



Great Grey Owl – Oulu, Finland – June 2022 – © Andrew Kinghorn

FINLAND – THE OWLS TOUR 2ND JUNE – 7TH JUNE 2022

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THURSDAY 2ND JUNE – *Overcast with rain, often heavy.*

Thursday was primarily a day of travel, flying from Heathrow to Helsinki and then catching our connecting flight to Oulu. We arrived in Oulu in good time and headed straight to our accommodation, after a rest we then headed out for our first evening's birding in Finland. Our first stop of the trip was to some farmland flanked by stands of coniferous woodland. Within minutes of exiting the vehicle we were watching a branched **Hawk Owl** and sometime later we managed to get excellent views of the female perched right by the roadside. An excellent start for the group!



Hawk Owl – Oulu, Finland – June 2022 - © Dawn Riggett

FRIDAY 3RD JUNE – *A largely overcast but warm day, with heavy rain from early evening.*

Our first stop of the day was to look at a nest site for Tengmalm's Owl, the area itself had numerous **Whinchat** and **Tree Pipits** were very common. We arrived at the **Tengmalm's Owl** nest site and had excellent views of one of the adults. Next stop was a site nearby that regularly held **Pallid Harrier**, whilst we weren't successful on this visit, we did have great views of **Black Grouse** in crop fields and **Short-eared Owls** put on an excellent show as they went about hunting. From here we headed off to take in a **White Stork** which had turned up in the region, this was a scarce bird in the area and so certainly noteworthy! Other birds during this stop included a brief flyover **Hobby** whilst **Redwing** and **Fieldfare** were seemingly ever present.

Our next stop was a **Pygmy Owl** site, en-route we did stop to check for **Little Bunting**, but on this occasion we were unsuccessful. At the **Pygmy Owl** site, we had truly excellent views of a **Hazel Grouse** but the **Pygmy Owl** failed to show its face, the grouse being one of the standout trip highlights for many of the group. We decided to head off for lunch and then try again for the **Pygmy**

Owl afterwards. When we returned to the site after lunch we had superb views of the **Pygmy Owl**, another trip highlight for many.



Pygmy Owl – Oulu, Finland – June 2022 - © Andrew Kinghorn

After the Pygmy Owl we headed off to a site where a **Great Grey Owl** had taken up using a Goshawk nest. En-route a flyover male **Hen Harrier** was all too brief but well received. On arrival we stood in awe of the **Great Grey Owl** for quite some time, the female was tending to her young and occasionally we glimpsed the young as they rose slightly above the nest. It was only a short 150-200m walk to a site for **Ural Owl**, we were shown where the birds had nested but by this point the young had branched to a stand of nearby woodland. With the aid of thermal imaging technology both the adult and young were located.

Our final stop of the day was to the **Hawk Owl** site once again, we did this purely so we could get all the speciality owls in a day. We located a young owlet with relative ease but the conditions were closing in and so we decided to call it a day. What a superbly memorable day birding in Finland.

SATURDAY 4TH JUNE – *A dry and pleasantly warm day.*

Today was focused on taking in some of the wetland and birding towers in the Oulu region. Our first stop of the day was to breeding site famed for Terek Sandpiper, here we had excellent views of singing **Common Rosefinch** and **Eurasian Curlews** foraged on piles of snow that had not yet melted from the winter. From here we then headed to a site for **Slavonian Grebe**, instantly on arrival we were treated to some truly amazing views of this species. Then it was off to take a look for birds around Liminka bay, we had an excellent time here with superb lekking **Ruff** whilst **Black-tailed Godwits** could almost be described as common. A nearby flash held a superb drake **Garganey** and flyby **Common Cranes** and **Whooper Swans** were entertaining. A scan over the bay revealed two **White-tailed Eagles** which flew in and perched up on a distant fisherman's hut, when we returned to the vehicle the alarm calls of Common Gulls alerted us to the fact one of the **White-tailed Eagles** had come over for a look as it thermaled upwards in the late morning sunshine. From here we headed to the Virkkula birdwatching tower and visitor centre, the tower itself allows for excellent views

