47	Knot	Calidris canutus			3	3	✓				
48	Dunlin	Calidris alpina				2					
49	Broad-billed Sandpiper	Limicola falcinellus				3	3				
50	Ruff	Philomachus pugnax				1	6				
51	Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus				✓	2	6			
52	Common Curlew	Numenius arquata				1	2	1			
53	Redshank	Tringa totanus	1	1		2	1		1		
54	Greenshank	Tringa nebularia			2	1	1	4			
55	Green Sandpiper	Tringa ochropus		3							
56	Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola	1		3	2	3		3		
57	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	1		1	1	1	5			
58	Great Snipe	Gallinago media				4					
59	Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago	1	1	1	3	2	1	2		
60	Woodcock	Scolopax rusticola	2	2		✓	✓				
61	Red-necked Phalarope	Phalaropus lobatus				10	4	2			
62	Long-tailed Skua	Stercorarius longicaudus				3	1				
63	Little Gull	Larus minutus					23				
64	Black-headed Gull	Larus ridibundus	✓			✓	√	✓			
65	Common Gull	Larus canus		2	1	2	2	1	2		
66	Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	3	3							
67	Common Tern	Sterna hirundo	1	1	3			1			
68	Arctic Tern	Sterna paradisaea			✓	✓	✓				
69	Black Tern	Chilidonias niger		6					29		
70	Woodpigeon	Columba palumbus	√	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
71	Stock Dove	Columba oenas			2						
72	Feral Pigeon	Columba livia		3					3		
73	Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaoto	1	✓					✓		
74	Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus	1	1	✓	✓	✓	3	✓		
75	Eagle Owl	Bubo bubo						1			
76	Ural Owl	Strix uralensis		1							
77	Great Grey Owl	Strix nebulosa	2						1		
78	Tengmalm's Owl	Aegolius funereus		1							
79	Common Swift	Apus apus	1		✓	✓			✓		
80	Black Woodpecker	Dryocopus martius	1		7	1			1		
81	Green Woodpecker	Picus viridis		1							
82	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major		2							
83	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopus minor						1			
84	Three-toed Woodpecker	Picoides tridactylus		1	1						
85	Skylark	Alauda arvensis	✓				✓		✓		
86	Shorelark	Eremophila alpestris						2			
87	Swallow	Hirundo rustica					✓	✓	✓		
88	House Martin	Delichon urbica	√	✓			✓	✓	✓		
89	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia	√					✓			
90	Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis	✓	✓				✓			
91	Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis	✓	✓			✓	✓			
92	White Wagtail	Motacilla alba alba	✓	1			1	1			
93	Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava thunbergii	✓		2	2					

94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101	Common name Dipper Wren Dunnock Robin Thrush Nightingale Bluethroat	Scientific name Cinclus cinclus Troglodytes troglodytes Prunella modularis	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
95 96 97 98 99 100 101	Wren Dunnock Robin Thrush Nightingale	Troglodytes troglodytes	4							
96 97 98 99 100 101	Dunnock Robin Thrush Nightingale				1	2				
97 98 99 100 101	Robin Thrush Nightingale	Prunella modularis	1	2					1	
98 99 100 101	Thrush Nightingale			1					1	
99 100 101		Erithacus rubecula	1	2					1	
100 101	Dluothroat	Luscinia luscinia	1						1	
101	Diueililoai	Luscinia svecica				2	4	2		
	Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus				1		1		
102	Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra			2	1		1		
. 52	Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe				3		2		
103	Ring Ouzel	Turdus torquatus			4	1				
104	Blackbird	Turdus merula	√	✓				✓	✓	
105	Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
106	Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos	✓	✓				✓		
107	Redwing	Turdus iliacus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
108	Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus	✓					✓		
109	River Warbler	Locustella fluviatilis							1	
110	Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus							1	
	Icterine Warbler	Hippolais icterina							2	
	Garden Warbler	Sylvia borin	1						1	
	Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla							1	
	Lesser Whitethroat	Sylvia curruca		1					1	
	Common Whitethroat	Sylvia communis		-					1	
	Wood Warbler	Phylloscopus sibilatrix						1		
	Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita	1		1			· ·		
	Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus			1	1	1	1	1	
	Goldcrest	Regulus regulus	1				<u> </u>	<u> </u>	1	
	Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata	1	1				1	1	
	Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula hypoleuca		1		2	1	3		
	Willow Tit	Parus montanus					1	1		
123	Blue Tit	Parus caeruleus	1		1		<u> </u>	<u> </u>		
	Great Tit	Parus major	1		1	1	1			
	Coat Tit	Parus ater	•	1			<u> </u>			
	Common Treecreeper	Certhia familiaris		1						
	Nuthatch	Sitta europaea	1							
	Red-backed Shrike	Lanius collurio	1							
	Northern Grey Shrike	Lanius excubitor	'				1			
	Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	1	1	1		<u> </u>			
	Siberian Jay	Perisoreus infaustus	'	<u>'</u>	1		4	2		
	Jay	Garrulus glandarius	1				1			
	Magpie	Pica pica		✓			√	✓	✓	
	Jackdaw	Corvus monedula	✓	✓				✓	✓	
	Raven	Corvus corax			2	1	2	3		
	Hooded Crow	Corvus cornix	✓	✓	✓ ×	<u>'</u>		√	✓	
	Rook	Corvus frugilegus	✓							
	Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus	3					3		
	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	1					3		
	Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	1	1			1	1		
	Brambling	Fringilla montifringilla	 		✓	✓	I ✓	I ✓	✓	

			May/June									
	Common name	Scientific name	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4		
142	Siskin	Carduelis spinus				✓	✓	✓	✓			
143	Greenfinch	Carduelis chloris	✓	✓				✓	√			
144	Redpoll	Carduelis flammea						✓				
145	Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	1									
146	Linnet	Carduelis cannabina	1									
147	Common Rosefinch	Carpodacus erythrinus						1	4			
148	Bullfinch	Pyrrhula pyrrhula		2			2					
149	Common Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra						2				
150	Yellowhammer	Emberiza citrinella				2		2	2			
151	Ortolan Bunting	Emberiza hortulana							4			
152	Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus				1	2	2	1			
153	Lapland Bunting	Calcarius Iapponicus				7	2					

Mammals

			May/June									
	Common Name	Scientific name	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4		
1	Badger								1			
2	Moose		1	1	1			1				
3	Reindeer					✓	✓					
4	Arctic Hare				1	1						
5	Roe Deer		2	1				1				
6	Red Deer							4				
7	Fox							2				

Butterflies

Painted Lady Wood White B
Camberwell beauty Swallowtail N
Peacock Comma G
Dingy skipper Holly blue N

Brimstone Northern chequer skipper Green Hairstreak Northern Wall Orange tip Pear bordered fritillary Grizzled skipper