



Great Grey Owl – Oulu – May 2026 – © Andrew Kinghorn

Finland – The Owls Tour – 26TH to 31ST May 2026

written by Andrew Kinghorn, June.2026.

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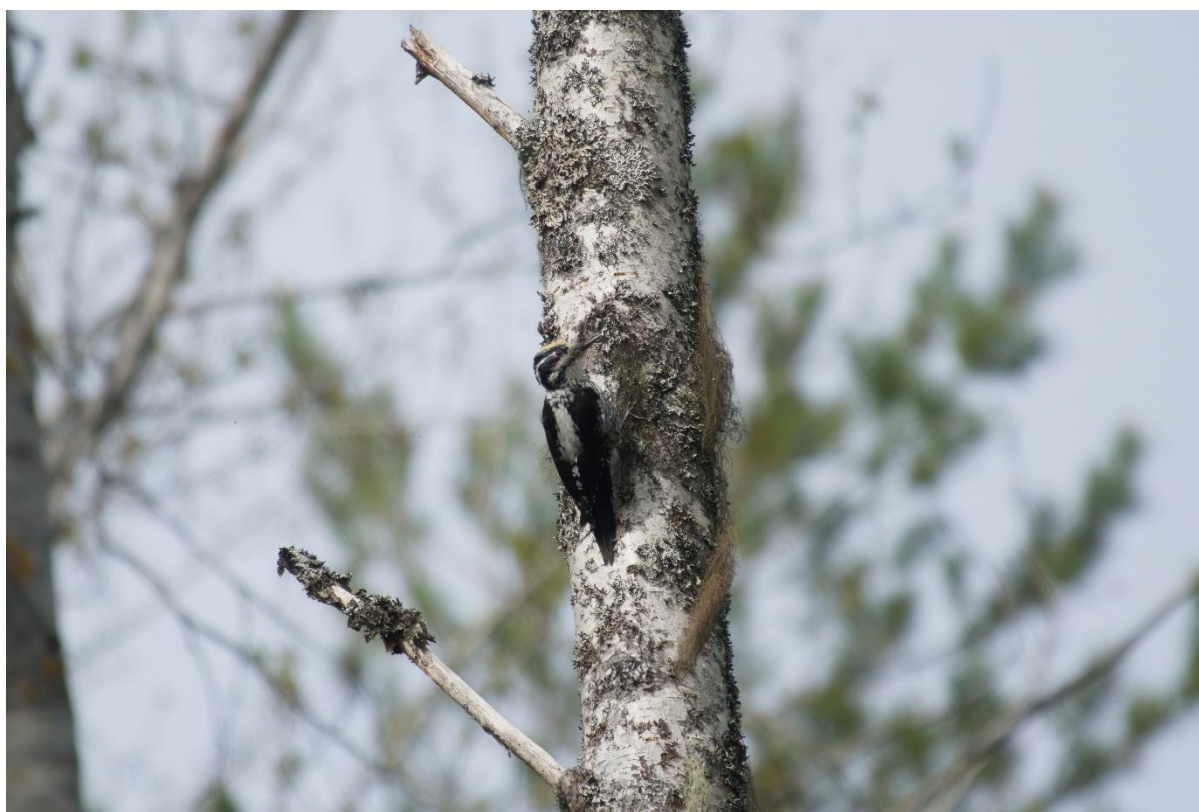
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INTRODUCTION

Late May in Finland offers fantastic spring birding in northern Europe, the weather is often much more settled than in April, but it can be cold at times. The following account is a summary of key highlights of events and birds seen during the tour. Please note that the day narratives are by no means intended to be exhaustive, instead they outline highlights for each day. For the sake of consistency all species below possess names as defined by AviList version 2025 (*AviList Core Team*. 2025. *AviList: The Global Avian Checklist*, v2025. <https://doi.org/10.2173/avilist.v2025>), and to my best knowledge are correct as of June 2026. The tour was led by Pentti Kallio and Andrew Kinghorn.

TUESDAY 26TH MAY

We landed in Oulu mid-afternoon and with time on our hands we were all eager to head out for our first day's birding, admittedly things were a bit slow in the strong wind and warm sun, but notable birds came in the form of flyover **Little Gulls** and a smart red **Common Rosefinch**. The real treat today came after our evening meal when we headed out to take a look at some owls, our first stop was to take a look at a Pygmy Owl nestbox, as we approached, we were rudely interrupted by a calling **Black Woodpecker**, which then flew over us. Upon arriving at the Pygmy Owl box we didn't have to wait long before seeing the male and a real treat came when the female also peered out of the nest box for a short time. Content with this we then took a very short walk to look at an impressive **Great Grey Owl** on an old Goshawk nest, what was a little frustrating is a few of us glanced what was clearly the male returning to feed his mate, but by the time we got there he had departed. After this memorable experience it was a short drive to a pair of **Ural Owls**, the night was really getting on now and as if by magic the male flew in with a **Siskin** prey item for his mate, she shuffled around the nesting platform somewhat to reveal her downy chick. What a truly memorable first evening birding around Oulu, it will live long in the memory for many, I am sure.



