

Go Slow in Sweden

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 15th May 2023



Ural Owl by Richard Bashford



Slavonian Grebes by Ron Pickering



Hawfinch by John Chapman



Eagle Owl by John Chapman

Tour report by Richard Bashford



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Daniel Green & Richard Bashford (leaders), with 13 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Wednesday 10th May

Our morning flight from London's Heathrow was delayed but landed in the early afternoon at Stockholm's Arlanda airport where the group met Daniel Green – our guide for the tour and who leads many Naturetrek tours.

Transferring to two minibuses, we headed north stopping off for a picnic at Parnassen (including cinnamon buns of course) and enjoying a leg stretch with highlights being an Osprey and Marsh Tits coming very close to us – clearly used to food.

Onwards to Sättra Brunn Spa checking in in time for a relax before meeting for dinner at 18:30. Daniel explained that we could go for a night safari at 19:45 and although tired from a long and often delayed travel day, we had a fascinating tour around the local Black River Valley area with good views of Common Crane, Whooper Swan, Curlew and Lapwing. We toured the forest and clearings spending some time searching the areas where a Great Grey Owl had been seen a few weeks ago. You have to look! We saw Black Grouse and two brief Hazel Hens. As the darkness increased, we made our way back and noted several mammals – many Roe and Fallow Deer, a small group of Red Deer, Hare, Fox and finally a couple of groups of Wild Boar.

Back for 22:00 and time for our beds!

Day 2

Thursday 11th May

We woke to the promised fine weather and were ready by the minibuses by 07:15. Daniel explained what we would be doing – complete with a picnic breakfast and lunch, our aim was to get to an area of forest, regenerating after the 2014 fire. Here there was a good amount of standing dead wood and consequently, it was a good place for woodpeckers.

En route to our first stop in Fermansbo Nature Reserve, we stopped for a Whinchat and Bullfinch or two but made it to a small parking area for a pre-breakfast walk around 08:00. Into the forest and we noted a good range of species – a few Pied Flycatchers singing, Goldcrest and many Willow Warblers. Then as Daniel imitated a Pygmy Owl call, an amazing view of a Willow Tit. Also here was a less obliging Crested Tit but some managed briefer views. Onward a short distance and we heard and then saw a fine Three-toed Woodpecker! One of the hardest species to see but after a few views, it was joined by a second – looking like a pair here which showed well.

Leaving them in peace, and with a few tummy rumbles, we went back to the minibuses and enjoyed a delicious picnic breakfast. Green Hairstreaks were darting about, and Siskins were singing from treetops.

Then we were off to another site next to a large lake in the Öjesjön Ekopark. On the way, a roadside field was full of *thumbergi* Yellow Wagtails with dark grey heads. Several Wheatears were also here. At the lake stop we scanned the water. Within a minute a Black-throated Diver was seen, and we managed good views through the telescope. As it headed right and out of view, we too walked to another viewpoint and our views improved over the next 20 minutes or so when it was joined by a second. After this, we had a walk along the track enjoying several Camberwell Beauty butterflies and a Comma. We then heard a Wryneck which perched well eventually, and then a Black

Woodpecker flew in and showed well for about a minute on a pair of dead trees. A good range of other species were seen including Osprey, Tree Pipit, Raven and Whinchat. By now it was time for lunch and Daniel brought out another feast from the back of his minibus, all prepared by the wonder staff at Sättra Brunn.

This is a “Go Slow” tour and the relaxed pace was great for such a beautiful area and a late lunch. But it was 14:45 so we had a short drive back to the hotel arriving around 15:15 for some free time.

Meeting up for the checklist at 19:00 and dinner at 19:30. What will tomorrow bring?

Day 3

Friday 12th May

A meet up by the minibuses (laden with picnic breakfast and lunch once more) and a drive for around 30 minutes north to Nyhyttan, to meet one of Daniel’s contacts who had seen a Grey-headed Woodpecker the day before. As usual, it was a beautiful location and we set up overlooking a small stand of larch and aspen trees. Try as we might, there was no sign of any Grey-headed Woodpeckers, but we did see a fly by Black Woodpecker, an Osprey’s nest and Lesser Whitethroats. But we decided to optimise our time and have breakfast here.

