

FINLAND
24TH – 29TH MAY 2015



ORIOLE BIRDING
TRIP REPORT

TOUR LEADERS

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PARTICIPANTS

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24TH MAY 2015

We met at Terminal Three at London Heathrow for our flight to Helsinki which departed and arrived on time. A mad dash across the airport upon arrival ensured everyone made the connecting flight as really there was not sufficient time for this. An hour later and we had arrived in Oulu on a sunny but breezy evening and once we had met with Ari and collected the buses, we made the short journey to our well located hotel. Following a delicious dinner, we headed out for our first birding excursion around half an hour away. Before we left we watched a pair of Fieldfares in the hotel grounds taking food to unseen chicks, a couple of Chaffinches, fly over Black-headed Gulls, Barn Swallows and a Willow Warbler. We then spent a very enjoyable hour or so in the forest near Singisuu, where we enjoyed absolutely fantastic views of a pair of Urals Owls doing a food pass in glorious evening sunshine as well as a well grown chick in a nest box, a couple of roding Eurasian Woodcocks, a male Pied Flycatcher and a pair of Wood Pigeons. Driving back, we encountered a female Elk in a field along with two Arctic Hares and our final stop produced a singing but unseen Common Chiffchaff and after an anxious wait, we rounded off a great start to the trip with cracking views of a calling male Eurasian Pygmy Owl while some also saw the female fly into a nest box. Back at the hotel, we had a celebratory beer to end the day while watching the midnight sun.

25TH MAY 2015

Sunny early morning becoming cloudier with occasional splashes of very light rain and a light breeze.

Some of the group made it out for a pre-breakfast walk to the marsh at the back of the hotel overlooking the Gulf of Bothnia. Several Spotted Crakes and a Great Bittern were heard calling but not seen while Sedge Warblers displayed, Reed Buntings sat on top of the reeds and Redwings, Pied Flycatchers, Yellowhammers and White Wagtails were noted around the hotel itself. Arctic Terns, Black-headed and Herring Gulls were seen offshore, while a few Tufted Ducks, Great Crested Grebe, a couple of drake Garganey and single drake Northern Shoveler and Gadwall were on the water. A male Marsh Harrier hunted the reeds, a pair of Common Rosefinches were feeding in a birch sapling and shorebirds included small numbers of Common Sandpipers, Eurasian Curlews, a couple of Common Greenshanks and a lone Little Ringed Plover. A Common Snipe was seen displaying and the picture was completed by four fly over Barnacle Geese and three Whooper Swans. Following breakfast, we drove south towards Siikajoki and into an area of Spruce forest picking up small flocks of Whooper Swans, Rooks, Western Jackdaws, Northern Lapwings and Common Cranes along the roadside. Once we had reached our destination, we only had to wait a short time before we were watching a Great Grey Owl nest with two large chicks in it and shortly after both adults came in and gave fantastic views as they perched openly in the nearby trees – what a privilege to be so close to these magnificent birds. Whilst we were here we also saw displaying Tree Pipits and a singing male Common Redstart and another area produced great views of Willow and Crested Tits and a male Eurasian Siskin. Moving on to an area of open countryside around Vardi, we quickly added Common Kestrel and Common raven to the trip list, as well as a Northern Wheatear, several Sky Larks and the first of many Whinchats.

An impromptu comfort stop paid dividends as a pair of Eurasian Wrynecks and cracking male Red-backed Shrike gave good views, while another area of similar habitat saw good numbers of House and Sand Martins overhead as well as a distant pair of Hen Harriers, an even more distant but readily identifiable immature Golden Eagle and amazingly a Camberwell Beauty butterfly that landed on the bonnet of one of the minibuses before fluttering back into the forest – the only butterfly seen all day!! By now it was lunchtime and we took this at the excellent Limminganlahti Reserve Centre before we spent the first couple of hours watching the famous bay here from the tower hide. What an excellent hour or so it was too with fabulous views of adult Little Gulls, Arctic and a very nice Gull-billed Tern; a real Finnish rarity, displaying Black-tailed Godwits in brick red breeding dress, a couple of very smartly plumaged Grey Plovers and the first of several flocks of Ruff which were in coats of many colours. Out on the water, Tufted Ducks were joined by a drake Red-breasted Merganser, a few Common Goldeneyes and a pair of Goosanders, a few Common Gulls, a pair of Greylag Geese, a drake Eurasian Wigeon and a couple of Northern Shovelers, while a drake Garganey gave excellent views as it swam around a small pool. A small flock of Wood Sandpipers dropped in but straight out of sight, a super male Grey-headed Wagtail posed on some dead reeds, a party of over one hundred Common Cranes drifted over and Whooper Swans were also present in good numbers, all of which moved quickly out of the way as an adult White-tailed Eagle gave a prolonged and fairly close fly past – brilliant! With the weather closing in a little, we returned to the forest and managed to coax a male Three-toed Woodpecker to stick its head out of its nest hole, a flock of eighty or so Common Crossbills perched up obligingly before flying off en masse and a Great Spotted Woodpecker was seen briefly in flight. The rest of the afternoon was a series of short stops for target species. At Rajakorpi, we quickly connected with a singing male Ortolan Bunting before it flew off and a displaying Wood Sandpiper was also present here. Lintolampi produced fabulous views of a pair of Slavonian Grebes on the small water body – we saw them at very close range and even witnessed the changeover of birds sitting on the nest. Finally, at Nuottasaari on the outskirts of Oulu, we tried for Terek Sandpiper at a well known site and although we failed to see the bird, we had amazing views of lekking Ruff, a pair of Little Ringed Plovers, a few Wood Sandpipers, Common Redshanks and our first Ringed Plover, Linnets and a pair of Eurasian Teal that flew off on our arrival. Arctic Terns were everywhere here and a single Common Sandpiper gave good views as it perched on an ash tip and finally a European Oystercatcher flew out to sea. The drive back to the hotel produced several Fieldfares and Hooded Crows to cap a memorable day.