across the bay. The complex was initially built for visitors to enjoy Yellow-breasted Bunting which at the time was in serious decline, frustratingly by the time the centre had been finished the species all but stopped breeding in Finland and the birds had gone. From the tower one of our team skilfully picked out a **Pintail** amongst the **Mallard** and others had good views of patrolling **Caspian Terns**. One of the two **White-tailed Eagles** was still perched up on the fisherman's hut and so we had slightly closer views from the birding tower. An **Osprey** was initially distant before it approached us on its feeding route. From here we headed off to look for a hunting male **Hawk Owl** that we had been tipped off about, but sadly we didn't see him on this occasion. As we were so close by, we decided to have yet another look at the young **Hawk Owls**. En-route we had excellent views of a male **Marsh Harrier** and the **Hawk Owl** chicks were showing ridiculously well, but there was no sign of the adult female on this visit. We then returned to the visitor centre at Virkkula for lunch.



Ruff – Oulu, Finland – June 2022 - © Andrew Kinghorn

After lunch we took one final throw of the dice to try and see the female **Hawk Owl**, but she wasn't giving herself up, but the **Hawk Owl** chicks were still present but had spread out somewhat. From here we returned again to the site for the **Terek Sandpiper** but sadly couldn't locate any, though a **Green Sandpiper** provided some entertainment and the **Common Rosefinch** was still present singing away. A check of the bay was our final call of the day before we headed off back to our accommodation for some much needed rest before our early start the next morning.

SUNDAY 5th JUNE – *A dry day, overcast at times but pleasant.*

Today was an early start so we could travel onto Kuusamo, half way there we stopped for breakfast at a conveniently located birding tower. The area provided guests with the chance to connect with **Common Crossbill**, whilst **Common Cranes** were visible from the birding tower. After breakfast we continued onto Kuusamo where we arrived around mid-morning. A quick stop by a nearby lake gave us our first flavour of the regions avifauna with excellent views of both **Black-headed** and **Little Gulls** feeding over and around the lake from the roadside. On the other side of the road, we also had our first **Goldeneye** of the trip. From here we headed off to Vihtasalmi bird watching tower where we had excellent views of breeding plumage **Red-necked Grebe** and the colony of breeding **Little Gulls** here was quite special. Noisy **Whooper Swans** made themselves known and a flyover **Peregrine** was notable at this site as their closest breeding location was quite some way from the site. On the way to drop off our bags at the hotel, another quick stop produced some excellent views of **Velvet Scoter**, for British birders it's a real treat to see locations where these birds spend their summers. We headed off to our hotel where we checked in and had a short rest before heading back out for a time.

We took in some stunning summer plumage **Black-throated Divers** near to our hotel and they were also joined by a smart pair of **Red-necked Phalaropes**. After a short drive we were in some truly breathtakingly beautiful boreal forest, whilst the wind was quite strong, we did hear both **Greenish Warbler** and **Red-flanked Bluetail**. The former was the first reported this year in the region. Nearby

we stopped to look for **Rustic Bunting** and it wasn't long until we were enjoying views of a stunning male in full song. For a bird that we see as a rare vagrant in the UK, it was a real treat to see this stunningly marked bird in full song in boreal forest. From here we headed off to look for both Three-toed Woodpecker and Siberian Jay, but on this occasion, we were not successful. With an early start planned we decided to call it an evening and head back to our hotel for the night.



Little Gull – Kuusamo, Finland – June 2022 - © Andrew Kinghorn

MONDAY 6TH JUNE – *A sunny and calm day, initially cold and then warming up as the day progressed.*

An early morning start around Ruka was excellent, with **Grey Wagtail** and singing **Brambling** at our first stop. A steady walk up the hillside provided us with some close encounters with Reindeer and a brief view of what was presumed to be a non-breeding **Red-flanked Bluetail**. From here we moved onto look for Siberian Jay, we stopped to look for a singing male **Red-flanked Bluetail** but on this occasion we had to remain content with just hearing the male sing. A flyover **Osprey** was seen by some and a **Willow Tit** showed well if briefly. We headed further up the slope until the forest reached somewhat of a plateau, from here we heard another singing male **Red-flanked Bluetail** and after some patience the male was located singing and everyone had excellent views. From here we headed back to our hotel for some breakfast.

