

Sweden in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Report

9 - 14 September 2011

Report compiled by Daniel Green



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Day 1

Friday 9th September

Arrival from the UK in pleasant warm, sunny, calm weather

After arriving from the UK, Hjälvastaviken was our first stop. Plenty of geese were flying around and many were landing not far from the path we were about to walk. We passed some Linnets, Goldfinches, Wheatears and other small birds and soon started to scrutinize the massive geese flocks in front of us. It didn't take long for us to locate the first Lesser White-fronted Geese, and soon a whole flock of at least 20 birds, mainly adults, but also some dark brown juveniles could be studied from a reasonably good distance. This was the first day this autumn with these numbers. The timing of our visit was perfect. Hjälvastaviken is the main Swedish staging area for these (in Europe– nearly extinct) little geese. Three decades ago they were down to ten pairs, and now they have reached, just about, 100 birds. Today the (official) estimated numbers of geese on the site were as follows: Taiga Bean Goose 6.000, Greylag Goose 7.000 and Barnacle Goose 1.000. Needless to say, it's an impressive sight with birds all over the place!

We walked down to the hide/watchtower by the wetlands. There were plenty of birds right next to it, in the water, and on the mudflats - geese and ducks mainly, Teal and Wigeon being the most numerous, amongst Shoveler, Pintail and Gadwall in lower numbers. Overhead raptors were soaring, Marsh Harriers (at least 4), Kestrel, White-tailed Eagle and suddenly an adult Peregrine turned in the air just above our heads, causing a massive commotion amongst hundreds of Lapwings, ducks and waders. The waders deserved some of our attention and among hundreds of Ruff (possibly 300-400), some Dunlins and Ringed Plovers, we also found 2 Greenshanks, 2 Wood Sandpipers, 2 Spotted Redshanks and at least 2 Little Stints. Some Common Cranes were moving by, but we know the area holds many more than we could see today. Instead we gave priority to a first attempt to see Pygmy Owl. Despite a beautiful evening we didn't get any success.

Day 2

Saturday 10th September

As we stepped out onto the hotel veranda, the first garden birds appeared on the feeders; Nuthatches, Great, Blue and also Marsh and Willow Tits. Today we stayed locally and Nutcracker was our first target bird. In a little forest clearing we waited patiently while the traffic of Crested and Willow Tits was going on in front of us. Treecreeper, Great-spotted Woodpecker, and Common Jay all showed up. A trumpeting call made us believe there was a Two-barred Crossbill around, but the bird never showed. Red Squirrels are entertaining with repeated visits.

Nutcrackers were heard repeatedly and seen flying by several times, and when we were just about to leave, finally a bird came down in the glade in front of us and perched in a tree for a while.

Only a few minutes drive away, a little forest lake made a nice stop, and after a while an adult and a juvenile Black-throated Diver swam around and offered good views. A nice walk along the lake was enjoyable. The afternoon was quite hot so a few butterflies were still up flying, a Comma butterfly was a good find for our American guests and some Red Admirals too. Dragonflies were also on the wing, and a Moorland Hawker was caught in the net for more careful identification. Ruby Darters basked on the stones by the water's edge.

Down on the floodplains Nötmyran, in the valley, a soaring Goshawk and a flock of 150 foraging Cranes were the best finds.

The evening by Lake Fläcksjön was warm, sunny, calm and brilliant. On the way out a Great Grey Shrike sat perched just by the roadside. Some 160 Common Cranes were flying in to roost. Water Rails were calling, and Marsh Harriers, and once again White-tailed Eagle showed well (and a possible juvenile), and a dark chocolate brown Honey Buzzard flew by a bit to hastily. Yellow Wagtails were present on the short grass in front of us.

Day 3

Sunday 11th September

Färna ekopark has impressive old growth forest with lots of dead trees, attractive to woodpeckers. Several times Black Woodpeckers flew by or away from us, but without showing really well. A Hobby was calling loudly and showed up a couple of times in a clearing. After a lot of effort a male Grey-headed Woodpecker sat in a treetop calling intensively. Plenty of Great-spotted Woodpeckers were in the area though. Wrens were calling, a Dunnock showed well and some Common Crossbills flew past.