26TH MAY 2015

Rain in the morning clearing by lunchtime and no wind.

We woke to light but persistent rain but continued with our plan and this proved to be a good move. We drove north for an hour or so to an area of clear fell forestry around Martionojoki and before we even got out of the bus we found an adult Northern Hawk Owl perched on the top of a dead tree. The bird soon flew down to a low branch and fed the fledged chick a sizeable vole. Soon, we found a second chick and then a third and continued until we had found six of the eight known to be here as well as both adult birds. We also had excellent views of two Common Cuckoos here and on one occasion the owl chased one of the cuckoos off the territory. Not only did we enjoy these superb birds, we on a drive around the forest tracks in ever improving weather, we again found a female Capercaillie taking grit from the side of the road, while some enjoyed reasonable views of a female Black Grouse but this bird was so well hidden that not everyone was able to see it before it flew off through the trees in silhouette. A singing Lesser Whitethroat showed well, as did the first of several Northern Wheatears, a few Common Cranes flew overhead, as did a small party of Common Crossbills and a stop at the very picturesque Luokkojarvi produced excellent views of a pair of Common Terns as they perched on telegraph wires. A return visit to Nuottaasaari produced the same species as yesterday and no sign of any Terek Sandpipers so we went back to the hotel for lunch. Our first stop in the afternoon was at a series of wet fields where we saw several Eurasian Curlews, Northern Lapwings and an obliging if a little distant Temminck's Stint that was moulting into breeding plumage. We also had good views of a singing male Common Rosefinch here and a smart male Grey-headed Wagtail.

We continued driving back roads and checking drier fields for Dotterel, but without any luck and in fact we saw little, so we decided to have a return visit to Siikajokikylva and this was a very productive stop as we had superb views of soaring Golden and White-tailed Eagles and a cracking male Pallid Harrier that drifted overhead before beginning to hunt the marshy field we were standing near. The bird was always a bit distant but could be clearly seen and the identification features were obvious. Eventually it drifted into the forest. A Eurasian Sparrowhawk was another new raptor here and we also saw Whinchats again. By now it was early evening so we headed back to the hotel but not before we made a final stop at Papinjarvi near the airport. This sizeable freshwater lake had a large flock of adult Little Gulls dip feeding over the water, good numbers of Tufted Ducks, a few pairs of Common Scoters, a couple of Greylag Geese and Whooper Swans and a beautifully marked pair of Black-throated Divers that spent the whole time giving us an exhibition of synchronised diving to end another fabulous day. A quick look at the bay behind the hotel after dinner produced a few Garganey, Common Greenshanks, Tufted Ducks, Gadwall, Arctic Terns, Ringed Plovers and Red-breasted Mergansers, as well as adding Great Black-backed Gull and a drake Northern Pintail to the trip list.

27TH MAY 2015

Torrential rain all day.

