

Sweden in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

16 - 19 May 2013



Three-toed Woodpeckers



Ural Owl



Tengmalm's Owl nest



Female Capercaillie

Report compiled by Daniel Green
Images courtesy of Sarah-Jane Eastman



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Day 1

Thursday 16th May

Only a few miles from the airport the first Black Woodpecker came flying by, crossing the road in front with its unmistakable, undulating flight. A first stop at a roadside sewage pond gave 4 Baltic Gulls and the first Goldeneyes, Tufted ducks, Common-, Herring- and Black-headed Gulls. Some nearby Fieldfares were entertaining with rattling summer calls and worms in beaks.

Hjälstaviken is an accessible reed-fringed lagoon that offers a nice picnic stop for our sandwiches and potato-salad and coffee. After that we enjoyed a light walk down to the lake watchtower and saw plenty of birds. A 50-headed flock of Barnacle Geese and 2 much delayed Bean Geese grazed the meadows together with the regular Greylags. Little Gulls (20 or more), Black Terns, (5) and even Arctic Terns (10) were among more plentiful Common Terns and hundreds of Black-headed Gulls. Shoveler, Gadwalls and Pochards amongst Great-crested Grebes and Coots showed nearby. Further away in the reedbeds many Cranes gathered whooping loudly every now and then as small flocks came and went. Osprey, several Marsh Harriers and 2 Hobbies just above our heads were the raptors on display. Yellow Wagtails and Reed Bunting showed really well on the fence by the path. A Thrush Nightingale was singing by the car park as we went down to the wetland, but we could never localise it in the dense vegetation. Now as we were about to leave however, it suddenly sat just by the road and showed extremely well for some time, also giving samples of 3 different calls.

We could not resist a look at another wetland just by the road. That was a rewarding call, with several male Ruffs in summer plumage, Greenshanks (6) and Wood Sandpipers (10) were soon identified, the Ruffs all appearing in different plumages with black collars, striped collars or ginger hoods, amazing birds! At the back of the mudflats 2 Temminck's Stints were also picked up by sharp eyes, and there was a good selection of northern waders there too.

After dinner we headed out to look for Owls. Two Moose showed almost instantly as we drove down the track with surrounding lakes, meadows and forests. After scanning several meadows and looking at several roding Woodcocks, a Pygmy Owl popped up in a treetop, whistling its fluty short call on repeat. It soon sat very close against the evening sky and even though the light was poor the views in the telescope were not bad. On the way back to the B&B a Red Fox and a Wild Boar were seen in the dusk.

Day 2

Friday 17th May

This morning the weather was lovely, and some of us had already heard and seen Black Woodpeckers just outside their hotel rooms. We went down to one of the nearby lakes and there was a pleasant temperature, blue skies, sunshine and not much wind. We instantly heard the charming calls of Black Terns and at least 40 birds are busy hovering over the nest site. A White-tailed Eagle sat in a tree across the lake but after a while it showed up closer, soaring on majestic wings, showing a pure white tail, revealing its age as adult. 2 Wrynecks were entertaining around us, singing and posing for an unusually long time on Ash tree branches still without leaves. Spotted and Pied Flycatchers were also appearing in the trees around us. A male Garganey swam in the shallow water beneath. Cranes started to soar above us and flock after flock appeared until at least 150 birds altogether were counted. Loads of just-arrived Swifts were adding to the ambience of a spring in full bloom.

Further down the lake we stopped at the sight of a hovering Osprey. It gave us fine views for a long time and we seized the moment to enjoy a cup of coffee as we scanned this part of the wetland for more birds. A stop by a felling area gave us the first Long-tailed Tits and a singing Blackcap. A little outburst of butterfly activity generated Comma, Peacock and a rare Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell and a fine Camberwell Beauty, that didn't hang around long. It would show better later on though.

On our way up through the pine forest we stopped to look for Hazel Grouse, but Willow Tits and a soaring Sparrowhawk is what we got. Just as we sat down by a cool, remote, little forest lake to have lunch, a Honey Buzzard came flying straight towards us, gliding slowly and rather low above us, soon followed by an Osprey and soon after that a Hobby. What a hotspot! Some Common Sandpipers were lively on the nearby rocks along the shore. The trilling song of a Wood Warbler was heard and we walked towards it. It proved to be at least 2 males singing and displaying with fluttering wings in the birch trees around us and possibly a female calling as well.

