

Central Sweden:

Owls 'In-the-Hand' and other specialities!

Leader: Richard Taylor

23rd-27th May 2006

For 8 participants (+ Tour Leader & local guides)

Price: £*Coming soon!*



Collins Bird Guide: The Most Complete Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe by Mullarney *et al* (1999) on booking this tour!

Central Sweden is a mosaic of lakes and forests with large areas of unspoilt, prime habitat. If you like your birding in deserted forests and marshes then Sweden is the place for you.

This five-day trip, with a visit to the Upland coast added, creates more birding time by the wetlands and lakes of SvartÅdalen - The Black River Valley. Further prime birding.

These short breaks aim to use the extended daylight hours of spring to see a large number of Scandinavian specialities. Sweden has always lived in the shadow of it's neighbours with regard to seeing owls and woodpeckers, but the dedication of birders in central Sweden has proved that a high percentage of these special forest birds can easily be seen here. We aim to benefit from their expertise in seeing as many of these as possible at a great price.

Additionally we will have the almost unique pleasure of accompanying local ringers as they ring the young owls in specially provided nesting boxes. This once in a lifetime opportunity is certain to be a highlight in this fantastic country.

Many aspects of this magical trip will remain with you forever. Although the walks will be short and easy-going, the days will be long and action packed. All food, accommodation and travel are included in the price.

Three intense days in a high pace with full time birdwatching focused on forest species like Owls, Woodpeckers and Grouse.

Detailed Itinerary:

DAY 1:

Early morning flight, arrival at Vasteras airport 9.40. We will be met by our local guide, whose expert local knowledge will ensure our time here is maximised. Birding will start rapidly with a short break at a site nearby with lush deciduous forest and plenty of birds for an introduction into typical Scandinavian migrants, amongst them singing Icterine and Wood Warblers and Thrush Nightingales.

Coffee/ tea and sandwiches for lunch outdoors at small a wetland that has several pairs of breeding Slavonian Grebes. This is also a good spot also for the rowdy Black and more timid Lesser-spotted Woodpecker and also Osprey and Goshawk.

We will then transfer towards the north and the more coniferous parts of the area to join some local ringers who will be ringing the young Ural Owls in the nesting boxes which they provide, a fantastic experience, not to be missed and a sure highlight. Capercaillie and Common Crane may be seen along the roadside.

Dinner and night at Satrabrunn Spa and conference centre.

DAY 2:

There will be a very early start this morning to search an area good for woodpeckers, particularly Black, Grey-headed and Three-toed, the latter often being particularly obliging and allowing good photographic opportunities.

We will then pay a visit to some Tengmalms Owl nesting boxes to hopefully watch some ringing being done. Wryneck and Red-backed Shrike should have just arrived and the general area is also good for Woodlark, Black Grouse, Goshawk, Honey Buzzard and Crossbills, including possibly Parrot amongst the Common. We will also pass several lakes that have breeding Black-throated Divers and European Beavers.

We will then return for a relaxing lunch. The afternoon will be spent with a bit more leisurely bird watching around a local lake that holds Little Gulls, Black Terns, Eurasian Hobby, White-tailed Eagles and Great Bitterns, with possibly some lingering Bean Geese.

Evening excursion for the magnificent Great Grey Owl and/or Pygmy Owl, the former being absolutely stunning, no field guide can do it justice.

Dinner and night at countryside hotel Satrabrunn.

DAY 3:

There will be an optional early morning excursion for a Black Grouse lek, the first of some amazing birds possible today. We will then spend the rest of the morning looking at likely areas for both Capercaillie and the elusive Hazelhen.

We will also pay a visit to a forest feeding station where Nutcrackers, Grey-headed Woodpeckers and the local races of Bullfinch, Willow, Coal, Marsh and Long-tailed Tits might still turn up, the latter looking positively stunning with their white heads. This area produces the possibility of some good photographic opportunities.

We will then head off to watch some ringing of Eagle Owls, without doubt a truly memorable occasion. Around the quarry in which they nest, if we can take our eyes off the owls, we should hear and see Common Rosefinch, Ortolan Bunting, Redstart and Cuckoo.

If Pygmy Owl or Great Grey Owl is not yet on the trip-list we will dedicate the last afternoon/evening in search for them.

Dinner, pub and night at Satrabrunn.

DAY 4:

We spend time in the Black-River Valley to explore the vast grasslands, pastures and wetlands. Red-throated Pipit, Lapland Bunting, Brambling, Dotterel, Short-eared Owls and several species of ducks, geese and waders might be resting on their migration towards Lapland.

Thrush Nightingale, Common Rosefinch, Ortolan Bunting, Eurasian Hobby and Honey Buzzard are all abundant in the area.

Some Rough-legged Buzzards might be lingering on from winter and of we will look thoroughly for Pallid Harriers that are increasingly abundant in the area, with several records in spring and autumn over the last few years.

We dedicate the evening to the wetlands, looking and listening for Corncrake, Spotted Crake, Bittern, Thrush Nightingale etc. In the early season we target the nocturnal display of Jack and Great Snipes, whilst later (late May-June) night singing Warblers like River, Marsh and Blyth's Reed Warblers can be hoped for.

Dinner, pub and night at Satrabrunn.

DAY 5:

Two hour drive to Upland coastal lagoons where Caspian Terns, Little Gulls and many waders such as Ruff, Spotted Redshank or even Broad-billed Sandpipers and Temminck's Stints should be seen. Both Montagu's Harrier and White-tailed Eagle breed here, and we stand a great chance of seeing these magnificent raptors.

We will also search for scarce but regular Red-breasted Flycatcher on the Baltic coast and from the Eagle's Stone rock the view over the Baltic is stunning. Here we will pause for a picnic lunch.

From this point we will go southwest through Upland to look for Red-necked Grebes and find out what is about in this well birded area, perhaps a surprise or two? We will then finish this trip at some further wetlands that are always full of birds.

Transfer to airport for departure.

Over the nights of Days 3-5 we will focus some time on an evening excursion for singing Eagle Owl, European Nightjar viewing, a moose safari and another evening mist-netting Tengmalms Owl males, should there be any interest!