After breakfast we headed out to look for **Little Bunting**, on arrival at the site it didn't take long before the bird started to sing and we eventually got views of this charming species. Some of our group were really keen to see Calypso orchid, and so we headed off to Oulanka national park. The site itself was spectacular; the river held **Goosander** and some entertainment was provided by a foraging **Redwing**. Whilst taking in the impressive waterfall both **Grey Wagtail** and **Dipper** were seen. A very short drive from here was made in search of Siberian Jay, whilst we were not successful, we did manage some superb views of **Rustic Bunting** foraging right by the road. Another stop by a site to look for Three-toed Woodpecker failed to produce the species, but we did have roadside **Green Sandpiper** and **Brambling** were relatively easy to connect with. It was decided it was time for lunch

and so headed back to the visitor centre at Oulanka, on arrival some **Parrot Crossbills** were present in the car park, which were among the only ones noted on the trip. We tried several locations in the hope of connecting with **Siberian Jay**, and whilst we were not successful, we did encounter some other excellent birds including further singing **Brambling** and some of the only **Blackbirds** of the trip.



Red-flanked Bluetail – Kuusamo, Finland – June 2022 - © Andrew Kinghorn

TUESDAY 7TH JUNE – *A fine and dry day with largely clear skies, but cold first thing.*

This was the final day of the tour, and with the weather forecast being dry and calm we decided to do the Kuusamo “grouse drive”, this focused around driving a pre-determined route in order to look for the various grouse species. Our first stop of the day provided us with splendid views of **Black Grouse** as it was lekking across the lake, the whole evocative experience was like something you’d see on a nature documentary. The lake itself had a lot of wildfowl on it with the highlights being roosting **Smew** and a distant **Black-throated Diver**. Our first stop on the grouse drive was to take in some excellent **Black Grouse** that were just by the road, a short way on and we had good (but brief) views of **Hazel Grouse** on the deck. A quick stop to check for **Taiga Bean Goose** revealed quite a few birds on nearby agricultural land, other birds noted here included handsome **Golden Plover** and excellent views of **Whooper Swans**. A coffee stop by a lakeside revealed more **Smew** as well as a single male **Ruff** and another colony of **Little Gulls**. We then headed off to look for **Willow Grouse**, to begin with we heard birds but couldn’t see them. With some help from the thermal imaging camera a bird was located and excellent views followed. The IOC taxonomic authority may decide to split Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus scoticus*) from **Willow Grouse** (*Lagopus lagopus*), meaning each would be elevated to full species status rather than Red Grouse being a subspecies of Willow. Our final bit of birding of the trip was undertaken near to our hotel in Ruka where we finally connected with a small party of **Siberian Jays**, a much sought-after corvid for many on the tour and so well received. We also heard our only **Waxwing** of the trip here, a great way to end a memorable trip.

After breakfast we took a leisurely drive back to Oulu (with a few comfort stops), we then boarded our flight back to Helsinki and caught our connecting flight to Heathrow.



Willow Grouse – Kuusamo, Finland – June 2022 - © Andrew Kinghorn

SYSTEMATIC LIST

** DISCLAIMER: Please note that the comments are by no means exhaustive, their intention is to give a rough outline of what was seen and the frequency at which it was seen. This checklist includes species seen on journey as well as whilst birding. **

No	Species List	Comments
1)	Greylag Goose	Present and seen on three of the six days.
2)	Mute Swan	Only seen on one of the six days.
3)	Whooper Swan	Seen on five of six days, the species was once threatened in Finland but thanks to conservation efforts the species is now easy to see.
4)	Taiga Bean Goose	A non-breeding party of birds was witnessed on one of the six days in Kuusamo.
5)	Garganey	Seen on two of the six days and always around marshy or large wetland areas.
6)	Northern Shoveler	Seen on one of the six days and around a wetland area in Oulu.
7)	Eurasian Wigeon	Seen on two of the six days in the Kuusamo region.
8)	Mallard	Seen on five of the six days, common and easy to see.
9)	Eurasian Teal	Seen on three of the six days, always around wetlands.
10)	Northern Pintail	Only a single bird seen in Liminka bay amongst wildfowl.
11)	Tufted Duck	Seen on five of the six days, common and easy to see.
12)	Velvet Scoter	Seen on one of the six days on lakes in Kuusamo region.