Today was transfer day, so once breakfast was over, we set off east for Kuusamo on the border with Russia. Unfortunately, it began to rain almost as soon as we left Oulu and other for a very brief period it didn't stop all day making for a very frustrating time as we were in some superb habitat but birds just weren't showing. We began at Hivisuo where we did get a brief lull in the weather – just long enough to scan from the Tower Hide. Two Taiga Bean Geese were on the pools in the bog were bonus birds and we could see the salient features through the scopes, but they were never close. A pair of Tufted Ducks, a few Common Cranes, displaying Tree Pipits, Chaffinch, Willow Warbler and a very nice male Grey-headed Wagtail at close range were also seen before we had to move on. Our next stop was in the beautiful Syöte National Park, but unfortunately a combination of the rain and lying snow made for a pretty difficult walk through the Spruce covered slopes. Remarkably of the four species seen during the morning, three were new for the trip!! A very showy male Brambling perched up nicely and gave its wheezy note, at least one Spotted Flycatcher flitted from tree top to treetop allowing everyone to get reasonable views and a small party of Common Redpolls were feeding in an alder before flying off and a Tree Pipit was again displaying despite the conditions. Following an excellent lunch at the visitor centre, we ventured back out and a Common Treecreeper showed well almost immediately; another new trip bird!!! Other than that our chances of seeing some of the sought after species in this area were ruined by the heaviest rain of the day which meant that we pushed on for Kuusamo rather than trying to venture out into the worst of the weather. We saw a few Common Goldeneyes and Reindeer en route and arrived at the hotel in the late afternoon. Once everyone had had time to get dry clothes on, and with the rain easing at last, we reconvened for a short visit to the two large lakes around the town noting large numbers of Whooper Swans, a pair of Red-necked Grebes trying to rescue their nest that was being washed away and Muskrats, Wood Sandpipers, Common Goldeneyes, Goosanders and six Black-throated Divers. With good weather after dinner, we took full advantage by adding great views of a Tengmalm's Owl to complete the big five owls and end the day on a high.

28TH MAY 2015

Early morning mist followed by sunshine and no wind.

With so much time lost yesterday, we made a very early start today to try to catch up with species missed and we enjoyed a very successful couple of hours before breakfast. The forest was very atmospheric and the lakes echoed to the bugles of unseen Whooper Swans hidden somewhere on the water. We began by finding a Willow Grouse sat in a small area of bog by the side of the road and quickly followed this up with a singing and showy Little Bunting.

We also saw Reed Buntings, a Red-necked Grebe, a Common Tern and a mixed flock of three Ringed Plovers, ten Temminck's Stints, two Common Greenshanks and a Ruff that were all feeding in the forest road where it had been flooded. At our next stop, we caught up with a couple of Siberian Jays but perhaps surprisingly given this species tolerance of humans they remained in the treetops before flying off deeper into the forest. Our final stop produced nice views of a pair of Siberian Tits at a nest box and a pair of Common Redstarts, but it was time for breakfast, so we headed back in sunshine buoyed by what we had seen. Following breakfast, our first stop was at Iivaara where we hoped to see Red-flanked Bluetails, but despite our best efforts the birds known to be present just did not show. The compensation came in the form of two pairs of Bohemian Waxwings that showed at really close range, another Siberian Tit and a Crested Tit in the same tree, an incredibly obliging Eurasian Pygmy Owl that posed right above our heads and a pair of Dunnocks, but otherwise it was quiet in lovely weather. The remainder of the day was spent driving the forest roads around Kuusamo stopping at various water bodies or likely habitat and we enjoyed some excellent birding. A Green Sandpiper was seen first of all in flight and then singing before it disappeared deep into the forest, an Osprey was perched in a dead tree but took to the wing as we approached and a Eurasian Hobby and a Eurasian Sparrowhawk were seen soaring together with a second Eurasian Hobby seen in the afternoon. Our stop for lunch not only provided a delicious meal but also great views of Eurasian Siskins, Bramblings, a pair of Bullfinches and a Red Squirrel around a feeding station. Later, a Common Cuckoo flew overhead, the first of two Mistle Thrushes were seen on top of a dead tree, a Northern Wheatear perched up nicely and incredibly we found a pair of Northern hawk owls in a courtship routine. The female was encouraging the male to breed but he appeared to have stage fright as we watched from the roadside. However, he called to her and they gave us terrific views before we left them to it. The water bodies provided us with very good numbers of Black-throated Divers, Common Goldeneyes, Little Gulls and Goosanders and we also noted Great Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Pipit, Common Kestrel and Willow Warblers before time caught up with us and we headed back for dinner.

29TH MAY 2015

Sunny with a cold breeze.