Moving on, we followed the tracks into the regenerating forest with Daniel’s friend Peter. At the end of the track, we walked to a small lake complete with a pair of nesting Red-throated Divers. They were both active and we were able to hear their unusual calls on the water and in flight. Here too were singing Tree Pipits and a brief Wryneck.

A couple more places were tried for Grey-headed Woodpecker, but it was not to be. Of most interest was an unusual song – a Redwing singing from a small birch tree. We also heard our first Chiffchaff singing.

On to our lunch stop – Gölja Lake - a flooded bit of farmland now managed for wildlife. It was hard to know where to look with Ruffs of all colours, a few Wood Sandpipers, and some glorious Slavonian Grebes. Also here were some summer plumaged Little Gulls. Among the ducks, there were several Goldeneyes, Gadwalls, a Wigeon and a Tufted Duck. A constant movement of Cranes was also great to see. Pride of place as we ate our lunch was a male Montagu’s Harrier which showed well.

After another fine lunch we headed back to the hotel for a mid-afternoon breather before a checklist and then an early dinner at 17:30. Our plan was to head out at 18:30 to follow up on a recent Great Grey Owl sighting. As in recent years, small mammal numbers had made this species (and several other predators), hard to find in this area. With a week-old sighting 1.5 hours away near Morskoga, Lindesburg, we set off. It was an opportunity to see that the beautiful countryside, neat, picturesque farms, and villages extended further – as did the forest with many amazing bits of habitat on our journey. Nearing our destination, we saw a female Capercaillie on the roadside. We managed another view of this bird by turning back and picking it out a few feet away in roadside trees.

By 20:15, we were in a new patch of forest and scanning likely looking clearings and checking all tree stumps. It was an exciting way to spend an hour and a half, but our main target eluded us. A few more Capercaillie sightings, a calling Black Woodpecker and Woodcocks were the compensation. The weather was perfect and the sunset the stuff of dreams. The sunlight on the edges of the clouds and the reflection in the lakes was stunning. The route back began in near darkness, but we still managed a couple more Capercaillie sightings and then a field with large black shapes in. Stopping and peering, we just managed to see a small number of feeding Elk and some Red Deer.

Back at 23:10 for some sleep.

Day 4

Saturday 13th May

An optional meet up before breakfast was partially successful in our efforts to see Hawfinch. As yesterday, Richard heard them from 06:30 and at 07:10 a few of the group were outside watching two or three calling and moving through the trees. By the time others arrived, they had gone. But we did see the expected Pied Flycatchers by their nest box and noted a group of active Spotted Flycatchers – freshly arrived we suspected as they were chasing each other around.

A wonderful buffet breakfast was enjoyed at 08:00 and we were on the road by 08:45. We tried a few bits of forest and visited Östringby Nature Reserve looking for Pygmy Owl. We added Red Squirrel to our mammal tally and saw a Crested Tit. No owls here, or the next two sites but some lovely habitat.

Next was a look out point to view Fläcksjön Lake where two Ospreys were flying – one with a fish. Here too were Black Terns, an Arctic Tern and a good range of wetland birds including many nesting Great Crested Grebes. Daniel then announced we would be visiting a Ural Owl nest box! As in recent years, owl numbers had been low and so their usual nest boxes were empty – except one, near Skultuna.

We had a roadside scan of Lake Hällsjön with large numbers of Whooper Swans, a distant Hobby and an even more distant White-tailed Eagle. Also here was a Scarce Tortoiseshell – a butterfly which had colonised recently. After meeting Daniel's son Simon a little further down the road, we entered a forest and walked a short distance into the trees. Their periodic nest box check (a check to see if there were chicks and estimate their age), was to take place and allowed us to see Daniel extracting the adult female Ural Owl while Simon confirmed there were two chicks – just days old.

