

Sweden's Butterflies

Naturetrek Tour Report

25 – 30 June 2014



Purple-edged Copper



Lesser Marbled Fritillary



Geranium Argus



Amanda's Blue

Report & images compiled by Daniel Green



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Tour Participants: Daniel Green (leader) with a group of Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Wednesday 25th June

We arrived at the tiny Västerås airport at midday and went straight to an area of old pasture surrounded by forest. We had coffee and a sandwich, and started looking for butterflies. Purple-edged Copper, Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Geranium Argus and Northern Brown Argus are soon spotted and photographed at very close quarters. Ringlet, Pearly Heath, a late Northern Wall Brown and several Mazarine Blues were also found.

Next we moved northwards just a few miles along the road. As we started our 500-metre walk, dark clouds appeared in the sky. Just as we thought it was going to be ok it began to pour with rain. Some of us returned to the vehicle whilst others took shelter in a log cabin. A sandwich and a drink helped to wait out the rain and we were rewarded with both Heath and Marsh Fritillaries. By the roadside were Amanda's Blue, Common Blue, Mountain Argus, Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, and our first Small Tortoiseshell.

Later in the afternoon we headed towards our hotel less than 30 minutes away, and in the process we saw several Red-backed Shrikes along the winding forest road.

Day 2

Thursday 26th June

We began our day searching for Poplar Admiral in Färna ekopark. It was a brilliant morning and it only took a few minutes until one was found, sitting on the gravel road in front of us. We were able to approach closely and most of us got photographs from both sides: a fantastic butterfly. We also found our first Ida's Blue in a hedge beside the road.

As we walked along a small forest track we heard agitated birds and wondered if an owl or a raptor was nearby. When several Redwings dive-bombed something on the ground we realise it might be a mammal instead; and just so as a Pine Marten ran away into the forest opposite the track. Above us two or possibly even three Honey Buzzards were soaring.

It was a beautiful day and we had a lot more good butterflies to see so we headed further into the vast Bergslagen area to where conifers leave room for a more open and deciduous landscape. We went for a walk alongside a small stream, winding through forest and clearings. A large, impressive, Common Goldenring dragonfly was perched in the bushes and several more were flying over the stream. As the forest opened a bit more, butterflies became more abundant and soon we found our first False Heath Fritillary, basking on a leaf and allowing close approach. Also several Scarce Fritillaries were fluttering around and perching. Time and weather seemed to be on our side so after a short picnic lunch and a Dark Green Fritillary, we moved on to another site.

Here we met a local guide who took us to a place that we would have had difficulty finding on our own. A little uphill walk soon took us to a secluded clearing where we enjoyed watching the rare and localised Scarce Heath. We manage to locate about ten individuals which was great as they had only started flying here since 1st June - another result of the cold spring and summer in Sweden. This Scarce Heath population was recently discovered

and is the only one known about in the county (Västmanland). A Real's Wood White showed well on the way back, and another False Heath Fritillary was spotted and photographed.

On our return we stopped at the site where we'd done some butterfly watching on the first afternoon. We hadn't even stopped the vehicle before we spotted a Great Grey Owl perched on a fence post by the meadow. It is amazingly close and didn't appear concerned about our presence. We had stunning, breath-taking views of this lovely creature as it moved between perches on its hunt for voles in the grass. What a finale to a long but wonderful day.

Day 3

Friday 27th June

We seemed to be heading towards a 'shakier' period in terms of weather so we headed for the coast today. After a two hour drive we arrived at 'Butterfly Road'. It was still cold and grey when we arrive but some Wood Whites were instantly found on flowers by the roadside as we enjoyed a coffee with nice Swedish cinnamon buns. We hoped for the clear blue skies we could see to the east, and slowly the temperature increased as we tried to spot butterflies along the path. The calcareous soil here provided the ground for the rich flora with several orchids and some good butterfly habitat. After an increasingly active session we saw 19 species of butterflies including a stunning male Silvery Argus; one of the main target species for the area and a beautiful butterfly. Other sightings included Green-underside, Ida's, Amanda's, Common, and Silver-studded Blues, Geranium and Northern Brown Argus, and Heath, Lesser Marbled and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. Birds seen included the seemingly ever-present Red-backed Shrike and Tree Pipit, but also Hobby Crested and Willow Tits, and a surprising Grey-headed Woodpecker. A good dragonfly was also identified on the track: a Yellow-Spotted Whiteface.

