

Sweden in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

14 - 17 February 2019



Siberian Jay



Willow Tit



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Spotted Nutcracker

Report by Daniel Green
Images courtesy of Val Perrin



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Tour participants: Daniel Green (Leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Thursday 14th February

After landing at Stockholm's Arlanda airport, we head straight to Uppsala some 30 minutes away where a Hawk Owl has been seen for the last few weeks. A Kestrel is found in the search but the Hawk Owl is and remains invisible. (it was never seen after this either) After a thorough search including a quick coffee and a sandwich on foot, we give up and continue towards our base for the next days - Skultuna in the Black River Valley.

We drive mainly through farmland and eventually a bigger bird is seen in a treetop. It's a Rough-legged Buzzard, so we stop and get out but it flies away, typically skittish like they often are. A little further down this winding track another Buzzard is hovering just above the road. Another Rough-leg! It's spreading its black and white tail and comes back, soaring right above us as we step out of the van, offering much better views than the first one. A bunch of smaller birds are sitting in a tree top next to the farm where we stand. The majority are Yellowhammers, but a few Bullfinches and a couple of Redpolls are picked out among them. 10 or so Roe Deer stand on a field. As we look in the opposite direction we find two bigger raptors standing on the ice of a nearby lake; they are White-tailed Eagles - dark, immature birds. They look big, but also a bit funny when they walk about on the ice. We stop by a garden with bird feeders. Greenfinches, Yellowhammers and a Great-spotted Woodpecker are about all we can see here. When we pass over the river we have to stop and reverse on the bridge since a Dipper is sitting on a stone in the stream. An attempt for Pygmy Owl just before dusk fails due to the strong wind. It's a bit rough and nearly below zero, so it's nice to get inside and warm up in the cosy little hotel and have dinner together.

Day 2

Friday 15th February

After a good, substantial hotel breakfast we head out to watch birds. A Hawfinch perches in a treetop just outside the hotel entrance as we board our bus and a Green Woodpecker is calling. We stop after just a few miles, where forest meets meadows. Several Common Crossbills are busy in the treetops around us. They seem to be heading for a good breeding season in many parts of this area, the spruce trees are dangling with cones. After a while we spot a bigger, even rounder silhouette in another spruce top, and it's a Pygmy Owl. It sits up for quite some time giving good views, even if the distance requires a telescope - which luckily we have.

Further up this road a lake is in view on our right hand side so we stop and get out. At least three White-tailed Eagles are on the ice, two of them being adults and when they later fly up we can see their all white tails properly. The next lake offer a Great Grey Shrike in a bush-top and soon after a gorgeous male Black Grouse in a birch tree, and when it flies off it turns out there are another four in company with it. We push on westwards to reach an area noted for Three-toed Woodpecker where we spend a good bit of the first part of the day. A Black Woodpecker shows briefly a couple of times and although there are plenty of fresh Three-toed Woodpecker tracks on the trees here, the bird eludes us completely. It's a nice, sunny day though and we enjoy a hot soup for lunch. On the way back a pair of Crested Tits show really close in this natural habitat of theirs. The brave ones who dare to leave the track and get out in the knee-deep snow are rewarded with a Treecreeper.

The forest is really old here and many spruce trees are dying due to bark beetles, perfect conditions for Woodpeckers. Since we have some daylight left we drive to Fagersta where a feeding station kept up by the local

nature conservation club attracts some birds. Marsh tits, Bullfinches, Nuthatches and Great-spotted Woodpeckers are present when we arrive, then we wait and look around. Kevin - the ever active bird spotter - looks behind and above - and spots a male Grey-headed Woodpecker! It's against the light at first in a deciduous tree, but after a while it comes closer and starts to descend towards the food. It's a bit nervous and we are close so it doesn't appear completely in the open, but views are good and some get pictures too. A little walk down to the nearby bridge and a river give views of a Dipper, actively diving into the freezing water. Oh yes! Kevin also spotted a second Great Grey Shrike from the petrol-station where we made a pit-stop just before.

Day 3

Saturday 16th February

It's an early departure at 6.00am this morning, followed by a two hour drive through snowy landscapes as the dawn sky turns orange. A forest track leads down into the forest. Luckily a snowmobile has made a track here for us to walk in - there's still about 70-80 cm of snow on the ground here.

We don't even have to wait a minute for one of our target species - three Siberian Jays appear almost instantly to check whether we have any goodies for them. Sometimes there can be hours of waiting for these birds to appear, but today we got them instantly. The routine is to offer them bits of a certain Swedish sausage that they like. When they see that, they usually come back repeatedly to collect food to cache somewhere in the forest for future needs. A few small birds also come down to feed in the clearing in front of us, including several Crested Tits, Willow Tits, Coal Tit and an aberrant Nuthatch with a crossed bill(!) We walk further down the track and even push on after the forest road ends. Some mammal tracks intrigue us, and when we look more carefully we can see it's a Lynx track! As we walk on another track joins it, apparently two animals are getting together and then the tracks show they have walked in one another's footprints. Some paw prints are quite distinct despite being a day or two old.