A spontaneous coffee break by a lake gives us two Red-throated Divers (a juvenile and an adult), then two Black-throated Divers and even a flock of another eight Black-throats were soon spotted out on the lake. A few Herring and Common Gulls were also seen. As our local woodpecker guide Michael was behind us, he yelled out Nutcracker! The flying bird perched in a treetop and we crossed the street to get closer. Soon two Nutcrackers appeared and not only did they call loudly and show well, they also proved to be Slender-billed Nutcrackers (!) – the second subspecies of Nutcracker during the weekend. This is the Siberian subspecies that has started to breed in Sweden since the 1990's. This year they are on the move southwards again but it is not known if their origin is Siberian or Swedish. Our individuals were in fact eating the specialities of both species; Cembra pine cones and Hazel nuts. Concave upper mandibles to a very slender and long bill are the best features of the Slender-bills and were clearly visible on these birds. They were also very loud and tame, which is rarely the case with indigenous thick-bills.

We spent time looking for grouse in the forest on our way westwards, but a couple of passing by Long-tailed Tits was the best we get. But suddenly a little group, possibly a clutch of five Black Grouse were sitting by the roadside!

Several were female-coloured but especially one of them was moulting into its black male plumage. Beautiful! Rain stopped our plans for an evening owl excursion but the fantastic dinner at Hellefors herrgård made up for it.

Day 4

Monday 12th September

Some good local knowledge delivered a kick-start to the day. A short pre-breakfast excursion at dawn, just a few minutes drive from the hotel, defied a light rain and produced Pygmy Owl! One bird showed up close by, sitting well perched low in a pine tree just in front of us. Meanwhile a second individual was calling - the particular autumn call of the species from a bit further away - a series of ascending, whistling calls, quite unlike the monosyllabic spring call.

A post-breakfast stroll around the hotel garden, with a little mixed forest, gave Common Jay, Siskins, Song Thrush and Fieldfare, female Blackcap and a young Robin. (Two-barred Crossbills have been seen here lately)

As we descended through the pine-forest dominated Bergslagen area, we made a last stop to try for some grouse and woodpeckers. A walk into an old-growth forest gave only brief views of a Hazel Grouse to some of us, and a Spotted Flycatcher in a treetop. We also saw Goldcrests, Willow Tits and Bullfinch.

The weather was wet, but we had a coffee and waited until the rain stopped and we headed down to the farmlands again. A flyby Buzzard looked to be the 2nd candidate for Honey Buzzard but the view was too fleeting. The sight of thousands of geese was impressive as we stepped out at Hammar, Lake Kvismaren. Most geese in sight just in front of the hide were Taiga Bean Geese, but there were also plenty of Greylags, Barnacles and we found a Pink-footed Goose among the Beans. A Hobby was catching dragonflies just in front of us and at least three White-tailed Eagles appeared on the scene causing mayhem among the geese to fly. A constant noise went on for a couple of hours. Among the geese, plenty of ducks were also visible. We could identify Wigeon, Pintail, Shoveler and of course plenty of Teal. Some juvenile Ruff too. When a Peregrine appeared a cloud of Lapwings and Starlings rose in the air, but several times the falcon singled out Ruff and tried to hunt them down. He failed over and over but in a last attempt he struck a Teal and flew away to sit and eat it in the grass.

Yellow Wagtails and Wheatears fed amongst grazing cattle, along with geese and some Cranes. In the evening 9.000 Cranes and loads of geese flew in to the roost just in front of us. A big male Wild Boar trotting across a field by the roadside was a nice surprise.

Day 5

Tuesday 13th September

There was a strong wind but the rain had passed during the nightly storm. We drove to the western fields where lots of Cranes were foraging. We found a position where we had Cranes all around us and could get excellent views of flocks and family groups. A tour around the western fields gave us only a few more birds, amongst them two Whinchats well perched in some herbs by the road. A juvenile Goshawk flew by with prey in its claws.

Lake Rysjön is very exposed to the wind but it is surprisingly ok up in the higher tower overlooking the lake. An impressive amount of dabbling ducks lay on the surface. For once Mallard was not the commonest species, in fact there were only a few. The most common duck seemed to be Gadwall with some estimated 800 (!) individuals, after that Teal (500), Pintail (300) and Wigeon (200). Amongst them were some Shoveler, Goldeneye, Coots, and a Pochard. In a puddle along the path stood a Wood Sandpiper for a while, which allowed close views. Once again Goshawk was seen and a White-tailed Eagle was performing and flying above us really close. A picnic lunch was enjoyed in a hide by the canal, just across from Lake Rysjön. From here we detected a Smew, diving actively out on the lake, an early find of a normally relatively late northern migrant.

