

# Norway's Varanger Fjord

Naturetrek Tour Report

21st – 25th March 2023

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Tour report by Pirita Latja

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Tour participants: Pirita Latja (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Tuesday 21st March**

The group arrived in Ivalo with the evening flight and Pirita welcomed the group at the airport. We drove to our hotel nearby and enjoyed a welcome meal in our hotel in the evening.

## Day 2

**Wednesday 22nd March**

We started the day at 7am with breakfast and started traveling north towards Varanger at 8am. After an hour, we had our first proper birding stop and we visited a roadside café with an amazing bird feeding station. We had the first Pine Grosbeaks and Reindeer already before that along a smaller road. At the café, there were at least 30 more Pine Grosbeaks, singing and chasing each other. Several Siberian Jays and Siberian Tits visited the feeders as well, with Arctic and Common Redpolls. We also had a pair of Parrot Crossbill suddenly amongst the Pine Grosbeaks! Many Red Squirrels were climbing the trees around the feeders.

After a nice break at the café, we headed north again. Not too long after, we stopped for a roadside Hawk Owl! Great views of the owl sitting on top of the trees and flying between. We enjoyed lunch at the Norwegian border. Soon after crossing the bridge and the border into Norway, we spotted four Willow Grouse feeding on the roadside Willows and Birches. Another Hawk Owl gave us great views a bit further along the way.

We reached the Varangerfjord itself and stopped at Nesseby church where we had dozens of Purple Sandpipers. Later on at Vadsø, we had our first Steller's and King Eiders. Seven Steller's Eiders (four males and three females) gave excellent views and the drake King Eider was a stunning sight. We also saw quite a few Red-breasted Mergansers and Long-tailed Ducks, plus plenty of Common Eider. There were Reindeer here and there along the way. The weather turned from all-sunny into a snowy blizzard and after the eventful drive to Vardo, we finally reached our hotel and enjoyed a delicious evening meal.

## Day 3

**Thursday 23rd March**

After breakfast, we headed to the nearby dock for our boat trip to Hornøya bird island. The weather was sunny and the last evening's blizzard was only a memory. Black Guillemots and Common Eiders were swimming in the harbour. After the short boat ride, we arrived at Hornøya. The only birds on the cliffs were Kittiwakes – we saw hundreds and thousands of auks flying over the sea around the island. Luckily, we managed to see Brünnich's Guillemot, Razorbill and some Puffins among the flying Common Guillemots. We also had a few small flocks of King Eiders around the island, as well as Shags sitting on the rocks. A pair of Twites were seen as well!

After a lovely lunch at the hotel, we drove back to the mainland through the tunnel off Vardo island, the idea being to explore the nearby harbours. We soon learned that it was very windy on the mainland and the visibility was very low. We returned to Vardo and checked the shores around the town. We added White-tailed Eagle and Common Scoter to the list and saw another small flock of Steller's Eider as well.

## Day 4

## Friday 24th March

We set off back from Vardo at 8am. After a short drive, we stopped at a small fishing harbour and had the best views of Steller's Eider for the tour. At least 30 individuals were seen at the harbour pool, with Common Eiders and Kittiwakes. We continued and made stops along Varanger Fjord. We had great views of a roadside Red Fox and an adult White-tailed Eagle. We stopped again at Vadso and had two drake King Eiders, as well as four all-white Mountain Hares. We had lunch on the border again, and soon after continuing, we stopped for a Hawk Owl by the road. We arrived at our hotel in Ivalo at 6.30pm. The weather was beautiful the whole day with sunshine.

## Day 5

## Saturday 25th March

Because of the flight being so early, we decided not to make it a hassle and did not do a morning outing before breakfast since it would have involved some hasty packing. Some members of the group saw Bullfinches around the hotel. We enjoyed breakfast in peace and headed for the departing flight at 8am. On the way, we had about 30 Black Grouse feeding on tree tops! It was a great way to end this great tour – but finally it was time to say goodbyes!

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## Species lists

### Birds

	Common name	Scientific name	March 2023			
			22	23	24	25
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	
2	Steller's Eider	<i>Polysticta stelleri</i>	7	7	40	
3	King Eider	<i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	1	15	2	
4	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓	
5	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>		6		
6	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	
7	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓		✓	
8	Willow Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	4		3	
9	Black Grouse	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>				30
10	Rock Dove (Introduced)	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	
11	Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>	✓	✓	✓	
12	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
13	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
14	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓	✓	
15	Brunnich's Guillemot	<i>Uria lomvia</i>		✓		
16	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓		
17	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓		
18	Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>		✓	✓	
19	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		5		
20	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	
21	European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓		
22	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	✓			
23	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		✓	✓	
24	Northern Hawk Owl	<i>Surnia ulula</i>	2		1	
25	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓		✓	
26	Siberian Jay	<i>Perisoreus infaustus</i>	✓			
27	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	
28	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	
29	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	
30	Siberian Tit	<i>Poecile cinctus</i>	4		3	
31	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>	2			
32	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	2			
33	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	2		2	
34	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
35	Pine Grosbeak	<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>	40		1	
36	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				✓
37	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	
38	Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		2		
39	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	10			
40	Arctic Redpoll	<i>Acanthis hornemanni</i>	2			

			March 2023			
	Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25
41	Parrot Crossbill	<i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>	2			
	<b>Mammals</b>					
	Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25
1	Reindeer	<i>Rangifer tarandus</i>	✓		✓	
2	Grey Seal	<i>Hypochoerus grypus</i>		3		
3	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	✓			
4	Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>			4	