We look around for more birds, but there's not much moving today. A few Crossbills buzz around, but there are far fewer cones up here compared to down in the Black River area. Anyway, we enjoy the repeated visits of the three Siberian Jays, and they sure offer good photo opportunities in the sunshine. For a good part of the morning the weather is absolutely brilliant although there's a bit of wind as well. As usual Daniel starts a fire so we can grill some tasty, local (hand-made) sausages with bread and the Swedish delicacy prawn salad (in mayonnaise).

We drive back south in the beautiful weather and can't help stopping by a lake where a patch of open water seems to attract a bird or two. A small group of gulls are scrutinized, but they all seem to be Herring Gulls and a nice male Goldeneye swims closer. The sun feels lovely on our faces, but after enjoying it for a short time we push on down to the major River Dalälven. We head out to try walking along the river on a forested island, but the snow is too deep and there's no track to follow. Instead we decide to look in the streams from the bridges to see if we can find anything interesting. There's a good 20 or so Goldeneye in one flock and scattered individuals as well. Dippers (of the black-bellied Scandinavian form) seem to be very abundant this year and we can count at least 10 from the four bridges we walk on. On the drive out three Elk are spotted from the van and luckily the road has no traffic so we can reverse and have a closer look. One is a bull with antlers, although not very big, but still really impressive animals.

Day 4

Sunday 17th February

We arrive at the Nutcracker site near Lake Fläcksjön a bit behind schedule, since the hotel chef overslept and couldn't serve us breakfast on time!

But it's a still morning with a light overcast and bird activity should be good for most of the day. On the walk up towards the feeding station, at least two Nutcrackers are spotted in treetops. A Black Woodpecker is calling and is seen by most of the group when it perches on tree-trunks, before it eventually disappears into the forest. We can later hear it call several times without getting any more visuals. In the clearing there are several Great-spotted Woodpeckers knocking about and the passerines like Willow, Marsh, Coal, Blue and Great Tit of course. Several Nuthatches show well, being the Scandinavian race with whiter underparts. But it's the Nutcrackers we are hoping will come down closer. They don't seem to be very willing though.

While the photographers among us stay to wait for the Nutcrackers, half the group takes a walkabout down to the nearby lake. The sun is shining from a clear sky now and it's simply a lovely late winter's day. Here we see several Nutcrackers show in treetops alongside the road we walk, and it looks as though one or two of them fly in the right direction as well, meaning towards the feeding station and the rest of the group. By the lake Kevin spots the local pair of White-tailed Eagles perched in a big tree. We have heard their loud calls during the morning and they are now very close to the nest site as the breeding season is approaching. Suddenly a Goshawk comes flying by with a Hooded Crow in pursuit. A beautiful, adult bird, looking silvery and bright in good sunlight. We also come across another interesting set of footprints, and indeed another Lynx has been walking here before us - the third set of Lynx tracks during the weekend. When we get back up the feeding station the Nutcrackers have been all over the place and produced good pictures and satisfying views for those who stayed. We enjoy hot soup and sandwiches for lunch before heading back to the hotel for our luggage and a pit-stop.

After that one more target remains, and we need to go downtown for that: Waxwings! After checking one site with negative results we come to this backyard with an apple tree full of apples....and Waxwings! About 40 or more of these lovely birds are buzzing around the fruit.

Then it's time to hit the high-way to catch our flight home. Several Buzzards are seen along the road though, one Common and two or maybe three Rough-legged.

That's it for this time! Come back to Sweden soon!

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Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only; m = male; ad = adult)

	Common name	Scientific name	February			
			14	15	16	17
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		✓	✓
2	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>			✓	
3	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	2	3		✓
4	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				1
5	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				1 ad
6	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>				1 ad
7	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	2			3
8	European Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1			
9	Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>		5		
10	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	1m			
11	European Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				3
12	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓		✓	✓
13	Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				3
15	Eurasian Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>		1		1
16	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		1		1
18	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		1		1
19	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>		1 m		
20	Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>				42
21	Black-bellied Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus cinclus</i>	1	1	10	
22	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓			✓
23	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1			✓
24	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	H	1		✓
25	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>			✓	✓
26	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	1	✓	✓	✓
27	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		3	3	✓
28	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	1			
31	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		1		✓
33	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		2		
34	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓
35	Siberian Jay	<i>Perisoreus infaustus</i>			3	
36	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>				3
38	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Red (Common) Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓	✓	✓
42	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓		✓
43	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	✓		1	✓
44	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	2			
45	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	3	3	H	✓
46	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		1		
47	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

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Mammals (D = droppings; P = prints)

1	Eurasian Lynx	<i>Lynx lynx</i>		P 2		P 1
2	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	H	2		
3	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>		D		
4	European Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>		1		
5	Eurasian Elk	<i>Alces alces</i>		3		
6	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

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Bohemian Waxwing