As we were about to walk away from the hide, a juvenile Honey Buzzard was flying towards us and passed close by - a very pale individual with almost Booted Eagle-like appearance. The bird then perched in a tree for a while. We finally had really good views of this species – and a stunning individual. Two Kestrels showed up at the same time.

Hammar Bridge offered yet another good Peregrine show when two birds – a juvenile and an adult – hunted together among hundreds of Lapwings and Starlings. The evening influx became a great experience with Cranes en masse. The light was better than yesterday with some clear skies to the west and the stream of Cranes flying in towards us seemed endless for a while.

Day 6

Wednesday 14th September

Since yesterday was too windy for mist nets and bird ringing (banding) we got a little compensation in the form of a study visit to the Kvismaren Bird Observatory's ringing activity in the lea side of a forested hill. Not many birds were caught but at least a Tree Pipit and a Spotted Flycatcher were nice to see among more common Goldcrests, Blue and Great Tits. Suddenly a Black Woodpecker flew past us just as close as you would like to see them. What a bird! As we left this bird ringing area, a young Hen Harrier appeared just by the road, over a cornfield.

The Oset Nature Reserve was on our way back towards Västerås, and is actually a quite nice little habitat. Some puddles in a lakeside grass area were attracting some birds. The waders were the scene stealers with a noisy flock of eight Spotted Redshanks landing. Already on the site were Dunlins, Ringed Plovers and among them we singled out at least two juvenile Curlew Sandpipers, five Little Stints and possibly a Temminck's Stint. A Marsh Harrier and Sparrow Hawk were in the air.

As we got to the airport the weather improved and we got a last hour of sunshine to relax in before check-in and the flight back to the UK.

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Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; h = heard only; 12k = 12,000; juv = juvenile)

	Common name	Scientific name	September					
			9	10	11	12	13	14
1	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>		2	2+8			
2	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			2			
3	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				2	2	
5	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓				
8	Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>	6000	✓		5000	5000	✓
9	Lesser White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>	20					
10	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	7000	✓		8000	8000	✓
11	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓					
12	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	1000			500	500	✓
13	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	300	✓		1000	1000	✓
14	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	400	✓		500	500	✓
15	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓			800	✓	✓
16	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓			300	✓	✓
18	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓
19	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				1		
20	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fulicula</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
21	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>				3		
23	Smew	<i>Mergus albellus</i>				1		
24	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
25	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		1		1+1		
26	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>						1 juv
27	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>				1 juv		
29	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	2	1		4+	3+	
31	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2	✓		✓	✓	
32	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			2			
33	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1 ad			2	2(ad+juv)	
34	Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>			5			
35	Hazel Grouse	<i>Bonasa bonasia</i>				1		
36	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		h				
37	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
38	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	100+	160	✓	12K	12K	✓
39	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	10			✓	✓	10
40	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	5					
41	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	600	✓	✓	1000	1000	✓
42	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	40			✓	✓	50
43	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	100+			✓	✓	✓
44	Common Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	3					
45	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	2					8
46	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	2					
47	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	2					

	Common name	Scientific name	September					
			9	10	11	12	13	14
48	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
49	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
50	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
51	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			✓			✓
52	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓		✓	✓		
54	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓
55	Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>				2		
56	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>			3+			1
57	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
58	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>			1 male			
59	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
61	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
62	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓				
63	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergii</i>		10		4	4	
67	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓			
68	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
69	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				2		
71	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
72	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
76	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
77	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>				1+1		
78	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓			✓	✓	
79	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓			
80	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				1		1
81	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	
82	Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
83	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
84	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Coat Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓			
87	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			3			
88	Common Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		1	✓			
89	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
92	Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>		1+	2			
93	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	September					
			9	10	11	12	13	14
98	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
99	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
101	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>			✓	✓		
103	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓		✓	✓		
104	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	✓			✓	✓	
105	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				h		
106	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			h	h		
107	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
108	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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