13)	Common Goldeneye	Seen on three of the six days, with the species being easier to connect with in the Kuusamo region.
14)	Smew	Seen on one of the six days in Kuusamo region on the lakes in the region.
15)	Red-breasted Merganser	Flyover birds noted on two of the six days.
16)	Goosander	Seen on two of the six days around river systems, as is typical for the species.
17)	Hazel Grouse	As is often the case amongst birders visiting Finland, this is a much sought after species and we had two encounters; most notable a territorial male in Oulu and also roadside birds in Kuusamo on an early morning drive.
18)	Willow Grouse	Whilst a full species in its own right, the British Red Grouse is considered a subspecies of Willow Grouse (or Ptarmigan). There is a chance that the IOC may split Willow Grouse and Red Grouse to species in their own right, but it is equally as likely this won't happen. Birds were heard and a single bird seen around Kuusamo on an early morning visit.
19)	Black Grouse	A surprisingly widespread species in Oulu and Kuusamo compared to how British birders experience the species. We saw the species on two of the six days, the species has a strong population in Finland due to the amount of woodland.
20)	Slavonian Grebe	Seen on one of the six days and extremely well! A bird was witnessed on an ornamental wetland in the Kuusamo region.
21)	Red-necked Grebe	Seen on one of the six days in the Kuusamo region where it nests.
22)	Great Crested Grebe	Seen on three of the six days, and it was noteworthy that the species was noted on Oulu and not in Kuusamo by our group.
23)	Common Woodpigeon	Seen in three of the six days and wasn't difficult to connect with, most encounters are likely to be random.
24)	Collared Dove	Seen on one of the six days and just like in Britain a strong connection between human settlements and the species presence.
25)	Common Cuckoo	Either heard or seen on at least four of the six days, the species appears to be relatively widespread still in Finland.
26)	Common Swift	Seen on nearly every day, a common and widespread species in Finland.
27)	Corncrake	Species was heard on at least two of the six days, and these were made around our accommodation in Oulu.
28)	Common Crane	Seen in three of the six days, this species is quite widespread in Finland as it is in most other European nations.
29)	European Golden Plover	Only noted on one of the six days and only in Kuusamo, but it is worth noting we did not go out of our way to see this species.
30)	Northern Lapwing	Seen on four of the six days, was notably lacking more so in Kuusamo compared to Oulu.
31)	European Oystercatcher	Seen on one of the six days in Oulu region.
32)	Eurasian Curlew	Seen in four of the six days and wasn't hard to see in the Oulu region, the species was largely lacking in Kuusamo in areas where we were bird watching.
33)	Black-tailed Godwit	Seen in the Liminka bay, and therefore on only one of the six days.
34)	Ruff	Seen in the Liminka bay, and therefore on only one of the six days. Displaying males were a highlight for many on this trip