(Three-toed Woodpecker – Oulu – May 2026 – © Andrew Kinghorn)

WEDNESDAY 27TH MAY

Given we were out until close to midnight, we had a well-deserved lie-in and then it was up and out after breakfast for some woodpecker action. This year had not only been a good year around Oulu for owls but for woodpeckers also. Our first stop was to wait to see a **Three-toed Woodpecker**, the male performed superbly well, certainly this was my best views of this species. We then walked

through the woodlands, on the way we had multiple **Wood Warblers**, some **Eurasian Treecreepers**, and our next target showed well too when a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** came out of its nesting hole – result! A walk back to the main road for our final woodpecker of the wood; **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, we also stopped by a **Black Woodpecker** nest hole where the chick from the day before had fledged the nest already, it was interesting to then walk around the base of the tree and see the sheer amount of wood debris on the floor the species had generated to create the hole.

From here we headed to look for a **Blyth's Reed Warbler**, this bird was singing well but not showing and so we decided to cut our losses, so to speak, and head on to look at a second **Great Grey Owl** nest, this one was quite astonishing, whilst man-made platforms are not as aesthetically pleasing to look at Goshawk nests, the views of this individual were quite astonishing, it was around 7-8ft off the ground and sitting incredibly close to where we were standing. I'd like to reiterate that when it comes to 'aura' omitted by a bird, this species has it in spades. It truly is a must-see species. From here it was time for an early afternoon evening meal, only because we were back out again for the evening.

For the evening's birding, we headed to a **Tengmalm's Owl** box, sadly as is the nature of birding it was a bit of a frustrating affair, with most only glancing a pair of eyes in the entrance to a nest hole, the eyes of a large chick that had no intentions of showing itself to us in full view. But we finished the evening off with a high, we headed off to a site for **Eurasian Eagle Owl** site, as we arrived the male came in, of course to bring some food to his mate. Whilst he perched up at an awkward angle, participants of the tour very skilfully picked out the female perched up, she afforded some really excellent views, at one point a **Peregrine Falcon** came in, and embodied the meaning of the phrase 'sailing close to the wind' when it almost lost its life to the female who pursued it briefly with talons lunched! We watched her for some time and with the day now getting on, we decided to call it another successful owl night.

THURSDAY 28TH MAY

After a late finish, it was once again time for a very civilised late breakfast. Our first stop of the day was a little north of the hotel to look for **Terek Sandpiper**, after exiting the car we took the very short walk towards the shore and sure enough two of our targets appeared. What followed was the male putting on quite a show singing, it is worth reiterating how hard it is to connect with breeding **Terek Sandpiper** in Europe. We then took a short drive to try our luck with **Tengmalm's Owl**, but we were rudely interrupted when we just simply had to bring the vans to a screeching halt for a stunning adult male **Pallid Harrier**, this species westwards expansion across Europe continued apace, and whilst the reasons for it could be concerning, it is hard not to welcome the sight! This male was clearly feeding a female somewhere nearby and we watched him carry off prey only to return very soon after once again hunting the same area. We were not successful with the owl and so instead headed off to try for the **Ortolan Buntings**, the wind was strong and we only glimpsed a bird briefly, it was mainly **Yellowhammers** galore on this occasion.

After our lunch stop we headed off to Liminka bay, despite the wind there was plenty on offer. Here we added two male **Garganey** amongst the **Teal** for the trip list, we also had some memorable views of **White-tailed Eagles** and with patience we eventually got views of **Caspian Tern**, which was a trip tick for most of the group. Other highlights in Liminka included **Osprey**. For the remainder of the afternoon we tried for **Corncrake** and **Blyth's Reed Warbler**, we were successful on both fronts, though we did have to settle for just heard only on the former species, which is of course most typical.



(Terek Sandpiper – Oulu – May 2026 – © Andrew Kinghorn)

