

Sweden in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

9 - 12 May 2013



Common Blues



Ortolan Bunting



Three-toed Woodpecker



Ural Owl

Report compiled by Daniel Green
Images courtesy of Steve Carter



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Day 1

Thursday 9th May

Only minutes from the airport we simply had to stop by a sewage/ drainage pond since a flock of Gulls was showing by the shore; Black-headed Gulls and Herring Gulls a Baltic Gull – and Lesser Black-backed Gull of the Baltic race fuscus – with a totally jet-black back stood out well. By the shore were 2 Wood Sandpipers, a Little Ringed and we also saw a few Coot, Goldeneyes and Tufted Ducks too. Our next – and first proper stop – was where we enjoyed sandwiches, potato salad and hot drinks. After the break we walked down to a watchtower by the lake and were soon rewarded by several Ruffs, Wood Sandpipers, Yellow Wagtails of both Nordic races, and a whole flock of Cranes flying out from the reedbeds, well over 70 birds altogether. The lagoon was teeming with birds and not only the regular colony of hundreds of Black-headed Gulls but also beautiful, pink-washed Little Gulls (20), Black Terns (10) and Arctic Terns (30) amongst breeding Common Terns. Ducks included Gadwall, Wigeon, Teal, Pochard and several pairs of Shoveler. Marsh Harrier and Hobby patrolled the sky and just as we were about to leave the hide, a Rough-legged Buzzard appeared above us, soaring higher and higher until it disappeared in the misty clouds. Whinchats and Wheatears were entertaining on the walk back.

As we passed the outskirts of the town Västerås a male Peregrine was soaring above the nearby suburb. A garden with some bird feeders proved to be more than interesting with 4-5 Hawfinches showing really well here, and amongst them were some Bullfinches, Yellowhammers, Nuthatch (of the Scandinavian race), Marsh Tit, Goldfinches, and the more common Great- and Blue Tits of course.

After this we headed for the B&B and an early dinner. But the evening drew us back out. We wanted to look for Great Grey Owl tonight and we carefully scanned the forest clearings in the best areas. After three sites we are almost about to give up, but then we heard the majestic call of the bird...it was a male Great Grey Owl sitting just across the meadow but inside the forest. We waited quite some time and it was a very atmospheric experience to listen to the repeating call but the bird remained invisible.

Day 2

Friday 10th May

We had a relaxed start at 8 o'clock before heading out in the surroundings.

We started with some flooded farm fields where some nice summer-plumaged Ruffs were showing, together with Greenshanks, Wood Sandpipers, Whimbrel and dabbling ducks like Wigeon, Shoveler and 2 lovely male Garganey. Skylarks were filling the sky with their optimistic song. Down in the flooded birch forest a Thrush Nightingale sang intensively and we didn't have to wait long until it showed really well in the bushes in front of us. An Osprey had just caught a fish in the lakeside in front of us and it looked to be a rather heavy pike. Two Beavers were swimming in the same lake – Lake Fläcksjön.

We drove towards the pine forest but made a stop in a felling area with a few stands of deciduous trees and pines. It looked promising and just as we turned our heads a big Moose stood out in the open, running away as we stopped the vehicle. A Woodlark was flushed in front of us and a Cuckoo was calling. We heard a Wryneck as well but only the Cuckoo showed – it showed well though. It was lively around us, a family group of Crossbills were loud and noisy in the pine trees above and we examined them carefully but they prove to be Common Crossbills. Suddenly a Black Woodpecker came flying along and soon it perched in the open, a female - which we can tell from the red patch on the back of the head. A Lesser Whitethroat sang. A bit further down the track we wanted to find a more obliging Wryneck, we didn't get any success with that but when we imitated the call of Pygmy Owl we got a better response. First a couple of Yellowhammers, Bullfinches, another group of Common Crossbills and a Crested Tit turned up to mob the potential enemy and then we heard a distant call from the real thing - a Pygmy Owl. We had to go a bit closer but there it sat, reluctant to move from its favourite perch half way up a pine tree. Luckily it was quite approachable. At the same time another Black Woodpecker appeared, flying by and sitting in a dry tree. Dunnock, Lesser Whitethroat and Siskin added to the experience at this site.

Then we went Ural Owl ringing. But the first box was holding an exception...here we looked at a Tawny Owl drawn out from the box by the experienced ringer. A Wood Warbler sang. The next box got a careful approach but the female Ural Owl escaped before the ringer Kjell-åke got to it. However when he raised the ladder to the tree, she flew in to attack, most probably the eggs had hatched and she's got little ones in the box. The male was calling not far away as the female swooped in. After this, a beautiful Ural Owl female was taken out of another nest-box to be ringed and after a short portrait session she was released to fly up into the trees – she perched well in the open for a while before returning to her 2 downy little 4-day old chicks.

Our after-dinner excursion was to a new area, and we were soon in awe at the sight of a Great Grey Owl sitting on a nest, on a birch tree stump. It was not far from the track and we stayed by the van to admire this fantastic creature as she sat with hanging wings on the seemingly all too narrow treetop. After a quarter of an hour we left her in peace to go to a nearby clearing to have coffee. A Pygmy Owl suddenly turned up in a treetop, was mobbed by a male Redstart and came closer and closer until it sat really well perched in a nearby tree. It was still sitting there when 2 Moose calves came running through the forest and stopped in front of us in the clearing. We don't think too much of that, however, when we were about to enter the van again, 2 Wolves stepped out on the forest road some 30 metres away!! I had to whisper and scream at the same time WOLF! WOLF! to get the group looking in the right direction. Surprisingly, the wolves lingered on the road, until one of them soon disappeared but the other – probably young and a little curious – walked slowly away, and turned around to look at us! It was 9pm and the light was not very low yet. Wow, wow, wow! What an experience!

