Sweden in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Report

6 - 10 September 2017



Common Cranes

Report & Images by Daniel Green



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Tour Report Sweden in Autumn

Tour participants: Daniel Green (leader) with five Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Wednesday 6th September

The group arrived at the small airport of Västerås in mid afternoon, to a temperature of +15°C, an overcast sky and easterly winds. A Raven becames the first bird we saw as we stepped outside to our minivan. We drove past the town and out over the farmland countryside, to the north. A Marsh Harrier and a Common Buzzard were the first raptors spotted just before we stopped for a coffee and a lake view at Frövisjön. A lot of ducks soon revealed a Pintail, some Gadwalls and Wigeon, among plenty of Teal and Mallard. A family group of Whooper Swans had five cygnets. The first two Cranes flew in to the lake and, soon after we stopped, at least two more pairs were seen on the adjacent fields: not to be confused with the Grey Herons fishing in the shallow parts of the wetland. Some mudflats attracted waders and we could see Ringed Plovers, Dunlins (seven), Ruffs (two) and, after a while, four Wood Sandpipers. An adult White-tailed Eagle was perched on the old water-pump hut in the middle of the wetland. A flock of Yellow Wagtails flew past, but we would see more of them later. A dragonfly perched on a willow stem right in front of us, was identified as a Yellow-winged Darter, one of the easiest of the reddish Darters to identify, since the yellow wing-bases show quite clearly. A Brown Hawker also appeared, flying around close by.

Well, at least a little something to see before we needed to get checked in at our hotel in Skultuna.

After dinner we went out to try for some owls and other nocturnal creatures, the best part being the two Beavers we got to see swimming very close to an old railway bridge we were standing on. John had brought a Batdetector and used it to identify Daubenton's, Long-eared Brown Bat and perhaps even Beckstein's Bat, although latter is a bit unlikely since it is only known from one site in the very south of Sweden and counted as "the most rare mammal reproducing in Sweden"!

Day 2

Thursday 7th September

Since two participants overslept breakfast, the rest of the group went for a drive around the village and its gardens. A flock of Fieldfares landed in a tree in front of us and, as we stopped to look, a selection of garden birds turned up: Nuthatches, Great Tits, Blue Tits, Tree Sparrows, House Sparrows, Greenfinches, Chaffinches and even some Siskins, the latter three bathing in a puddle of water.

We picked up the sleepers and headed east to Hjälstaviken. As we approached, a flock of 100 or so Common Cranes were feeding in a stubble field next to the road. A male Marsh Harrier was flying by too and we stopped a while to look through the Crane flock, seeing that several youngsters are with them.

We decided to start with the board walk at the south end of the reserve. It led us into reedbeds. We stopped on the bridge over the canal as we instantly heard the calls of Bearded Reedlings. After some waiting and several glimpses, a group of four materialised, climbing up to the very tops of the reed and showing really well and close; one of them was an adult male in full splendour, moustached and all.

Above us a spectacle was going on as hundreds of geese, most of them Barnacles, flew in to the lake in patterns of V-formations.

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We continued along the board walk to its end in a hide with a lake view on surface level. A Grey Heron was too close to be true and the lake was filled with geese. With the telescopes, we could pick out the first 20 or so Taiga Bean Geese, darker in plumage and with much less orange on the bill (compared to the Greylags).

We drove up to the other side of the Hjälstaviken lagoon. As we got out in the car park, a massive noise and commotion starts among the thousands of geese down by the lakeside. An adult White-tailed Eagle glided past us and flushed all the geese that dispersed all over the ground. The bugling of Cranes reached our ears and 100 or so were standing in a field not far away. A couple of female Pheasants walked by in the grass and we started our walk down towards the lakeside viewing platform.

We were almost there when a Bluethroat was flushed from the side of the track, giving flight views before flying quite far away. But the numbers of birds here were impressive. We were very close to 1,000 or so Barnacle Geese that just don't seem to be afraid of people on this site. There is no hunting, and we are all enclosed by a deep ditch next to the trail. Further out on the mud there were plenty of waders, especially Ruff, but also Dunlin and Ringed Plover. Among them we later found at least two Little Stints and a Spotted Redshank; overhead, Hobbies were seen twice. Marsh Harriers and White-tailed Eagles appeared repeatedly.

Among the many geese, the challenge was to find the rarer species. We almost instantly saw three Greater White-fronted Geese. But it would take us several hours before we finally - on the walk back towards the car park - managed to find the Lesser White-fronts! At least three adults stood by other *Anser* geese and displayed their white foreheads and short pink bills. Really cute birds.