On our way back along the coast we had a perfect stop, overlooking a sheltered, shallow lagoon by a well grazed seaside. Here we saw Caspian Tern (7), Little Gull (3 adults), plenty of Arctic Terns (60-80) and a few Common Terns. Waders required sharper eyes but we saw male Ruff, Greenshank, and two Ringed Plovers were picked out among some Redshanks. Suddenly all the hundreds of ducks out on the pool took to the sky and we could see why - two majestic White-tailed Eagles soared low above us and over the birds. Many of the ducks were Wigeon, but among them were also Shoveler and some Gadwall. The action repeated itself with a male Peregrine and a stunning adult White-tailed Eagle.

Day 4

Saturday 28th June

Once again the weather decided our destination as we headed south to the Strängnäs area, passing a spectacular bridge over Lake Mälaren. Once on the island we soon encounter several Large Blue butterflies: another rare and localised species, and a recently discovered population. Unfortunately the weather wasn't perfect, being overcast and just a little too cold, making butterfly activity low. Only Pearly Heaths were flying around the blues, although we enjoyed the melodious song of a Wood Lark. An interesting and beautiful purple and yellow moth was photographed. On top of the hill the Iron Age burial mounds and stone settings were inspected and a few more Large Blues seen. We then headed back with the traditional stop on Ängsö; normally a great butterfly site but not in this weather, so we had to settle for a coffee break at the medieval castle.

Day 5

Sunday 29th June

We started the day with two Thrush Nightingales in a damp willow and birch area near Fläckebo. At the lake Black Terns were dominating the air above the sedge, a Wryneck was singing from a hidden position but soon perched on a fencepost providing excellent views, and an adult White-tailed Eagle approached, attempted to take a prey by the shoreline, and then landed for a while.

The Norberg butterfly area was today's destination but the weather was still a bit too cool and foggy. We checked a garden area on the way where some Nutcrackers had been reported feeding on pines: we found opened cones on the ground but no Nutcrackers; only a Green Sandpiper and a family of Willow Tits being seen. Continuing south, the overcast skies started to break up so we returned to the flowering roadsides of the forest track. It proved a good decision because here we immediately started to find butterflies: Amanda's Blue, Heath Fritillary, Large Skipper and a Cranberry Fritillary - the first for the trip and one of the sought after species on the northern bogs. As the temperature was starting to rise we returned to the bog for a second attempt to see more butterflies. It didn't rise much but at least we managed to find and net a Large Heath which completed our list of heaths, with all four species which occur in Sweden seen.

After dinner we went on an evening safari. We enjoyed roding Woodcocks, passing above us time after time on their nightly flight display. The sky started to turn dark grey and at the next viewpoint it turned into an intensive dark blue, lightening up a little to an almost unreal turquoise; and then the rain started. We drive north and avoided the first shower, far enough to hear a Nightjar churring in the forest. A Moose had already been seen in the distance but now a bigger one came running by the road, stopping in the open to examine us while we tried to take its photograph in the dusk. Later, a Moose cow with a calf and two Wild Boars were the last animals seen tonight. We made two more stops and heard both River Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler singing. As we returned, the rain started to fall more heavily so we had to abandon the moth lamp.

Day 6

Monday 30th June

For our last morning we started by checking the neighbouring Eagle Owl nest to see if there were still chicks in it, but we found that they had fledged. We then drove to a lake where five Black-throated Divers in immaculate summer plumage appeared on the water. We saw Common Sandpiper, and a pair of Whooper Swans were looking picturesque in the sparse vegetation, both perfectly still and lying neck to neck.

Next we visited a nutritious lake further south which was a more productive stop for birds. We saw several pairs of Slavonian Grebes with chicks, five or six Black Terns were flying around, calling as if they had nests on the little island in the lake where a Little Ringed Plover was standing. Finally three lovely Spotted Redshanks, still in full summer plumage, appeared on the shore.

Our last stop was near the airport where we walked down a track leading out through the reed beds. Just as the first calls of a singing Great Reed Warbler reached our ears, we realised it was time to go to the airport, about 15 minutes away, to catch our flight. A good last bird was a Thrush Nightingale which came onto the path in front of us and out in the open for once.

On this trip we struggled with some cold and bad weather; in fact Sweden had its coldest June in ten years. Even though conditions were not great for butterflies, we still managed to see some of the really good species.

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Large Skipper



Pearly Heath