Next we went to go Ural Owl ringing. We met with Kjellåke – an experienced Ural Owl ringer and researcher. He took us to a clearing with a nest box and we slowly approached with a net and a ladder. Kjellåke simply reached for the Owl in the box with his hand and took out the female. It showed that one of the 2 eggs had just hatched and a tiny chick was sitting on the floor of the box. She proved to be an old friend who was breeding again after a 4 year absence. This Ural Owl female was at least 10 years old. After release she sat up in tree for a good while offering really good views. A Yellowhammer and a Dunnock sang while we enjoyed a coffee in the shadows.

After dinner we went on an excursion to a new area where a summer-plumaged Black-throated Diver in superb evening light on a forest lake with a mirrored surface appeared unexpectedly close, only swimming slowly away from us. Soon we stopped to breathlessly view a Great Grey Owl, sitting on the top of a broken birch tree stump. She was lying on eggs or possibly small chicks, hardly honouring us with more than a glance. We soon moved away to leave her in peace but it didn't take long until we saw the male flying in to deliver an evening meal. When we come back for a last view she was almost standing on her head in the little bowl under her...feeding small chicks perhaps?

A Pygmy Owl started to call, soon a 2nd one appeared together, most certainly male and female - the females calls are high pitched (almost hazel grouse-like begging call), which is also used by the chicks. Woodcocks were roding. A Green Sandpiper flew up in front of the van over and over again, with its pure white rump glowing like a lantern in the falling dusk. Several Woodcocks also got flushed from the road, but eventually one of the silhouettes didn't look quite right...simply because this one was a Nightjar! It landed on the road in front of us and sat flat in the beams of the light. When we got out to play its call it came flying towards us over and over again, uttering squeaky, strange calls. This was obviously a male with its white wing markings. What a mysterious and beautiful bird! The Nightjar was species number 100 for the trip so far.

Day 3

Saturday 18th May

We had an early morning drive to Färna ekopark where Three-toed Woodpecker is one of our target species. Soon our woodpecker expert Michael showed us an active nest where both male and female appeared and suddenly interacted in courtship in front of us. What a sight! A pair of Treecreepers was nesting in the same stump, only giving quick views as they shot in and out of the nest. A Capercaillie female appeared on the roadside and became a welcome addition to the, so hard to see at this time of year, sought-after Grouse. A Grey-headed Woodpecker whistled a bit but didn't show more than flying. These birds are a bit tricky this year. Crested Tits, Robins and Redwings were all heard but also reluctant to show. A Red-throated Diver was a bit distant but a good find for the list. The Black-throats however showed much better on another forest lake. Here we got much better views of a Camberwell Beauty perched up in a tree but which finally offered excellent views. On the way back a male Red-backed Shrike showed well perched up on a dry stump in a felling area.

Tonight we tried something different. First we looked at the Eagle Owl on its nest. The female was still there and we knew that her eggs had hatched and she had 3 little ones under her. The floodplains – vast, wet, grass areas by the meandering river is an open habitat, Curlews and Wheatears were added to the list and we had a friendly chat with the local veterinarian. Some expressed a taste for more waders and we decided to try a flooded field a bit off the beaten track but still in the farmlands of the valley. The field had dried up quite a bit but 2 Whimbrels and some Wood Sandpipers still fed out here, a flock of 15 Whooper Swans too. A mammal was then spotted in the open, just south of us...wow, it was a Wolf! No, in fact, 2 Wolves! They show well but they steadily moved towards the damp birch forest. We all got 'scope views but I said, let's wait quietly and see if they don't come out here in front of us, to chase the Swans... it didn't take many minutes until they come out right where expected, much closer and within perfect view from our slightly elevated position. They now started to close in on the flock of Swans standing on dry ground and naturally they fly away before the Wolves got within reach. The Wolves looked around, the male and the female separated a bit but they gave excellent views as they slowly moved up the field towards the adjacent forest. We enjoyed watching them in the lovely evening sunlight for almost 30 minutes altogether. They were very beautiful, fully grown animals with pure white chins, most likely an Alpha pair, and the female even looked pregnant! Good news for the Wolf population in the area (now consisting of no less than 6 territories). The Wolves finally disappeared into the forest leaving us in awe. Luckily we had the right goods with us so we opened a bottle of locally produced Cloudberry wine and celebrated this amazing encounter!