On the way back, we took a drive through some diverse farmland to look for Harriers and whatever else was around. A Cuckoo was seen flying past and away over the fields, probably a young bird this time of the year. We also saw a Wheatear; some Kestrels showed here and there and, at a farm with houses, we saw a flock of 150 or so Linnets. Otherwise, there were plenty of Common Buzzards and some Marsh Harriers in this normally more productive farmland area. A male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker suddenly appeared by the road. We reversed and got out, and actually had quite good views on this little cute fellow.

Two White-tailed Eagles perched on the roof of the pump station by a lake: one adult with a juvenile bird. It was nice to see evidence of a successful breeding on this relatively new breeding site.

After dinner, we headed back out and drove north towards the Black River Valley. A Sparrowhawk was seen briefly from the van. First we stopped at the north end of Lake Fläcksjön, just as 40 Cranes flew in to roost. Some 100 Wigeon and a Whooper Swan with two cygnets were spotted, and a Common Snipe flew by. We then indulged in trying hard to find some Moose. But despite many local tips, we had to admit our defeat and returned empty-handed to the hotel.

Day 3

Friday 8th September

Today we headed north and focused on forest habitats. There seemed to be more birds in the air this morning and a flock of Chaffinches on the roadside and in a field proved to include a Brambling as well. We started with a site for Capercaillie without success, but the first Crested and Willow Tits were heard. Then we moved to the forest feeding station where we saw the first Nutcracker in a treetop before we arrived. Then it took a while before they came down on the food. We suspected the presence of a raptor since very few birds showed and those who did acted very nervously. Suddenly a big female Goshawk flew by and a Nutcracker shouted loudly. Then the tension disappeared and at least three Nutcrackers descended to the rocks and to feed on the peanuts

we'd put out for them. Several Common Jays also showed without fear. The birds were within a distance of five to six metres, very close for normally shy Nutcrackers of the Scandinavian forest population. (Only the slender-billed Siberian ones are normally un-shy). Small birds like Crested Tit, Willow tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatches and a Great-Spotted Woodpecker also came repeatedly to feed, along with a Red Squirrel.

As we were just about to enter the minibus to go further, a piercing call was heard from a distance. A Black Woodpecker! It was soon located sitting in a dead tree in the felling area next to us. A little forest track led us deeper into the same forest. We tried to find Hazel Grouse without any luck, but had a nice break by a lake where a Black-throated Diver in summer plumage showed well. A stunning bird! A young Hen Harrier flew in front of us and as we sped up a bit, even along the track were driving. We stopped as we got out in a more open area, only to find it soaring high above the forest with a Common Buzzard. We had a last coffee break before we started the 1½-hour transfer down to the lowlands, which produced distant views of one adult and two young Red-throated Divers on a lake.

We arrived at the Guesthouse in the Kvismaren Valley in time for an early dinner and then headed out to one of the hides to see where the Cranes were flying in this evening. There were already about 1,000 Cranes in view when we arrived, standing on the grassy areas in front of us. A juvenile White-tailed Eagle was perched on a dry tree not far away. Plenty of Greylag and Barnacle Geese flew in to the roosting area too. A Northern Wheatear sat on a rock nearby. It was a grey and drizzly night but we could already appreciate the potential of this site and enjoy the huge flocks of Cranes that fly in at dusk. It was impossible to grasp how many there were, but we later got the information that 8,000 was the latest count, a few days before.

Day 4

Saturday 9th September

When we got up at 5.30am, the rain had stopped. We got down to the reed bed area in the bottom of the valley to meet with the bird ringers. A few minutes of extra drizzle allowed us to have a cup of tea in the van, before heading out. Meanwhile the air was already full of Cranes leaving the night roost. The first other birds we heard as we entered the reed bed path were Marsh Tit and Brambling. A Yellowhammer appeared in a bush. We could hear a swarm of Starlings out there somewhere, and Water Rails were squealing repeatedly. The two (Catalonian!) ringers were busy ringing birds after their first round emptying the mist nets. A Lesser Whitethroat was the first bird to be shown, soon followed by a couple of Blackcaps, Robins, Reed Warblers and Blue Tits. A good male Bluethroat was soon presented to us by the ringing table. It was actually an adult male, which is not a usual bird this time if the year; it was colourful to be an autumn bird, with lots of blue and orange on the breast. We indulged in photographs before it was released. For the next round, we followed and assisted the ringers. A Brambling was caught and two young Bearded Reedlings - male and female too. Sedge Warbler, Willow Warbler and a male Redstart were also good to see close up. The fluty calls of a Greenshank were heard repeatedly as we headed back for breakfast, after a very productive morning, full of knowledge about migration and ringing recoveries of Scandinavian passerines.

