

Sweden in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Stockholm and transfer Svartådalen.
- Day 2/3** Birding around Svartådalen.
- Day 4** Birding around Svartådalen and fly London.

Departs

May

Focus

Birds

Grading

A. Gentle day walks only

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code SWE02) or the current Naturetrek brochure

Highlights

- Up to 7 species of owl including Great Grey Owl, Ural Owl & Pygmy Owl
- Join local ringers as they ring Ural Owl & Tengmalm's Owl chicks
- Explore the wetlands & forests of Svartådalen
- Icterine Warbler, Thrush Nightingale, Hazel Grouse & Capercaillie
- Three-toed, Grey-headed & Black Woodpeckers
- Slavonian Grebes in breeding plumage
- Migrating waders and terns
- Breeding Black-throated Divers on the forest lakes
- Led by expert local guide Daniel Green



Images from top: Great Grey Owl, Ruff, Svartådalen
Images by Daniel Green, Torbjorn Arvidsson & Paul Stanbury



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Introduction

This spring, why not head north with the migrants on this wonderful short break to central Sweden? Within a couple of hours of leaving the noise and bustle of Heathrow Airport you can be exploring a peaceful rural landscape of forests, lakes and wet meadows, the silence only broken by the trumpeting of a passing flock of Cranes, the 'Crex Crex' call of a Corncrake, or the lively song of a Thrush Nightingale. The patchwork of habitats within and around Svartådalén (the Black River Valley) are home to an exciting variety of northern birds. Here we find ourselves at the southernmost fringes of the boreal forests, that great carpet of conifers - dotted with a myriad lakes - that stretch north to the tree-line and then east and west to wrap the planet's northern-most latitudes in a swath of green. Whilst birds such as Three-toed Woodpecker, Capercaillie and Hazel Grouse are much appreciated by UK birders, the most sought-after denizens of these northern forests are the owls. Here live the great and the small of the owl world, from the diminutive Pygmy Owl to the majestic Great Grey and Eagle Owls. Add to these extremes Ural, Tawny, Long-eared and Tengmalm's Owls, plus an exciting supporting cast of woodpeckers, warblers and waders, and you have the makings of an unmissable long weekend of boreal birding.



Great Grey Owl (Stefan Oscarsson)

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & 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 best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Svartådalén (Black River Valley)

We depart London's Heathrow Airport on an early morning direct British Airways or Scandinavian Airlines flight to Stockholm's Arlanda Airport. Here we meet our English-speaking Swedish tour leader, Daniel Green, and transfer slowly to Svartådalén (the Black River Valley), a couple of hours drive to the north.

En route we will stop beside a small wetland surrounded by oak forest. Here we will look for breeding Slavonian Grebes, resplendent in their summer plumage, plenty of Fieldfare and hopefully encounter the newly arrived Icterine Warblers. After settling into our comfortable guesthouse we will head out to explore the woodlands, fields, lakes and marshes of Svartådalén.

Later in the evening - either before or after dinner - we will go in search of Great Grey and Pygmy Owls. Following a drive of approximately 45 minutes (during which we have a good chance of seeing Elk), we will position ourselves on the edge of the forest, overlooking a meadow, and await the star attraction of our weekend. Over the last 10 years several pairs of Great Grey Owls have moved south into the forests bordering Svartådalén and one particular pair have become especially tolerant of people, often perching, unconcerned, within several metres of their human admirers. The sight of a Great Grey Owl perched on a post or swooping low over a meadow must be one of the most breathtaking in the avian world. They frequently emerge to hunt in broad daylight and are sure to leave us all entranced by their piercing yellow eyes and mesmerising beauty! Having marvelled at one of Europe's largest owls, we turn our attention to the smallest. Pygmy Owls are no larger than a Starling and tend to emerge just before dark. Although difficult to find, Daniel knows exactly where to look and we will end our day in search of this diminutive predator.



Pygmy Owl (Michael Bergman)

Days 2 & 3

Svartådalén (Black River Valley)

We will spend the next two days exploring the mixed habitats of the Black River Valley. Situated in the lowlands of central Sweden, Svartådalén is comprised of attractive farmland studded with pretty little villages of bright, red-painted wooden farmhouses. These are surrounded by lush oak and conifer forests, and lakes and wetlands that lie amongst meadows and pasturelands grazed, unintensively, by cattle and sheep. Common Cranes, White-tailed Eagles, Ospreys and Black Terns characterise the wetlands, whilst Honey Buzzards and Goshawks, and such passerines as Red-backed Shrike, Icterine Warbler, Thrush Nightingale and Redwing breed commonly.

By mid-May northward migration will be in full swing. Wetlands, such as Lake Fläcksjön, are a magnet to a variety of northbound waders including Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Wood Sandpiper and Greenshank. Even Great Snipe have even been found passing through the region in recent years! The fringing reedbeds are home to Bitterns and warblers. These reedbeds are in turn bordered by extensive meadows – many awash with early spring flowers – which hold breeding Whinchat and Yellow Wagtails, over which Hobbys swoop for dragonflies and Goshawks frequently soar.