		to Finland.
35)	Eurasian Woodcock	Seen on two of the six days and both were roadside encounters of birds bordering woodland.
36)	Common Snipe	Seen on five of the six days, birds were easy to see and hear amongst even slightly boggy areas adjacent to woodland clearings.
37)	Red-necked Phalarope	Two birds seen on one of the six days and in the Kuusamo region on one of the many lakes in the region.
38)	Common Sandpiper	Seen on four of the six days, a seemingly common bird in the region.
39)	Green Sandpiper	Seen in two of the six days, some birds on the roadside and others in boggy woodland close to roads.
40)	Common Greenshank	Seen on four of the six days, another species that was relatively easy to see in Finland.
41)	Wood Sandpiper	Seen on three of the six days, and much like Green Sandpiper some of these birds were on breeding grounds and so singing from trees.
42)	Common Redshank	Seen on two of the six days and only in the Oulu region, the species was not noted in the Kuusamo region by our group.
43)	Black-headed Gull	Seen on every day of the tour, an easy to see species.
44)	Little Gull	Seen in two of six days, the species breeds in marshy areas in the Kuusamo region.
45)	Common Gull	Seen on four of six days, including seeing birds on their breeding grounds.
46)	Herring Gull	A widespread species in Finland and seen in three of the six days.
47)	Baltic Gull	Seen in two of the six days, but sometimes surprisingly hard to catch up with.
48)	Little Tern	Seen in two of the six days, they were present in the bay by our hotel in Oulu.
49)	Caspian Tern	Seen on most mornings or evenings during our stay in Oulu from the hotel, birds patrol the bay fishing and return to the large offshore colony.
50)	Common Tern	Seen in three of the six days and not difficult to see around large bodies of water close enough to the coast.
51)	Arctic Tern	Seen in two of the six days.
52)	Black-throated Diver	Seen on the lakes in Kuusamo, a handsome and ever popular species on any trip when in summer plumage.
53)	White Stork	The species is rare in Oulu and Kuusamo, and so the bird we witnessed in the Oulu region was a vagrant
54)	Great Bittern	The species was heard on two of the six days, but no visuals made.
55)	Osprey	Species was witnessed in the Liminka bay from one of the birding towers.
56)	Western Marsh Harrier	Seen on four of the six days, a widespread raptor and we found it far easier to see than even Buzzard in Finland.
57)	Hen Harrier	Seen in two of the six days, all birds pertained to flyovers.
58)	White-tailed Eagle	The species was witnessed in the Liminka bay, at least two individuals involved. The species was only noted on one of the six days, but is loosely distributed across the Oulu and Kuusamo region.
59)	Common Buzzard	Only seen on one of the six days, in good vole years raptors are hard to see in Finland as they aren't active for as long during the day due to the abundance of prey.

60)	Northern Hawk Owl	A highly nomadic species, and in some years the species doesn't stretch as far south as Oulu. This year was a good year for the species in Finland, we managed to connect with a single family and an attending female. The male was believed to be known and using nearby clear-fell.
61)	Eurasian Pygmy-Owl	A single pair observed well in the Oulu region, this species does not use nest boxes and so the nest site was a tree hole.
62)	Ural Owl	We saw a family of Ural Owl on one of the six days, these impressive birds were only two00 meters from a Great Grey Owl nest.
63)	Great Grey Owl	This species was a definite trip highlight, we witnessed a female Great Grey Owl tending to her chicks in an old Goshawk nest. We only witnessed this species on one of the six days.
64)	Short-eared Owl	Seen on two of the six days and all encounters were made in the region of Oulu.
65)	Tengmalm's Owl	A single bird seen at a nest site in Oulu.
66)	Great Spotted Woodpecker	This was the only species of woodpecker witnessed on our visit, and was seen on four of the six days and with ease.
67)	Common Kestrel	Surprisingly the group only saw Kestrel on two of the six days and all observations were made in the Oulu region.
68)	Eurasian Hobby	Only a single bird noted and it flew over our vehicles in Oulu.
69)	Peregrine Falcon	Witnessed from Vihtasalmi bird watching tower in the Kuusamo region.
70)	Siberian Jay	The species is quite common in the Kuusamo region, but the species it a bit harder to see in the late spring and summer months. We managed to connect with a family party in Ruka.
71)	Eurasian Jay	Only seen on one of the six days in the Oulu region.
72)	Common Magpie	Seen on every day, common and easy to see.
73)	Eurasian Jackdaw	Seen on four of the six days, not difficult to connect with.
74)	Rook	Seen on two of the six days, but all encounters were made in the Oulu region.
75)	Hooded Crow	Seen on every day and very common.
76)	Common Raven	Seen on three of the six days, though by no means numerous in the areas we visited.
77)	Crested Tit	A single bird heard on a single day in Kuusamo.
78)	Willow Tit	Seen on a single day in Kuusamo.
79)	Siberian Tit	We visited a nest box where we had excellent views of Siberian Tits, these were our only birds of the trip. The observation was made in the Kuusamo region.
80)	Eurasian Blue Tit	Seen on three of the six days and all observations were made in the Oulu region.
81)	Great Tit	Seen or heard on five of the six days, an easy species to connect with.
82)	Eurasian Skylark	Seen on a single day in the Oulu region around agricultural fields.
83)	Sand Martin	Seen on three of the six days.
84)	Barn Swallow	Seen on every day, a widespread and common summer visitor.
85)	Common House Martin	Seen on three of the six days, most encounters made primarily around human settlements.
86)	Eurasian Wren	A single bird heard on one date only.

