

# Sweden in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

8th – 11th May 2025



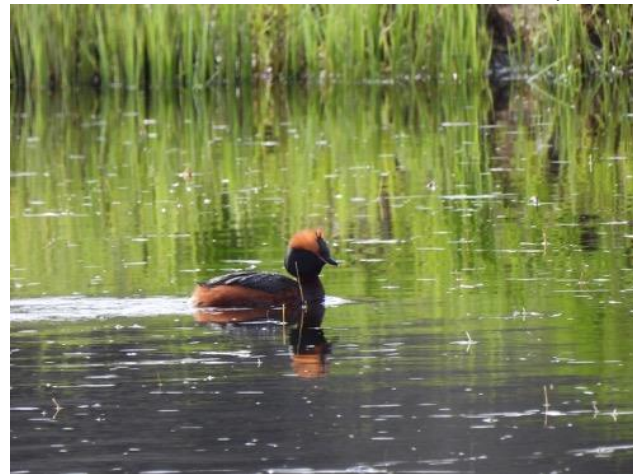
Ural Owl



Great Grey Owl



Ruff



Slavonian Grebe

Tour report by Dominic Couzens, photos by Pim Smal



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Tour participants: Daniel Green and Dominic Couzens (leaders) with eight Naturetrek clients

This was an amazing long weekend, visiting multiple sites and seeing almost every target species. The overall total of 136 species is probably a record for this tour, and among the many highlights were good or great views of Ural, Pygmy, Great Grey and Eagle Owls, a fantastic Black Grouse lek, Ruffs in breeding plumage and several rarities, such as Lesser White-fronted Goose. There were late nights and early mornings, but the rewards were great.

## Day 1

**Thursday 8th May**

After catching the 06.40 flight from Heathrow, we found ourselves birding by the middle of the day, first visiting the woods and meadows of Hjälstaviken, not far from Stockholm. Pied Flycatchers serenaded us as we ate a packed lunch, while a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were calling and drumming, often giving excellent views.

Moving on to the meadows and boardwalk, it was clear that water levels were high. Happily, this meant that the 20 or so Ruffs present were often swimming as well as walking and allowed us to approach to just a few metres away, giving extraordinary and prolonged views of all the stunning different plumages. There were many Wood Sandpipers around, too, and we could hear Reed, Sedge and Savi's Warblers singing, the last named a recent colonist in the area. Several White-tailed Eagles flew over, one magnificently dwarfing a nearby Osprey.

A quick transfer to the other side of the same reserve allowed us to enjoy some superb birding. Quite apart from the Caspian and Black Terns flying over the lake, the area was something of a goose-fest, with about 500 Barnacle Geese in the vicinity and a few flocks of White-fronted Geese, one of which contained a real bonus in the shape of two Lesser White-fronted Geese, new to many people. A Goshawk was also spotted over a distant wood, while all the while, Cranes were apparently flying off north – we counted 550 altogether.

After this cracking start we made our way to our hotel in Skultana. After dinner, we made a short drive in the local area, spotting plenty of Moose (Elk) and Brown Hares, along with birds such as Little Gull and several Whinchats. We weren't long, though, as everyone was in need of sleep!

## Day 2

**Friday 9th May**

Our first stop today was the lovely old-growth forest of Fermansbo Urskog, where we spent some considerable time enjoying the atmosphere and hoping for Pygmy Owl. The latter eventually came into view, sitting on the top of a conifer and staring at us with its piercing yellow eyes, as if we'd been rude about its mother. It was being mobbed by several, equally excellent species, including Willow and Crested Tits. We also had a brief view of Black Woodpecker.

Not far away, in another part of the reserve, we had a date with a Hazel Grouse. Love didn't really blossom, in that the bird flew across the track once and flew towards us once, then disappearing into the forest. However, most people did see it. Ravens flew over, calling loudly.

We drove on to Öjesjöbrännans ekopark, where we hoped to see divers on the lake there. They weren't around, although we enjoyed seeing many Cranes flying about and hearing some good bird songs, such as Garden Warbler

and Lesser Whitethroat. The highlight for many, though, was listening to the song of at least two Wrynecks and enjoying delightful views of them.

Plans then went into overdrive, as Daniel informed us that he had made arrangements for us to watch monitoring and ringing of some Ural Owls chicks back near Skultana. Watching at a safe distance, Daniel and his son took both the brooding adult female, plus three chicks, out of the nest box to check them, allowing us to get the most incredible views of this glorious northern forest-dweller – an incredible treat.

And it wasn't the last of the day, either. After a very early dinner, we made the long drive (90 minutes) to Söderbärke, where a forester had by chance unearthed the nest of a Great Grey Owl. Since we knew it was incubating, we weren't gambling too much, but it was still a fantastic privilege to see this magnificent animal, with its growth-ring-patterned facial discs, sitting peacefully upon its nest on a side-branch of an old tree, well worth the journey. On the return journey a few of us saw a Capercaillie fly across the track, and we saw several Woodcock during the evening.

## Day 3

## Saturday 10th May

Capercaillie was the target this morning, too, visiting the site of a lek at Fiskkraken. Unfortunately, the main activity for the season was over and we didn't see anything much, except for some Common Crossbills flying over. We also visited several lakes that should have been brimming with divers but weren't.

We decided to divert for coffee and, of course, that brought the birds in. We were soon listening to the lovely song of Wood Warbler at Farna ekopark, and enjoying excellent views of both Black-throated (very close) and Red-throated Divers, as well as being fortified with caffeine.