After breakfast, we headed out to a very well-built hide overlooking a newly restored wetland. We heard the "ping-pong" calls of Bearded Reedling and saw eight in a little flock passing by. A Hobby flew close by and, soon after, a young Peregrine started to attack the hundreds of Lapwings that were standing in the shallow water. There were other waders as well, including Little Stints and a Black-tailed Godwit, among more plentiful Ruffs, Dunlins and Ringed Plovers. Gadwalls were surprisingly numerous here with 100 or more individuals. Teal were also counted by the hundreds, a few Shovelers among them. Geese flew in to land on the deeper lagoon to the right, thousands of them, but all Greylags. Several Marsh Harriers were patrolling the reedbeds. Fifteen Raven

were circling together like raptors in the distance. The young Peregrine that landed in a tree decided to have another go at the ducks in front of us and came charging back again. The Hobby showed really, really close.

We eventually decided to drive about in the farmlands a bit to see if we can get closer to some big flocks of Cranes or find something else. A thousand or so Cranes had been standing on a field reasonably close, but they dispersed as we get closer. A female Hen Harrier was the better find on the drive; a few Northern Wheatears, Skylarks and Linnets were all other birds we found, where there's usually plenty of birds. We decided to go back and have lunch on a hill in middle of the landscape. It was a good decision and the weather cleared up and got warmer just as we spread out our lunch items and started to eat. From this point the view was excellent towards big wetlands, with masses of birds on two sides of us. A White-tailed Eagle flew by, the Peregrine was back hunting waders and a couple of Hobbies were soaring above. From the very top of the hill we could see 11 Hobbies at the same time in the air. We walked down across the canal to another viewpoint, lower down and closer to the water. Among plenty of common ducks and waders we found a Greenshank, a Curlew and a Blacktailed Godwit. Two Little Grebes and another Pintail were added to the list.

We then drove to the east side of the valley. Some Cranes were in the fields but we still missed the huge flocks. A couple of passerines by a thin line of reed in a ditch caught our attention. And rightly so, because a Whinchat and a Wheatear were soon joined by a Bluethroat. They chased each other around and showed perched up, as well as jumping on the ground. We could even get out and, since they moved away a bit, we could get the scopes out and check them more carefully. Now two Bluethroats and three Whinchats materialised, and next to them also Yellowhammers and a singing Reed Warbler. Always something.

We enjoyed an afternoon rest before having dinner and heading out again. Unfortunately, weather had now become worse again but we had umbrellas and waterproofs, so we did the walk to the best hide for Crane watching. And it's the right choice, because not only could we see an awful lot of Cranes here, we are also blessed with a roof over our heads so we stayed perfectly dry. John's Bat-detector identified a Soprano Pipistrelle. It was a grey and rainy night but still it was impressive to be surrounded by the thousands of Cranes and Geese and their loud calls as they flew in to the roost in front of us in massive numbers. Back at the Guesthouse, we enjoyed a last evening with drinks and listing and a lot of interesting subjects to discuss.

Day 5

Sunday 10th September

For the second morning in a row we got up at 5.30am, despite the rough weather. Well, it wasn't raining but a strong wind was rattling the trees outside so we had no higher hopes for an improvement of weather. We drove down to the lakes and walked out to a little hill where some Cranes normally fly by from the roost. Luckily, we were perfectly sheltered from the wind by just a few trees and bushes. We arrived just as the morning turned golden and the skies started to clear. The first bird we saw was a Hobby perched on the top of a dry tree; next, an Osprey came flying, almost instantly stooping down into the water and coming up wet but without any prey. Right away, it followed up by a young White-tailed Eagle flying by. We perched upon the hilltop and looked around. Several juvenile Marsh Harriers flew over the reedbeds. A little further away at least five Hobbies were already up catching Dragonflies. Plenty of Cranes lifted from the reed area across, but most of them didn't come our way. The sun rose on a clear sky and we could only stand in surprise at how quickly the weather improved. A Spotted Redshank was heard repeatedly but without showing, Water Rails as well. A mixed flock of Bramblings and Siskin landed in a nearby Mountain Ash, several Fieldfares too. A flock of Wigeon landed in one of the lake pools and prove to include a dozen or more Pintails. Altogether, the morning offers a lot of autumn atmosphere and migration vibe with several northern species.