Some rapid photos followed before the adult was released – only for it to kindly sit on a branch much to the pleasure of the photographers.

Leaving this magnificent beast, we returned to a roadside track near Skultuna where there was a nearby active Black Woodpecker nest. We took the opportunity to have our picnic lunch before clearing up – just as the Black Woodpecker came in to change over. Brief but close views.

After this, we returned to Sättra Brunn arriving at 15:15 for a breather before checklist and dinner.

Day 5

Sunday 14th May

Our last full day and a prompt start at 05:30 to drive to a Black Grouse lek in the Öjesjöbrännan Ekopark. An adult White-Tailed Eagle en route was a bit too distant to appreciate. Entering the forest on another beautiful sunny day, we drove a few kilometres and then noted the odd Black Grouse in the trees, then more, then more. As we approached the lek site, perhaps as many as 20-30 birds flew across the track. At this time, we could hear the wonderful bubbling call of the birds in the lek. We got out carefully and managed to see a fair number lekking, before they too left. But there was plenty more to see. An Osprey on a nest, Red-backed Shrike, Tree Pipits etc.

Back for a welcome breakfast at 09:15 and then out again. Our journey started in an interesting way with a small Slow Worm in the grounds of Sättra Brunn. Then on the main road, we noted a bird sitting on the white line in the middle. As we neared, we saw it was a Hawfinch! We stopped the vehicles and Daniel (bravely), picked the bird up. Known as “Stone Cracker” in Swedish, it is a bold move. Clearly the bird was a bit dazed, but after a few minutes (and many photos), Daniel let the bird go – flying well and calling. Nearby, we heard our first Wood Warbler.

Next was a bit of damp woodland just outside of Fläckebo which produced a fine Thrush Nightingale in full song. A couple more lake stops adding Shelduck and hearing Bittern. We returned to Daniel’s Garden for lunch (still very sunny and warm) and enjoyed the birds on his feeders – Marsh Tits, Nuthatch and Bullfinch. We left four keener photographers there who got the hoped for Hawfinches visiting the feeders a little later.

At 18:00, we were enjoying our last dinner and then out for our final safari. The first stop was a quarry where we found the promised two Eagle Owl chicks on a bit of machinery. The adult female had left as we approached but we managed to find her and saw her for a short time, perched on the sand and in a tree.

On for a safari through the woods, looking at the stumps in the clearings in a last hope of more owls. A fine male Montagu’s Harrier was popular. We ended you evening with a small wait at a river bridge – coffee and chocolates and a Beaver crossing the water! A great end to the day.

Day 6

Monday 15th May

A nice morning with our last fabulous breakfast and then meeting Daniel for 09:00. Here we said goodbye to Pau who was leaving by taxi to catch an earlier flight home to Taiwan.

On the road, we had time to visit a couple of wetland sites on the route to Stockholm. The first in Daniel’s village of Fläckebo (a different viewpoint for Fläcksjön Lake) where we saw the expected range of species. Then to Skadduga where there were Slavonian Grebes, Black Terns and Little Gulls. But there were new birds for the trip with a flyover Caspian Tern, and then Janet picked out the bird we were hoping to see – a male Garganey. We picked up Goran to help with the hire vehicles.

Onward to Parnassen for our final picnic lunch - spicy salmon this time. This site was visited on day one and notable for its tame Nuthatches and Marsh Tits. If you dropped a crumb, they were there! Excellent views, needless to say.

A very quick look over the marsh provided around 75 Cranes and three Marsh Harriers flying.

The final leg to Arlanda airport was straightforward arriving just after 14:00 where we split in two with six of twelve clients off on the Arlanda express to have three days in the city.

The flight to the UK arrived about five minutes early at 18:00.