We drive around to increase the chance of another glimpse from the road but they didn't show up again. Several Woodcocks sat on the road in front of us though and when we came to a lake, a Moose was swimming against the sunset sky. We moved to where we could see it get up on dry land before we drove back home. What a night!

Day 3

Saturday 11th May

Early this morning we went on a quest for Woodpeckers with Michael. Three-toed Woodpecker came easy and a bright yellow-capped male was excavating what seemed to be a possible new nest (they breed very late these birds). A Hazel Grouse was heard and despite efforts to lure it out in the open it only responded to calls but remained in the dense cover of the young spruce forest it so much likes to hide in. The first Spotted Flycatcher of the year and likewise Red-backed Shrikes appeared. Wrynecks were heard but didn't show up either. A Red-throated Diver was seen on a bog lake and a pair of Black-throated Divers was more obliging a bit later on.

After dinner we went to a sand quarry to look for Eagle Owls. It is a rather big habitat and not always easy but sharp eyes soon located the normally invisible male sitting on the side of a pile of gravel on the ridge opposite our elevated view point. We also located the female who was lying on the nest and known to have three little chicks under her. The request for this last evening was to try the hunting ground for Great Grey Owls again for the chance to see them hunt in the open. Several Moose were seen on the way there, even a Bull with antlers, but the Owl did not appear. A pair of White-tailed Eagles perched up in a tall tree by a lake along the way was a good sighting though. On the way back we stopped one final time at the bridge over the Black River to enjoy the remnants of the sunset that had left fine colours on the north-western sky. A Bittern was booming and Common Snipe was drumming.

Day 4

Sunday 12th May

We had a pre-breakfast excursion to the forest to look for Grouse. Already the first stop was rewarding, a Hazel Grouse male flew past the road in front of us and sat up in a tree, for once this super-elusive bird was in the open and showed quite well, even to the degree that we had time to put a telescope on him, before he disappeared into the forest.

On foot we approached a bog where Black Grouse go to lek. A Raven was calling and the Grouse seemed to have been put off by something, maybe a 4-footed predator? They sat around in nearby treetops but out of sight and bubbling. Meanwhile Willow Tits, Brambling, Golden Plover, Wood Sandpipers and Curlews were heard. We drove around the forest tracks some more to look for Grouse and a male Black Grouse was spotted in the vegetation by the road, also a furry mammal was seen by 2 of us, very close but in very dense cover, they later agreed that it must have been another Wolf!

Back for a last proper breakfast at the hotel and then we started our journey southwards towards the airport. A good stop by a newly restored lake offered plenty to see: first a local twitch was going on with a small crowd pointing our attention to an American avian visitor, a male American Wigeon, swimming with a Eurasian Wigeon male to offer comparison.

Around 10 Slavonian Grebes were also good to see and several Wood Sandpipers, Common Cranes, Marsh Harriers and after a while a summer plumaged Spotted Redshank! Two Wrynecks were calling around us but did not show this time either. We only moved a little bit down the track and then it was time to enjoy a final Owl – the 6th of the weekend – a Long-eared Owl lying in an old crows-nest in a birch tree. Red-necked Grebe showed just nearby too. One final quest for this trip remained and it was in another sand quarry...an Ortolan Bunting! A well coloured male sang and appeared well in sight. A Wood Warbler also sang as we enjoyed a final picnic lunch of smoked salmon and sandwiches before continuing the journey home...

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Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; h=heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			9	10	11	12
1	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>			2	
2	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			1	
3	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>				10
5	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	2			
6	Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>			1	
7	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓		
8	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓			✓
9	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	200			
12	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>		2		
16	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓		
19	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	2			1
20	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fulicula</i>	✓	✓		✓
21	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		✓		
23	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1			
24	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	2	2		2
25	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	1			
27	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		1	2	
28	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
29	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				✓
30	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		1		
31	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1			
32	Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>		1		1+H
33	Hazel Grouse	<i>Bonasa bonasia</i>			H	1 male
34	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓			
35	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓		✓
36	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	80	✓	✓	✓
37	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	1			

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			9	10	11	12
38	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>				✓
39	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	10	10		10
41	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		1		
42	Common Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			3	1
43	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓		✓
44	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>				1
45	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓	10		✓
46	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	6	20		20
48	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				2
49	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	10			
52	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	1			
56	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	30			
58	Black Tern	<i>Chilidonias niger</i>	10			
59	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>				1
63	Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>			2	
64	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		1		
65	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>		5		
66	Great Grey Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>	H	1		
67	Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>		2		
68	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		2	2	2
69	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		2		
70	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓		✓	
71	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>			1	
73	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓		
74	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	2			
77	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			9	10	11	12
78	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
79	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓
83	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
84	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>		2		✓
85	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		✓		
86	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	✓	✓		✓
87	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓		
88	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓		
94	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>		3	✓	✓
95	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				✓
96	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		2		
97	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓	✓
99	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			✓	
100	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
101	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>		✓	✓	✓
103	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>		✓	✓	
104	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			1	
107	Common Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓	✓	
108	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
109	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>			2	
110	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
112	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
113	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
114	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
115	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
116	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
117	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			9	10	11	12
118	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
119	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	5			
120	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
121	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
122	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	
123	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		✓		
124	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	3	3		
125	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		20+		
126	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
127	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓			✓

Mammals

1	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>			✓	
3	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>		2		1
4	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓	✓	
5	Eurasian Elk	<i>Alces alces</i>	1	6		3
6	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓		
8	Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>		2		
9	Red Squirrel	<i>(Sciurus vulgaris</i>			✓	✓



Whooper Swans on Lake Flackebo