87)	Dipper	A single bird seen on the fast moving river at Oulanka national park in Kuusamo.
88)	Willow Warbler	Seen or heard on every day, a widespread species still in Finland.
89)	Common Chiffchaff	Seen or heard on three of the six days, not a difficult species to catch up with in Finland.
90)	Greenish Warbler	A single bird heard in Kuusamo on a single day only, it was one of the first returning birds to the region in two0two0two.
91)	Goldcrest	Seen or heard on two of the six days, a species that is more commonly heard than seen.
92)	Sedge Warbler	Seen or heard on four of the six days, an easy species to connect with in Finland.
93)	Lesser Whitethroat	Seen or heard on four of the six days.
94)	Common Whitethroat	Seen or heard on only one of the six days.
95)	Eurasian Treecreeper	Seen on one date only in Kuusamo.
96)	Spotted Flycatcher	Seen or heard only four of the six days, quite a widespread species in Finland.
97)	European Robin	Seen or heard on three of six days.
98)	Common Redstart	Seen or heard on three of the six days.
99)	Whinchat	Seen on three of the six days, a widespread species that is easy to see in Finland, especially in the region of Oulu.
100)	Northern Wheatear	Seen on a single day only.
101)	Red-flanked Bluetail	A highly sought after species in Finland, we managed to hear and see this species in the hill forest of Kuusamo.
102)	Pied Flycatcher	Seen on four of the six days, a relatively easy species to connect with in Finland. A lot of individuals were still in full song.
103)	Mistle Thrush	Seen or heard on two of the six days.
104)	Song Thrush	Seen or heard on three of the six days.
105)	Redwing	Seen or heard on every day, this is a common and widespread bird in Finland.
106)	Eurasian Blackbird	Seen or heard on four of the six days.
107)	Fieldfare	Seen or heard on every day, this is a common and widespread bird in Finland.
108)	Common Starling	Seen on three of the six days.
109)	Yellow Wagtail	Seen or heard on three of the six days, the race in Finland is <i>thunbergi</i> .
110)	White Wagtail	Seen or heard on five of the six days, a common and widespread species in Finland.
111)	Meadow Pipit	Seen or heard on three of the six days.
112)	Tree Pipit	Seen or heard on every day of the trip.
113)	Waxwing	Only heard on one of the six days in Kuusamo.
114)	Common Chaffinch	Seen or heard on every day, a numerous species in Finland.
115)	Brambling	Seen or heard on most days when we were in the region of Kuusamo.
116)	European Greenfinch	Seen or heard on two of the six days with we were in Oulu.
117)	Common Linnet	Heard on the first day only in the Oulu region.
118)	Common Redpoll	Seen or heard on three of six days.
119)	Parrot Crossbill	Seen and heard on a single day in Kuusamo in the car park of the visitor centre in Oulanka national park.
120)	Common Crossbill	Seen or heard on three of the six days.
121)	Common Rosefinch	Seen or heard on two of the six days, observations included

		singing adult males.
122)	Eurasian Bullfinch	Seen on three of the six days, audibly quite different to birds we hear in the UK.
123)	Eurasian Siskin	Seen or heard on five of the six days, an easy bird to connect with.
124)	Common Reed Bunting	Seen or heard on five of the six days, quite an easy bird to connect with in Finland.
125)	Yellowhammer	Seen or heard on four of the six days.
126)	Little Bunting	Seen and heard on one of the six days.
127)	Rustic Bunting	Seen on two of the six days, all birds were observed in the Kuusamo region. Both adult males and females were witnessed.
128)	House Sparrow	Seen on two of the six days.
129)	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	Seen on two of the six days.