Eventually, we went back to have breakfast at the B&B before our departure.

The last birding stop was another nature reserve closer to town (Örebro), comprising an open landscape with some well-grazed grass areas and scattered, shallow pools along a path. This is one of the best spots to see Redthroated Pipits and we all went in. The sun shone through periodically, and plenty of White Wagtails twittered and even sang a bit so it almost felt like early spring. Among them a couple of Yellow Wagtails appeared, and among a few Meadow Pipits, soon materialised a slightly bigger, more upright, boldly marked Pipit with two white stripes over the back – a juvenile Red-throated Pipit! It was skulking in the grass, perching higher up on two occasions. Repeatedly we heard the silvery clear, fine call and several times we could see birds in silhouette, flying over and calling. There seemed to be three or four birds involved, but not all of us got the splendid views. At one point a bird reacted to playback song and came flying in closer, but only to disappear in the grass again.

Two Wood Sandpipers posed more openly and a Common Snipe showed very well. A few Ringed Plovers, Ruffs and a Curlew were added to the wader list, with Marsh Harrier again.

We felt a bit chilled by the wind and sought a sheltered table to have a hot drink. After that we had to start the one-hour journey towards the airport. As we stopped 10 minutes away to have our last lunch sandwiches, we got some blue skies and fine sunshine. Sweden was smiling goodbye to us for this time.

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Ringed male Bluethroat

Species Lists

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

	Bird Species	Scientific name	September						
			6	7	8	9	10		
1	Taiga Bean Goose	Anser fabalis		100´s	100's	100´s	100		
2	Greylag Goose	Anser anser		✓	✓	✓	✓		
3	Greater White-fronted Goose	Anser albifrons		3					
4	Lesser White-fronted Goose	Anser erythropus		3 ad					
5	Canada Goose	Branta canadensis		✓	✓				
6	Barnacle Goose	Branta leucopsis		1000's	1000's	100's	100´s		
7	Mute Swan	Cygnus olor				✓	✓		
8	Whooper Swan	Cygnus cygnus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
9	Gadwall	Mareca strepera	✓	✓	2	200	✓		
10	Eurasian Wigeon	Mareca penelope	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
11	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
12	Northern Shoveler	Spatula clypeata		✓		✓	✓		
13	Northern Pintail	Anas acuta	1			1	12		
14	Eurasian Teal	Anas crecca	✓	✓	✓	100´s	✓		
15	Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula					2		
16	Common Goldeneye	Bucephala clangula	✓			✓	✓		
17	Common Merganser (Goosander)	Mergus merganser		2					
18	Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus		✓		✓			
19	Red-throated Loon (Diver)	Gavia stellata			2juv-1ad				
20	Black-throated Loon (Diver)	Gavia arctica			1 ad				
21	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis				2			
22	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus		1					
23	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
24	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo		10	1				
25	Western Osprey	Pandion haliaetus					1		
26	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus		1	1		-		
27	Northern Goshawk	Accipiter gentilis			1				
28	Western Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus	✓	✓	· ✓	✓	✓		
29	Hen Harrier	Circus cyaneus			1 juv	1 f			
30	White-tailed Eagle	Haliaeetus albicilla	✓	6	✓ /	5	1		
31	Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo	✓	✓	✓	✓	· ✓		
32	Water Rail	Rallus aquaticus				Н	Н		
33	Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus		1 juv					
34	Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra	✓	√ /		✓			
35	Common Crane	Grus grus	V	V	8.000	8.000	√		
36	Northern Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
37	Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula	4	50		50	6		
38	Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago	-	1		✓	1		
39	Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata				1	1		
40	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa				1+1	•		
41	Spotted Redshank	Tringa erythropus		1			Н		
42	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia		•		1	•••		
43	Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola	1	2		'	2		
44	Little Stint	Calidris minuta	<u>'</u>	2		3			
45	Dunlin	Calidris alpina	4	100		<i>√</i>			
46	Ruff	Philomachus pugnax	4	200		✓	√		
47	Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus	→	200		✓	→		

