

Finland - Spring on the Arctic Circle

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Oulu

Day 2/3 Oulu

Day 4 Oulu - Kuusamo

Day 5/6 Kuusamo

Day 7 Fly London



Great Grey Owl, Ural Owl and Black Woodpecker



Introduction

This tour will take you to the westernmost part of the vast Siberian Taiga Forest and is timed for the peak activity of breeding birds, with six nights split across two excellent locations. In June, this Arctic wilderness is alive with activity and on long, bright days we have ample time to find a great range of special species. Timed carefully to capture the peak of activity, this tour covers the coastal areas of Oulu and the vast taiga forests of Kuusamo. The most sought-after highlights of this tour are the northern owls, woodpeckers and the excellent selection of eastern specialities that we shall seek. All the resident owls, woodpeckers, grouse, crossbills, Siberian Jay and Siberian Tit are around and active – so it is sure to be an action-packed tour!

The weather at this time of year is usually clear and fine (but of course highly variable) and days are long in order to give us ample time to try and find our target species. Please note that owl numbers in Scandinavia vary from year to year and are influenced not only by the fluctuating rodent populations but also by several other factors. Whilst all the species outlined below have been seen regularly on previous tours, and we will try our best to find as many as we can, some of the larger owls in particular are by no means guaranteed!

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise the best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Oulu

This morning, we will leave London and fly to Helsinki before transferring to our flight to Oulu, a town on the north-east shore of the Gulf of Bothnia. Here we will be met by our local guide who will take us to our hotel for the next three nights. Depending on the timing and weather, we may spend our first evening outside in search of owls – in particular Pygmy, Tengmalm's and Ural Owls. If vole populations are high, we might well have an encounter with Great Grey Owl and possibly Hawk Owl too.



Great Grey Owl

Day 2/3

Oulu

We will now have two full days to explore this fabulous area and enjoy a super range of special birds. After an early breakfast, we shall make the short journey to a local forest near to Oulu to look for some of Finland's special woodland birds, such as Black and Three-toed Woodpeckers, Black Grouse and possibly the elusive Hazel Hen. Crested Tit, Wood Warbler and Red-backed Shrike all breed in this area too and the habitats at this time of year are alive with activity!

Just south of Oulu, we will visit Liminganlahti. As an internationally important wetland reserve, this site is home to an excellent range of species. We can hope to see Whooper Swan and Common Crane, and breeding waders include Black-tailed Godwit, Greenshank, Common Sandpiper and Curlew, whilst Caspian Tern and Garganey are also possible. Migrants here may include Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Spotted Redshank and Ruff in stunning breeding plumage. Broad-billed Sandpiper also often stop off here.



Finnish Wetland Habitat

This region is best known for its breeding northern owls, and whilst breeding numbers fluctuate from year to year, the breeding species include Great Grey, Tengmalm's, Pygmy, Ural and Short-eared Owls. In most years the area also holds the nomadic Hawk Owl and Long-eared Owl. We will use the very best of the local knowledge to seek out these special birds during our time here. In the weeks before our arrival, our guides will be talking to foresters and other local contacts to find out if these majestic owls are active in the area. With luck, we may have the privilege of watching a Great Grey Owl gliding silently over the meadows or perched in a tree; without doubt, a highlight of any trip to the Arctic taiga.

Day 4

Kuusamo

Depending on the previous day's sightings, we will spend this morning taking a last look at the forests, fields or wetlands around Oulu before departing for Kuusamo, a small town that lies close to the Russian border. Kuusamo is around 200 kilometres to the north-east of Oulu, a journey that takes around 2 hours 45 minutes (without stops) and we shall wind through a tree-covered landscape dotted with lakes and bogs. We will make birding stops along the way with chances to see beautiful Little Gulls and possibly the stunning Smew. We plan to arrive at our hotel late in the afternoon and if time permits, we may venture out into the famous old-growth taiga forests, bogs and lakes near Valtavaara. This is the home of Siberian Jay, Siberian Tit, Waxwing, Hazel Hen and Two-barred Crossbill and we will try our hardest to find as much as possible.

Day 5/6

Kuusamo



Finnish Taiga Woodland

Kuusamo is a very exciting birding destination, and this remote wilderness is full of breeding activity at this time of year. We will have two full days now to explore the habitats here where an enviable number of eastern and northern species breed. The area contains a wonderfully diverse range of habitats – including vast expanses of old taiga forests, many calmly flowing rivers, bogs, and meadows. Here we hope to find such species as Siberian Tit, Siberian Jay, Black and Three-toed Woodpeckers and possibly Red-flanked Bluetail that breed in this area at the far west of their range.

A morning grouse drive may reveal Willow and Black Grouse and with luck even Capercaillie. As we explore, we shall keep a lookout for eastern specialities, including Rustic and Little Buntings, and lakes and bogs are

home to Red-necked Grebe, Goldeneye, Smew, Spotted Redshank, Wood Sandpiper, and Jack Snipe.

In addition to the many special birds on the tour, with luck we may encounter some of the mammals that frequent the area such as Elk, Arctic Hare and Red Squirrel. If there have been owl sightings in this area, we will of course be reacting to that, and the itinerary is kept flexible to try to achieve the best possible sightings in both locations and having three nights in each location gives us ample time to achieve our goals.



Siberian Jay

Day 7

London

After a final look at the local birds, we will begin the drive back to the airport (either Oulu or Kuusamo), birding en route where possible, for our mid-afternoon departure to Helsinki and our flight home to London.

Accommodation

We will be using two hotels on this tour. On arrival in Oulu, we will transfer to a nearby hotel for three nights situated on the edge of Kempele Bay. For our next three nights, we will transfer to another comfortable hotel near Tatanki Lake in Kuusamo. This will be an excellent base from which to explore the area.

Weather

June is late spring in this area of Finland, and you can expect the weather to be around 16/18°C for daytime temperatures but it can still be cool in the evenings and lows may be 7/9°C. Rain is not common at this time of the year but of course very much possible. Warm layers and a light raincoat are the best advice for this tour, and you will be sent a full checklist of recommended clothing on booking as part of the pre-departure pack.

Transport

We will use a minibus throughout, driven by our local guide.

Local Guides

Our local guide for this tour will be members of the Finnature Team of Ornithological Leaders, who have unrivalled knowledge of the birds of the Oulu and Kuusamo areas.

Nesting Bird Sites

On this tour you will be visiting sensitive bird nesting sites.

The safety of breeding birds is of utmost importance, and we ask you to please follow the following rules on this tour:

1. It is NOT allowed to mark any nest sites of birds in any map or GPS applications on phones or any other GPS device.
2. It is NOT allowed to share any nest sites of birds in any public services (eBird, iNaturalist, observations.org or similar, social media platforms etc).
3. It is also NOT allowed to mark or share locations of any birds along the roads leading to nest sites. This is important as we have seen people finding sensitive nesting sites based on the other bird observations shared on the internet, even if the location of the nest itself is hidden.

Instead, to ensure the safety of birds, we recommend **using a common centre, for example the hotel or the town, for all bird observations during the day.**

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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