Well, what a fine week. Such great company, a beautiful part of the world to enjoy, explore and experience in wall-to-wall sunshine. Daniel was a star, showing us all the key places in this stunning area, and of course, his local wildlife knowledge meant we saw an incredible range of species.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May 2023					
		10	11	12	13	14	15
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>				✓		
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓			✓		
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>					1	1
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>						1
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		4		1		2
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera strepera</i>			✓		✓	2
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			1			
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		2	✓		2	2
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			1			1
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			1			4
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>			✓	✓		✓
Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>	2	1				
Western Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>			6			
Black Grouse	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>	2				30	
Red-throated Diver (Loon)	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			2			
Black-throated Diver (Loon)	<i>Gavia arctica</i>		2				

Common name	Scientific name	May 2023					
		10	11	12	13	14	15
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓
Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>			12			6
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>					H	H
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		1	1		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	1		1	1	
Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1	1	1	2	2	1
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			3	1	1	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	2	2	2	1	1	2
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			1		1	
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>				1	1	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	2	2		2	2
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					1	1
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓		✓	1	1	✓
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓	✓	55	✓	✓	✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓					
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓				10	
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	✓		✓		✓	1
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	✓	1	✓			
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	H			✓	1
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			1			
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			H			
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	1		1			
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	✓	5	✓		✓	
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>					✓	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	✓		4	✓		6
Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>				✓	✓	✓
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>						1
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓			1		1
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>				4		12
Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>					✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	2	2			
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	H	1	1	H	✓	✓
Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>					3	
Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>				1		
Eurasian Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>					1	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>					2	
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		2	1		1	
Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>		2				
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		3	H		3	✓
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		1	2	2	1	
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H	H	H	H	

Common name	Scientific name	May 2023					
		10	11	12	13	14	15
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1		1		1	✓
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>				1	1	
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>					1	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			1		1	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	1	2			1
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		1				
European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		1		1		
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	✓			H	✓	✓
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		2				
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	1	1	2	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓			
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			1		30	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓			1	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			H	1	1	
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>			LO		H	
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>					H	H
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>					H	
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>					H	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	H	1	✓	
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>				H	H	
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>		✓	2	H	H	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>					2	1
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		2	1	✓	H	1
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		1	H			
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	1		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		2	✓	1		
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	2	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			1		1	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓		1	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	2			1	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				3	1	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>					2	
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>					H	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	1	5	2		✓	2
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	5	1	1		
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May 2023					
		10	11	12	13	14	15
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>				✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓		✓			
Grey-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergi</i>	✓	✓	✓		1	2
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		2	✓	✓	✓	
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			LO	✓	✓	1
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	1	✓	1	1	✓	2
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	5		✓	✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>				H		H
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>					4	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			1		✓	

Mammals

I=Introduced	
Common name	Scientific name
European Hare - I	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>
Wild Boar - I	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
Eurasian Elk	<i>Alces alces</i>
European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
Fallow Deer - I	<i>Dama dama</i>
Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
European Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>
Eurasian Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>

Other vertebrates

Reptiles	
Grass Snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>
Slow Worm	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>

Invertebrates

BUTTERFLIES	
Common name	Scientific name
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>
Camberwell Beauty	<i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>

Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>
Scarce Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis xanthomelas</i>
MOTHS	
Engrailed	<i>Ectropis crepuscularia</i>
Common Plume	<i>Emmolina monodactyla</i>

Dragonflies	
Common name	Scientific name
Downy Emerald	<i>Cordulia aenea</i>
Ruby Whiteface?	<i>Leucorrhinia rubicunda</i>
Other invertebrates	
Green Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela campestris</i>
Dark-edged Bee-fly	<i>Bombylius major</i>
Red Poplar Leaf Beetle	<i>Chrysomela populi</i>

Flora

Common name	Scientific name
Wood Anemone	<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>
Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus</i>
Violets	<i>Viola</i>
Lesser Celandine	<i>Ficaria verna</i>
Liverwort	<i>Hepatica nobilis</i>
Alpine Squill	<i>Scilla bifolia</i>
Bilberry	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>



Black-throated Diver by John Chapman