We finished the evening by going down to the lake to listen for some Bitterns; it was a bit more quiet today, but on the third stop a Bittern was booming and a lovely choir of Thrush Nightingales sang loudly and very close to the van. A Grasshopper Warbler added to the chorus.

Day 4

Sunday 19th May

We had a very early morning rise in a last effort to see some more forest birds. We got to see some lovely Crested Tits up close and well, and a late Brambling and another Honey Buzzard. Black Woodpecker once more had been seen near the hotel and the garden feeders offered a steady stream of Siskins, Bullfinches, Tree Sparrows and Nuthatches. Red Squirrels also appeared every now and then. In another garden we enjoyed Marsh Tits and more Bullfinches and Goldfinches. Not until the third stop were we rewarded with the king of finches – Hawfinch – as 3 gorgeous birds appeared together with plenty of Goldfinches, Greenfinches and even Yellowhammers on our garden feeding station to the south of the Black River area. A last stop at a lake en route was where we enjoyed Slavonian Grebes and Red-necked Grebes in full summer plumage. A great finale was the Long-eared Owl lying in her nest up in an old Crow's nest in a birch tree, showing her sweet face and ear-tufts.

Just before the airport we had time to look at Ortolan Buntings on a sandy ridge and no less than 3 males sang and one showed well. It was a nice end to a truly successful spring break in central Sweden. No less than 132 bird species were seen and heard. The Wolves might however be contender for highlight of the trip!

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Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recoded but not counted; h = heard only; m/f = male/female)

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			16	17	18	19
1	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>			1	
2	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			1	
3	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>				2
5	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>				5 – 6
6	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	1		
7	Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>			2h	1h
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	
9	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓			✓
10	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>	2			
13	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	50			
14	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>			2 m	
16	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓	✓
17	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	2	1		
18	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	3		✓	✓
19	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	3 m		8 m	✓
21	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	3 m			1
22	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓		✓
23	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1	1		
25	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	3	2		2
26	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		1	2 +	1
27	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓		✓
28	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		2		
29	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	2	✓	✓	
30	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		2		✓
31	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	2	1	✓	
32	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1			
33	Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>			1 f	
34	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	4	1		
35	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓		✓
36	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓	150	20	20
37	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	1			

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			16	17	18	19
38	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	2			
40	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	10 +			
41	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			2	
42	Common Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			2	
43	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	6		✓	
44	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓	1	✓
45	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	10		✓	
46	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		2		
47	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	✓	✓
48	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	✓	✓	✓	
49	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	20		2	
50	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	4			
54	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>				2
55	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	10			
57	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	4	40+		
58	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		1	✓	
60	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>				1
62	Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>			2	
63	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H		4	
64	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>		2		
65	Great Grey Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>		2		
66	Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>	1	2		
67	Tengmalm's Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>			1	
68	Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		1 m		
69	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		2	✓	
71	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	1	2	✓	
72	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓		
73	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>			1	
74	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>			2	
76	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			16	17	18	19
78	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓		✓
79	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓	✓	✓
80	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓			✓
81	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergii</i>	✓			
83	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	
84	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	
85	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			✓	✓
86	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	1		4	✓
87	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	2	✓	✓	✓
88	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			2	
89	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓	✓	
93	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓	
94	Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>			1 h	
95	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			h	
96	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			h	
97	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓		
98	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>			✓	
99	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	✓			✓
100	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		2		
101	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓	
103	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		2	✓	
104	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>				2
106	Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>		✓	✓	
107	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>			✓	2
108	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
109	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			3	
111	Common Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			✓	
112	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	
113	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>			1 m	1 m
114	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
115	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
116	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
117	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			16	17	18	19
118	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>				1
119	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
120	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
121	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓		✓
122	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
123	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>				3
124	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
125	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	
126	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
127	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	2		✓	
128	Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>		2	✓	✓
129	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
130	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓	✓	✓
131	Oortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>				3 m
132	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓			

Mammals

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



Common Crane



Common Rosefinch