Sunset over Svartadalen (Daniel Green)

The extensive forests of pine and spruce hold healthy, but secretive, populations of Black Grouse, Capercaillie and Hazel Grouse, the latter often best located by their piercing high pitched whistle. Pied Flycatchers and Redstart are also common here – and more easily seen – along with Willow Tit, Crested Tit, Wood Warbler, Tree Pipit, Cuckoo and Northern Bullfinch. There are also a few butterflies to look out for including Camberwell Beauty, Holly Blue and abundant Green Hairstreaks. Dotted

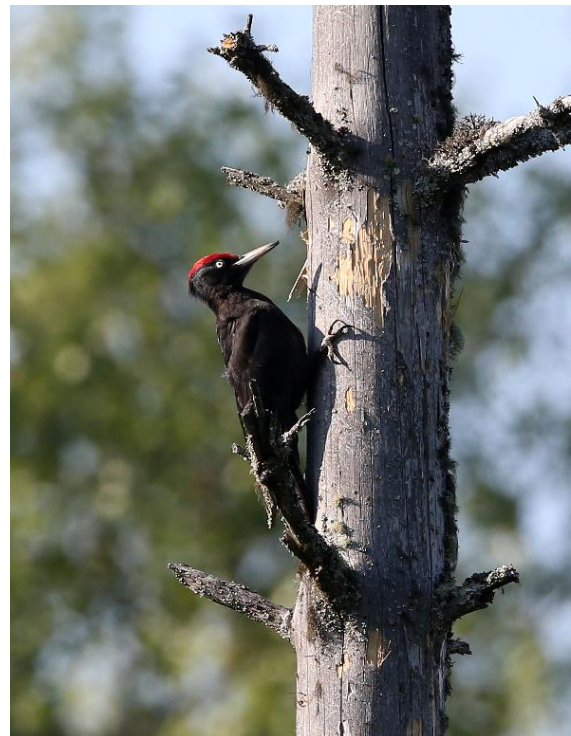


Black-throated Diver (Glyn Sellors)

amongst these forests are thousands of lakes home to graceful Black-throated Divers, resplendent in their breeding dress, Goldeneye, Grey Wagtails and even the occasional Beaver. A range of other mammals also live here including Elk, Red Deer, Roe Deer, Red Squirrel, Brown Hare, Mountain Hare and Pine Marten. Evening excursions provide us with the best opportunity to find a mammal or two, but we would need extreme good fortune to stumble across the most secretive and sought after denizens of these forests, Wolf and Lynx!

Early starts will be the norm on this weekend and on one morning we will rise early to join a local guide in search of the carpenters of the avian world, the woodpeckers. Whilst up to seven species of woodpecker can be found in a single morning, we will be especially looking for the more elusive members of the family, in particular Three-toed Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker and Black Woodpecker. Great Spotted, Lesser Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, plus Wryneck, complete the tally, whilst Parrot Crossbill, Woodlark, grouse and a variety of other birds are also possible on this walk. The first few hours of the day are also a great time to look for Elk.

Whilst there should be the opportunity to return to the Great Grey Owls on another morning or evening, not all owl watching is confined to the hours of dusk and dark. During our stay in Svartådalen we will join local ringers as they ring Ural Owl and Tengmalm's Owl chicks. Since the adult birds usually roost in the nest boxes alongside their young, we hope to be treated to rare and privileged views of these strictly nocturnal owls. Numbers of Tengmalm's Owls tend to cycle and in poor 'owl years' they may be difficult to find. In contrast, Ural Owl numbers are much more stable and, whilst nothing can be guaranteed in the world



Black Woodpecker (Gordon Small)

of wildlife-watching, the ringers usually know the location of several active nest boxes and we stand an excellent chance of being able to watch the ringing of, and photograph, these majestic birds.

On each day we explore this quiet and generally under-exploited landscape via small, winding roads, and on foot, before enjoying a typical Swedish picnic lunch. Then, after a full days birdwatching we will return to our guesthouse for a well-earned evening meal and rest.

Day 4

London

Since our return flight to London Heathrow does not depart until mid-afternoon we have a few hours this morning to complete our exploration of the forests, meadows and marshes of Svartådalén. We will leave the exact itinerary to our local guide, however, allowing a little flexibility to perhaps take one last look at the owls or another search of the forests for grouse. During migration there is a continual turnover of birds, so a final visit to the marshes around Lake Fläcksjön is also sure to be productive with new species to look for and the old favourites such as Cranes, Black Terns, Garganey and White-tailed Eagle to enjoy.

Finally around midday, we must make the two hour drive back to Stockholm's Arlanda Airport for our direct mid-afternoon flight with back to London Heathrow, arriving in the early evening.

Tour grading

Grade A. Gentle day walks only.

Focus

Birds, in particular owls and woodpeckers, and other natural history.

Weather

The weather in Sweden in May is very much as we experience in the UK. It can be very pleasant, sunny and warm (even hot on occasion) but equally cool conditions with showers are possible. The mornings and evenings can be cold, however, and frosts are not unusual. In summary, whilst we hope for warm and sunny weather, be prepared for anything!

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday (except for any meals or snacks you may require during travel to and from Sweden). This is a single centre holiday based at a comfortable guesthouse, just a short distance for the main birdwatching sites. All rooms have private facilities.

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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Female Ural Owl (Daniel Green)