

Central Sweden

Scandinavian Spring

Saturday 5 - Wednesday 9 May 2007 (5 days)

Just a few days – but long ones ! - amongst the wild forests and lakes of central Sweden with Capercaillie, Three-toed Woodpecker, and a wonderful selection of owls. Add breeding waders, Cranes and divers, and some superb hotels and food, and you have the ingredients for a hugely enjoyable tour!

One of the first things that strikes a new visitor to Sweden's forests is the amount of dead timber both standing and lying on the forest floor. Then there is the lush growth of mosses, ferns and flowering plants both on and around the trees; the great variety in the ages of the trees, from huge, gnarled kings of the canopy to dense clumps of saplings in the clearings; and lastly the mosaic of lakes, marshes and bogs within the forest. These woodlands are clearly different to almost anything we have in Britain, and an echo, at least, of the original 'Wildwood' that covered much of Europe before the arrival of man.

And, as befits their wild appearance, these Central Swedish forests are correspondingly rich in wildlife. Nowadays somewhat overshadowed by the renowned taiga forests to the north, these forests have a distinctive and varied fauna and flora of their own, combining elements of the arctic with central European and alpine wildlife.

To the British visitor, the area will be most reminiscent of Scotland, especially the Caledonian Pine Forest of Speyside, and indeed it boasts several birds that we think of as characteristically Scottish: Crested Tit, Osprey, Black Grouse and both Red- and Black-throated Divers. Scottish Capercaillies were originally introduced from Sweden, which remains one of the best places to see them. But in addition to these can be found many continental species: the small and often elusive Hazel Grouse, the pine-loving Nutcracker, three continental woodpeckers – Black, Grey-headed and Three-toed, and, best of all, an excellent concentration of owls, with Pygmy, Tengmalm's, Ural, Great Grey and Eagle Owls all to be looked for. Mammals include the mighty Elk.

The area holds several 'arctic' breeding waders, such as Spotted Redshank, Green and Wood Sandpipers and Ruff, all of which should be displaying now, and we should also see many migrants on their way further north.

We explore the area in the company of the friendly and outgoing local expert Daniel Green, who has designed the following itinerary for us.

Itinerary

Day 1

We take an early morning Ryanair flight from Luton direct to Västerås, the nearest airport, where Daniel will be waiting to greet us.

We start with a short stop at nearby Björnön, a deciduous forest with Icterine Warblers, just around the corner from the airport, and will then head for a small wetland on Ängsö, where several pairs of smart Slavonian Grebes will be seen around their nests, and we may see our first Ospreys. The forests here can be good for woodpeckers, from the huge Black to the tiny Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, and Goshawk can occasionally be seen flying over the treetops.

Later we hope to see the magnificent Ural Owl near a nestbox breeding site before continuing on to our hotel. In the evening we'll be back out again looking for Great Grey Owl and/or Pygmy Owl.

Overnight Sätträbrunn

Day 2

We head out early this morning to a superb area of forest and lakes. Here we hope to see some of Sweden's choice specialities, including the 'monarch of the woods' – Capercaillie. This is prime display time for these most spectacular of grouse species, and we have a good chance of seeing and

hearing the drama of their display. Black Grouse can also be found, and we hope to see them on a lek too. If this was not enough, Cranes breed in the area, and the forests should be resounding to their atmospheric calls. This is also prime woodpecker country, and we hope for both Grey-headed and very local Three-toed Woodpecker. Lakes hold smart Black-throated Diver while singing Wood Lark might turn up along the road, while Wryneck and Red-backed Shrike will be just arriving.

After a good second breakfast in the field, we will visit breeding grounds of Tengmalm's Owls in the hope of seeing them near the nest site.

We spend the afternoon with a bit more relaxed birdwatching at Lake Fläcksjön and surrounding wetlands which have White-tailed Eagle, Black Tern, waders including Ruff and Spotted Redshank in breeding plumage and Garganey.

In the evening we'll have another try for Great Grey Owl and/or Pygmy Owl.

Overnight Sätrabrunn

Day 3

Today it's 'Grouse morning'! We rise early again, to head for another excellent forest where Hazel Grouse can be found along with Capercaillie and Black Grouse. Redstarts and Pied Flycatchers sing along the path, and Black Woodpeckers can again be looked for. A nearby lake has Black-throated Divers and breeding Osprey, while both Common and Parrot Crossbills and Crested Tits can be found in the pines and spruce forest.

We will have a picnic by one of the lakes before heading for a forest feeding station where Nutcrackers, Grey-headed Woodpeckers, smart northern Bullfinches, and northern Long-tailed Tits might turn up.

Overnight Sätrabrunn

Day 4

We'll have a morning birdwatching in beautiful Svartådalen – The Black River Valley.

We explore the vast grasslands, pastures and wetlands of the valley. Red-throated Pipit, Lapland Bunting, Brambling, Dotterel, Short-eared Owl, and several species of ducks, geese and waders might be pausing on their northward migration.

Some Rough-legged Buzzard might be lingering on and of course we look thoroughly for Pallid Harriers that are increasingly abundant in the area with several records each month in spring and autumn the last years.

We dedicate the evening to the wetlands looking and listening for Corncrake, Spotted Crake, Bittern, Thrush Nightingale, etc. After dinner at Sätrabrunn, we'll have a final evening excursion – to the pub! – followed by an excursion to witness the nocturnal display of Jack and Great Snipes.

Overnight Sätrabrunn

Day 5

This morning we head for the Uppland coast. In the shallow coastal lagoons, Caspian Terns can be fishing close by and Little Gulls roost alongside summer flocks of immature Common Cranes. This is an excellent area for White-tailed Eagle, while Montagu's Harriers breed in the area as do large colonies of Cormorants and Grey Herons.

We then head out to nearby Hållnäs peninsula gives us a chance of seeing Red-breasted Flycatcher amidst beautiful virgin forest, as well as breathtaking views over the Baltic Sea.

From the rock "the Eagle Stone" the view over the Baltic Sea is marvellous and we enjoy it over an outdoor lunch on local seafood and fish specialities.

We head back via Hjälstaviken, an extraordinarily good wetland with Little Gulls and much more.

We then head back to Västerås airport for our evening flight back to Luton.

Accommodation

On this trip we stay on very comfortable 3-star countryside hotels with all rooms en suite. We are promised some exquisite Swedish food and drinks!

Principal Leader: Daniel Green

Numbers: Max. 14 clients

Price: £ 1,295

Single supp.: £ 125

Deposit: £ 300 per person

The price is per person, and is fully inclusive of scheduled return economy-class flights London-Västerås, airport taxes, accommodation, all meals, minibus transport, incidental tips, and the services of the leaders.

The price excludes travel insurance, optional tip to the local guide, drinks and other personal expenses.