

Go Slow ... in Sweden

Naturetrek Tour Report

15 - 20 May 2019

Report by Daniel Green



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

Day 1

Wednesday 15th May

The group arrived at the small Västerås airport about 16.40. We go straight to check-in at the hotel and have an early dinner. At 19.30 we are heading out on a clear, calm evening. The football field next to the local school offers a couple of Fieldfares and Mistle Thrushes. An open field with mostly bare soil next to the road reveals first a Brown Hare, but then Lapwings and a group of 12 or so Golden Plovers in nice, black-bellied summer plumage. Nice to see. Lake Fläcksjön is not far and we cannot resist a stop where the view over the absolutely calm water surface is impressive. Some Little Gulls are flitting about, snapping insects over the water and the odd Black Tern also appears. The nearby field is full of Greylag Geese.

When we reach the forest habitats we start to look for Great Grey Owl - a bird you can never take for granted and that hasn't had a very good breeding year at all, so we are all the happier when we see it suddenly perching there, on a tree stump just in front of the car. What luck! It flies up to a higher perch and after a second move it even comes closer. Wow! This is more than we could expect.

A Bittern is booming, a Water Rail is calling, and it's a beautiful evening. On the way back a very full-coated Red Fox runs by and stops to look at us for a moment.

Day 2

Thursday 16th May

Breakfast at 7 am and then pick-up at 8 should be OK for getting some bird activity although it looks to be a sunny and potentially hot day.

A Pied Flycatcher is singing in the hotel car park and two Spotted Flycatchers also appear by the van as we're about to leave. Today we drive 20 minutes away to bird in the Skultuna area. We stop when a smallish raptor is soaring by the roadside. What first appears to be a Sparrowhawk is in fact a Harrier - a "ringtail" - photos are taken and Daniel thinks this small individual shows characteristics of both Hen and Pallid Harrier; a possible hybrid? It gains height and disappears into the sky.

We are traveling through open farmland and Skylarks are singing and some are seen flying up from the roadside. At a bigger farm we see three Linnets and some House Martins coming down to feed on the grass (!). Tree Sparrows and Goldfinches also show. We are heading for the forest edge and our first target for the day is Pygmy Owl. After a while one starts to call, but despite our efforts to locate it we can't get sight of it. We walk a bit further and try to get different positions, but it keeps eluding us. In the process we find a group of Common Crossbills, including a red male, a Wryneck is singing and a Stock Dove flies by in display flight. A Crested Tit gets upset by hearing the Pygmy Owl and shows a couple of times in a treetop, while a Willow Tit is calling from the inside the forest. We eventually decide to have a coffee in a sunny little clearing by the forest track and give the Pygmy Owl a little more time.

As we enjoy the break a Camberwell Beauty comes flying by and lands on the ground, basking in the sunshine. Comma Butterfly has already been seen and Green Hairstreaks too.

The Pygmy Owl starts to call again a little later and finally it descends on to a dead birch tree trunk, low and nice and ever so close. Unfortunately it doesn't stay very long, so not all of the group get to see it.

On the way out of the forest we stop by a stand of tall Aspen trees with a lot of holes in them. The presence of Black Woodpecker seems likely here and soon we can see the head of a male with its bright red cap sticking out from one of the bigger holes. Pied Flycatcher is singing from the same copse.

Another site just by the river is a really productive stop as we get to see a Wryneck, two dragonfly-hunting Hobbies and a male nest-building Penduline Tit.

We then stop at a garden with a bird feeder. The first bird we see as we step out is a Common Whitethroat, singing from the top of Blackthorn bush. A first for the year Daniel tells us. But the star species here is Hawfinch, on the ground below are a Yellowhammer and some Greenfinches. Marsh Tit and Nuthatch are also showing well and at the same time we can hear Treecreeper and Redstart singing. That's all before the afternoon rest and a relaxing evening off.

Day 3

Friday 17th May

This morning we drive to a good area for Capercaillie and drive really slowly along a small ridge hoping to get a chance to see some. Unfortunately that doesn't work though - it is probably too late in the season, and the lek is over for this year.

Black-throated Divers just by the shore of a small forest lake are good to see. We take a walk along the lakeside fringed by deciduous forest. A Wood Warbler sings and appears quite close on a branch over the track. A raptor appears on the sky - a Honey Buzzard! The first for the year in the area and a beautiful specimen with very pale plumage, looking a bit like an Osprey.

After having had our picnic lunch by the lake we drive half an hour to meet with the Ural Owl ringing crew. We soon come to a nest box and as the ringers approach, a female Ural Owl flies out of the box and we get really good views and pictures as it perches well, visible for a while. The box is empty but at a second box we find three chicks which are ringed as the female is also well watched.

We spend the evening around Hassmyra with singing Rosefinch, Thrush Nightingale and Grasshopper Warbler. At least two Elks show in the tall grass area a bit further away. They seem to be male and female, the female always paler brown in colour. The last part of the evening is dedicated to Eagle Owl. We drive to a sand quarry just after sunset and awaits dusk. A Swift is flying by and we don't have to wait too long before the call of an Eagle Owl echoes over the landscape. For some time it doesn't show but a Hooded Crow seems to be upset by its presence and suddenly it calls at a higher pitch and flies out, and the Owl too! The big male Eagle Owl lands in a pine tree top where it is readily visible, ear tufts and all. Beautiful! What a majestic bird, and a great finale to the evening!

Day 4

Saturday 18th May

Our usual stop by the beautiful, calm surface of Lake Fläcksjön doesn't reveal anything extraordinary today. After the next lake it's time to hit the brakes though. A very pale, grey Harrier flies alongside the van over the meadows - Montagu's! It's a stunning looking adult male and we enjoy the views, although he goes away from us. Round the bend he comes back though and we get almost wonderful views as he flies back and forth over the fields, sometimes even approaching us. Finally he starts soaring and disappears over the forest.