	Bird Species				September			
		Scientific name	6	7	8	9	10	
48	Mew (Common) Gull	Larus canus		✓		✓	✓	
49	European Herring Gull	Larus argentatus		✓		✓	✓	
50	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Columba livia		✓	✓	✓	✓	
51	Stock Dove	Columba oenas	1	2	2			
52	Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaoto	1					
54	Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus		1 juv				
55	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Dryobates minor		1m				
56	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major		✓	✓	✓		
57	Black Woodpecker	Dryocopus martius			2			
58	European Green Woodpecker	Picus viridis		✓	✓	✓	✓	
59	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus		✓	✓	✓	✓	
60	Eurasian Hobby	Falco subbuteo		1		11	5	
61	Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus				1 juv		
62	Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius			✓	. juv	✓	
63	Eurasian Magpie	Pica pica	/	✓	✓	✓	✓	
64	Spotted Nutcracker	Nucifraga caryocatactes			3			
65	Western Jackdaw	Coloeus monedula	/	✓	√	✓	✓	
66	Hooded Crow	Corvus cornix	1	✓	· ✓	· /		
67	Northern Raven	Corvus corax	1		· ·	15	· ·	
68	Coal Tit	Periparus ater	1		· ✓	10		
69	European Crested Tit	Lophophanes cristatus			· ·			
70	Marsh Tit	Poecile palustris		✓	<u> </u>	Н		
71	Willow Tit	Poecile montanus		<u> </u>	6	11		
72	Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus	✓	✓	√	✓	√	
73	Great Tit	Parus major	\ \ \ \	✓	✓	*	→	
74	Bearded Reedling	Panurus biarmicus	+	10	· ·	2+8		
75	Eurasian Skylark	Alauda arvensis		10		Z+0 ✓	√	
76	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	✓	✓	✓	V	▼	
77	Willow Warbler		+	V	✓	1	▼	
		Phylloscopus trochilus Phylloscopus collybita			· ·	I		
78	Common Chiffchaff	<u> </u>		✓	1 ad	1		
79	Sedge Warbler	Acrocephalus schoenobaenus		V		1		
80	Eurasian Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus						
81	Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla				3		
82	Lesser Whitethroat	Sylvia curruca				2		
83	Goldcrest	Regulus regulus	✓	√	√		H	
84	Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	V	√	√	✓	<u>H</u>	
85	Eurasian Nuthatch	Sitta europaea		√	√	Н	✓	
86	Eurasian Treecreeper	Certhia familiaris		✓	√			
87	Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	√	√	√	V	√	
88	Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	√	✓	✓	✓	√	
89	Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris	✓	✓	✓		✓	
90	Redwing	Turdus iliacus	-		√			
91	Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos	-		√			
92	Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus			√			
93	European Robin	Erithacus rubecula	√	✓	✓	✓	✓	
94	Bluethroat	Luscinia svecica				3		
95	Common Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus				1m		
96	Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra				3		
97	Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe		1	✓	6	1	
98	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

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	Bird Species		September						
		Scientific name	6	7	8	9	10		
99	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus		✓		✓	✓		
100	Dunnock	Prunella modularis			7				
101	Western Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava flava	12				4		
102	White Wagtail	Motacilla alba alba	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
103	Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis		✓					
104	Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis		✓		✓	✓		
105	Red-throated Pipit	Anthus cervinus					3		
106	Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs		✓	✓	✓	✓		
107	Brambling	Fringilla montifringilla		1		1	✓		
108	Hawfinch	Coccothraustes coccothraustes		1					
109	Eurasian Bullfinch	Pyrrhula pyrrhula		✓					
110	European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris		✓					
111	Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina		150		✓			
112	Red Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra		Н					
113	European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis		100	✓	✓	✓		
114	Eurasian Siskin	Spinus spinus		✓	✓	✓	✓		
115	Yellowhammer	Emberiza citrinella				✓	✓		
116	Common Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus		✓		✓	✓		

Mammals

Roe Deer, Capreolus capreolus Beaver, Castor fiber
Red Squirrel, Sciurus vulgaris Red Fox, Vulpes vulpes

Long-eared Brown Bat, *Plecotus auritus*Daubenton's Bat, *Myotis daubentonii*Lesser Noctule, *Nyctalus leisleri*Soprano Pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

Butterflies

Red Admiral, Vanessa atalanta

Large White, Pieris brassicae

Small White, Pieris rapae

Brimstone, Gonepteryx rhamni

Wall Brown, Lasiommata megera

Odonata

Yellow-winged Darter, Sympetrum flavoleum

Brown Hawker, Aeshna grandis

Migrant Hawker, Aeshna mixta

Blue Hawker, Aeshna cyanea

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