We began early again on our final morning and headed for the beautiful spruce slopes of Valtavaara. We failed to find any Red-flanked Bluetails, but were amply rewarded with fantastic views of a male hazel Grouse that perched out on a branch on several occasions, giving many their best ever view of this sought after species. We couldn't believe our luck as this was followed by a lekking male Capercaillie that showed down as close as five metres and seemed totally unconcerned by our presence as it strutted and tail fanned its way around the forest floor. – amazing!!! We also saw our first European Robin here as well as Goldcrest and heard a couple of Northern Wrens. En route, we stopped at the roadside lake at Raapyslampi and had great views of several pairs of Velvet Scoters in the lovely morning light and a pair of Smew was also noted though the drake was particularly flighty and not seen by all, while another female Smew was seen as we left Valtavaara for the journey back. A few Little Gulls were also at the lake and we saw Eurasian Wigeon, Common Goldeneyes, Whooper Swans, Red-breasted Mergansers and Tufted Ducks and a Red Squirrel ran across the road. A short stop before we went for breakfast saw nice views of Reed Buntings and a distant White-tailed Eagle at one of the lakes in Kuusamo, but again we failed to find Rustic Bunting here before it was time to go. Following a late breakfast, shower and check out, we headed for the airport via a small lake which gave us a new species in the form of two Baltic Gulls flying overhead, as well as a couple of Bohemian Waxwings by the side of the road and several Common Goldeneyes. We said our farewells to Ari at the airport and continued on to London via Helsinki, arriving an hour late. This very enjoyable tour concluded in London in the early evening.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

- 1/ Whooper Swan
- 2/Greylag Goose
- 3/Taiga Bean Goose
- 4/Common Shelduck
- 5/Mallard
- 6/Gadwall
- 7/Northern Pintail
- 8/Northern Shoveler
- 9/Eurasian Wigeon
- 10/Common Teal
- 11/ Garganey
- 12/Tufted Duck
- 13/Common Scoter
- 14/Velvet Scoter
- 15/Smew
- 16/Goosander
- 17/Red-breasted Merganser
- 18/Willow Grouse
- 19/Capercaillie
- 20/Black Grouse
- 21/Hazel Grouse
- 22/Black-throated Diver
- 23/Slavonian Grebe
- 24/Great Crested Grebe
- 25/Red-necked Grebe
- 26/Great Bittern [H]
- 27/White-tailed Eagle
- 28/Golden Eagle
- 29/Osprey
- 30/Marsh Harrier
- 31/Hen Harrier
- 32/Pallid Harrier
- 33/Eurasian Sparrowhawk
- 34/Common Kestrel
- 35/Eurasian Hobby
- 36/Common Crane
- 37/European Oystercatcher
- 38/Little Ringed Plover
- 39/Ringed Plover
- 40/Grey Plover
- 41/Wood Sandpiper
- 42/Green Sandpiper
- 43/Common Sandpiper
- 44/Common Redshank
- 45/Common Greenshank
- 46/Black-tailed Godwit
- 47/Eurasian Curlew
- 48/Eurasian Woodcock
- 49/Common Snipe
- 50/Ruff
- 51/Temminck's Stint
- 52/Black-headed Gull
- 53/Common Gull
- 54/Herring Gull

55/Baltic Gull
56/Little Gull
57/Little Tern
58/Common Tern
59/Arctic Tern
60/Gull-billed Tern
61/Wood Pigeon
62/Common Cuckoo
63/Great Grey Owl
64/Ural Owl
65/Northern Hawk Owl
66/Tengmalm's Owl
67/Eurasian Pygmy Owl
68/Common Swift
69/Great Spotted Woodpecker
70/Three-toed Woodpecker
71/Eurasian Wryneck
72/Sky Lark
73/Sand Martin
74/House Martin
75/Barn Swallow
76/Meadow Pipit
77/Tree Pipit
78/White Wagtail
79/Grey-headed Wagtail
80/Bohemian Waxwing
81/Dunnoek
82/European Robin
83/Common Redstart
84/Northern Wheatear
85/Whinchat
86/Song Thrush [H]
87/Redwing
88/Mistle Thrush
89/Fieldfare
90/Blackbird
91/Blackcap
92/Lesser Whitethroat
93/Sedge Warbler
94/Willow Warbler
95/Common Chiffchaff
96/Goldcrest
97/Northern Wren [H]
98/Spotted Flycatcher
99/Pied Flycatcher
100/Great Tit
101/Blue Tit
102/Crested Tit
103/Willow Tit
104/Siberian Tit
105/Common Treecreeper
106/Red-backed Shrike
107/Black-billed Magpie
108/Siberian Jay
109/Western Jackdaw

110/Rook
111/Hooded Crow
112/Common Raven
113/Common Starling
114/House Sparrow
115/Chaffinch
116/Brambling
117/Linnet
118/Common Redpoll
119/Greenfinch
120/Eurasian Siskin
121/Bullfinch
122/Common Crossbill
123/Common Rosefinch
124/Reed Bunting
125/Little Bunting
126/Yellowhammer
127/Ortolan Bunting
128/Spotted Crane [H]
129/Barnacle Goose

Up to sixteen other species were recorded by individuals going out alone, but we never include species not seen by at least two people on the official trip list whatever the status.

MAMMALS

Reindeer
Elk
Arctic Hare
Muskrat
Stoat
Red Squirrel

BUTTERFLIES

Camberwell Beauty