A male Elk suddenly charges away from the roadside just in front of us. A dark beast, like most elk bulls are. He doesn't stay around for pictures but certainly gives good views.

We try for Hazel Grouse but without any success, so instead we decide to have our lunch break by the lake and then take a walk from there. This is a good decision, as Grass Snake comes swimming in the water just next to us. A Goldcrest is singing really close to us so we can take some pictures. We take a walk up the track and play the call of Pygmy Owl just on the off chance of attracting one. We don't get any response but a Nuthatch reveals it's got a nest in a tree right next to us.

Färna Ekopark is our main destination today. We stop and start to walk on a forest track where a storm felled a lot of trees some time ago.

A last stop is intended to try to find Red-backed Shrike, but it doesn't appear, although a Wryneck is heard repeatedly and an Osprey flies by.

Day 5

Sunday 19th May

The wetland site at Asköviken greets us with a sky full of singing Skylarks. A short walk down to a flooded field produces Garganey, Whimbrel, Shoveler, Gadwall, at least three Temminck's Stints, some female Ruffs and a pair of Little Ringed Plover. A flock of 30 Common Cranes are standing in the rough grass by the reedbeds, where Marsh Harriers and some Black Terns patrol. Sedge Warblers are singing with full force from the reed-fringed little canal behind us, while Yellow Wagtails (nominata race flava) are on the rails beside the boardwalk. This leads out to a hide where we can see another Temminck's Stint quite close and some regular stuff like Reed Bunting, Barn Swallow (building a nest inside the hide actually), Meadow Pipit, Common Snipe, etc.

On the east side of the big lake Mälaren we head out to an island and do a little walkabout in a mixed forest with tall trees. It's a cool and lovely habitat with a high density of Wood Warblers and Pied Flycatchers. Coal Tit is singing too. We had hoped for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker here but they don't show. Some House Martins seem to breed under the bridge to the island. On the mainland side we get out to the reed beds to have a look. From a little hill we can overlook a reed-fringed bay seeing species like Reed & Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting and at the same time three male Marsh Harriers are soaring above us. The calls of Bearded Reedling are heard but the birds don't come into view. Butterflies here include a couple of Small Heath. On the walk back we find a pair of Wheatear and two Common Whitethroats.

We decide to have the lunch in Daniel's garden in Fläckebo. We get the garden furniture out in the shadow under the apple-tree so we can watch the bird feeders while eating. Tree Sparrows and House Sparrows are soon

spotted and it doesn't take long before there's a stunning male Hawfinch sitting in the tree and on the feeder. A nice little Siskin also joins in, as does the Hawfinch female. Pied Flycatcher is singing in the garden all the time.

Later the weather is still great as we head out after dinner and when we stop and get out of the van as the sun is setting, we can hear singing Common Rosefinch, Thrush Nightingale and Grasshopper Warbler in a damp, bushy area. The Nightingale won't show in its incredibly dense bush right next to the roadside, but the Rosefinch is spotted on a distant bush. Some get scope views, and then suddenly it sits in the nearest tree just above us, so others in the group get to see its red upper body. It doesn't stay long though.

We drive further along the lakes and the Black River and stop by a bridge to enjoy the sunset and take some pictures. Further south another bridge becomes our viewpoint to try and spot Beavers. It takes a while but suddenly a head sticks out of the water. We decide to walk a bit upstream to a lagoon that seems to be the best place and yes, here we get a loud tail-splash from one animal and then we also get good views of one swimming.

Eventually a Tawny Owl starts to sing - a nice finale to a really fine evening!

Day 6

Monday 20th May

The morning looks grey and it feels like it's going to rain. Yesterday we failed to get views of the Thrush Nightingale, so today we try another bird not far away, and this one appears right in front of us. First low near the damp floor of the wet bushland, then it flies up in a birch tree and starts to sing with intensity. At the same time an Icterine Warbler is doing the same in a bush right behind us - what a double act!

We walk along the road for a bit and although we can hear Grasshopper Warbler and another Thrush Nightingale, we don't get any reply from the Rosefinch. We then decide to pop in to Daniel's garden again and check the feeders. A good decision because a few minutes later male and female Common Rosefinches appears on the ground beneath the feeders and we get excellent views. Two in the group (the guys with cameras) decide to stay and try to get pictures while the others move down to a viewpoint by the lake. Some Black Terns and a distant Little Gull are seen, so after a coffee we go up to the north end and walk out to the tip of a small peninsula, where the Little Gulls are much closer, in fact very close, and up to 25 Black Terns are also seen. A Kestrel with a prey in its talons flies up from a farm garden as we pass, maybe it's breeding here? As we come down to the trees by the lakeside, a Long-eared Owl suddenly flies up and away from a tree. We can enjoy it flying about a bit before disappearing into the tall grass.

We enjoy the lake view a final time while before heading south through the Black River area downstream by the river with its lakes and wetlands. Our final stop for the journey is another lake, a newly restored wetland with quite a lot of birds present. Little Gulls are flying around, geese and Cranes and Marsh Harriers, ducks and grebes in the water. We start with sorting out a few ducks. Tufted Ducks, Wigeon and Pochard are actually new for the trip list. Slavonian Grebes are always nice to see and here we find a pair with a nest. Suddenly a huge raptor flies in - an adult White-tailed Eagle - and it lands conveniently well in view and sits for a long time. The last new species for the trip is Red-necked Grebe and that pushes us up to 129. Quite a decent total!

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