Several Swedish locations are well-known for their feeding stations, and we visited one of these at Vasteras, which was brimming with common birds, including Yellowhammers and Tree Sparrows. After enjoying our fill, we transferred to Bemstamma, where Daniel knew of a potential site for Grey-headed Woodpeckers. As it turned out, this was woodpecker heaven. Not only did a male Grey-headed appear, but three Black Woodpeckers did, too, giving superb views – and there was also a Great Spotted on the same tree as the Grey-headed. This all happened while we were enjoying lunch. We also found Wolf scats here.

After a short but welcome rest, we took another very early dinner and set off out. The evening was two-pronged, with a trip to the fabulous wetland at Frövisjön followed by another owl stake-out. The lake was absolutely wonderful, with a fulsome selection of birds, including several good ducks such as Shoveler, Pochard and even Garganey. There were Cranes on the nest, lots of Marsh Harriers, Black Terns and many other treats, simply wonderful.

After this, we made another long trip to the quarry at Hedåker, where an Eagle Owl had been breeding in previous years. After a long wait, and at the very edge of dark, one eventually appeared, giving superb if distant views, an end to a very owlish day.

## Day 4

## Sunday 11th May

Most of us who weren't too tired set off at 05.00 to visit the Black Grouse lek at Hoskovsmossen, and absolutely nobody regretted it. What a stunning place, and on a perfect May morning, too. There were 21 displaying males, making a very loud dove-like cooing, interspersed with explosive sounds, as well as fighting and displays. We also saw the birds dispersing. Curlews and Cranes added their own sounds into the mix, ecstatic bubbling and loud clanging respectively. Among the singing birds nearby was a cracking male Red-backed Shrike. On the way back, we stopped at Rorbosjön for a beautiful Montagu's Harrier, and at Hällsjön, where a Bittern was booming and we briefly caught sight of an Otter. Not bad for a before-breakfast jaunt!

After a quick look behind the hotel at Skultuna to look for Grey Wagtail, we set off for Salbohed, where by the large lake we had great views of Osprey and White-tailed Eagles, as well as another Montagu's Harrier. There were several waders here, as well as some distant terns, one of which was a migrant Arctic Tern. After this, we spent a great deal of time at Fläckebo, trying to spot a Thrush Nightingale that was singing lustily from the thickets on the roadside. Eventually, most people did at least see something, though for most it was only a glimpse.

We enjoyed coffee at Daniel's house nearby, where we particularly appreciated the sumptuous plumage of the Northern Bullfinches, as well as many other finches and Nuthatch.

It was time to head south towards the airport, and our late afternoon flight. There was still time to visit the splendid Hammarskogs naturreservat, where among the screaming Black-headed Gulls was a gorgeous pair of Red-necked Grebes, as well as Goldeneye, Snipe and other common waterfowl. We also tried vainly to find Coal Tit, missing from our list, in the surrounding woodland. There was also just time to visit one more place, a small lake near Håbo-Tibble. Here we had point-blank views of many of the 10 or so pairs of Slavonian Grebes that were nesting there – and there was also a bonus Red-necked Grebe among them. Replete with experiences and species, we made our way to the airport.

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Black-throated Divers



Common Cranes



Wood Sandpiper



Grass Snake

## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025			
		8	9	10	11
Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>			✓	
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			2	
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>				3
Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>				10
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		✓	✓
Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>			H	H
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	2			
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		1	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	2	✓	✓	✓
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025			
		8	9	10	11
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	2	✓	✓	✓
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	500			
White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	200			
Lesser White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>	2			
Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓		✓	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓		✓	✓
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	1		1	✓
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>			1	
Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	2		✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	1	✓	✓
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			1	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fulicula</i>			✓	✓
Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			2	
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1			
Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	1			
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	1			
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			1	2
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	3		✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	✓		✓	✓
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	2	2	✓	✓
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓		1	✓
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1			
Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>		1		
Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>				21
Hazel Grouse	<i>Bonasa bonasia</i>		1		
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			1	✓
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H		H	H
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓		✓	✓
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓		✓	✓
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	550+	✓	✓	✓
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	1	✓
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	20		2	
Common Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>				✓
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	1			
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>				5
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1			1
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		H		1
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	✓		✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025			
		8	9	10	11
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			3	✓
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1			✓
Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	✓	✓		
Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	2		✓	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓	✓
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓		✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓			
Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	1			
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓		1	✓
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>				1
Black Tern	<i>Chilidonias niger</i>	✓		✓	✓
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓	
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		3	H	H
Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>			1	
Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>		4		
Great Grey Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>		1		
Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>		1		
Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		4		1
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		2	3	✓
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		2	✓	✓
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>			1	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓	✓
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	2			
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓		
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	H		✓
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	1	✓	✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			✓	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergii</i>	✓		✓	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				1
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H	H	H
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			H	✓
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1	1	✓	✓
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	H		H	1
Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			1	1
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	5		1	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025			
		8	9	10	11
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			1	✓
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			H	H
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓		✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	✓			✓
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	H			✓
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	H			
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		H	H	✓
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	H	H	H	✓
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>		H	H	1
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>		H	✓	✓
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>			1	
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			H	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓		
Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>	1	✓		
Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>		H		
Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>		✓		
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓		
Common Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>				1
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	2		✓	✓
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>				2
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		1		✓
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	4	✓	✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓			✓
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓		✓
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		✓	✓	
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	2			



		May 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		2		✓
Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		H	2	
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Mammals

		May 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>		✓		
Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>			Scat	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			✓	
European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				✓
Eurasian Elk	<i>Alces alces</i>	✓	✓		
European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	4	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓			
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓			
Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>	1			

## Reptiles & amphibians

Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) seen on 8th May