FRIDAY 29TH MAY

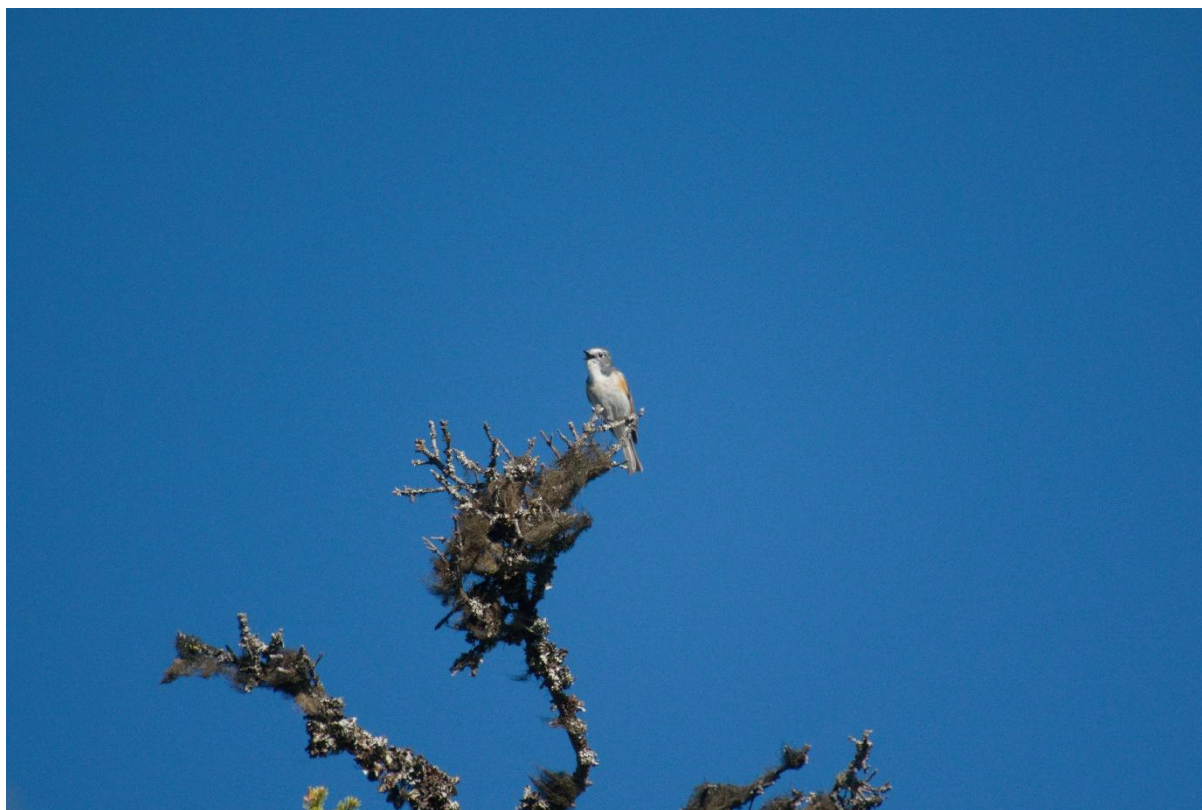
It was finally time to take the drive eastwards toward Kuusamo, so we got in the vans and headed that way after breakfast. On route we had our second **Pallid Harrier** of the trip, this bird a ringtail. We stopped at a site well known for **Icterine Warbler**, not only did we score the bird we also had good views of **Blyth's Reed Warbler**, after a run of bad luck with that species we had seemingly turned the corner in terms of our luck! Our first stop in the Kuusamo area started off well, upon disembarking the vehicle we had a flyover **Greater/Lesser Spotted Eagle**! Sadly, the bird was just too brief to obtain good photos of, the impression was likely the former but with hybrids also in Europe now, we had to settle for either/or on this occasion. On the lake we had stopped at we had good views of **Red-throated Diver** and there was also **Whimbrel** and **Wood Sandpiper** there too, our first **Waxwing** calling was also a sure sign we truly had arrived in Kuusamo.

After lunch it was time for some birding at some of the sites near to where we were staying, we visited a **Little Gull** colony where we also had our first breeding **Red-necked Grebes** of the tour. From here we headed off to take in yet more breeding plumage **Little Gulls** as well as more **Red-necked Grebes** and stunning breeding plumage **Black-throated Divers**. We decided to finish off the day strong and headed off to look for **Siberian Tit**, with a bit of patience we managed excellent views of this fabulous looking species, understandably a real tour highlight being one of Finland's specialities. After a long day of travel, we decided it was time to call it a day, we were going to be up very early morning the following day.

SATURDAY 30TH MAY

Today we were up at a time that even the larks could consider unsociable, but with barely a breath of wind and a cloud in the sky it was one of those mornings that was quite simply too good to not apply ourselves. First stop of the day was a cold but stunning lake, in the distance like some sort of oil painting a male **Black Grouse** was lekking atop a tree, his charismatic call echoing over the water. We then headed to look for **Capercaillie**, we heard a male lekking but he would not show himself, that didn't matter so much as we had roadside **Siberian Jay** as well as **Rustic Bunting**. With the

morning now getting on (in terms of woodland grouse timekeeping!) we headed off to look for **Wryneck**, it really did not take long before a male showing himself at the roadside. From here it was time for another icon of Kuusamo, after a short walk we located at least two male **Red-flanked Bluetails**, a short while later we had good views of **Greenish Warbler**. Our final stop added **Crested Tit** to the trip list, always a well-received species. We headed back to the hotel for a well-earned breakfast and some downtime.



(Red-flanked Bluetail – Kuusamo – May 2026 – © Andrew Kinghorn)

In the afternoon we targeted some of the birds where it is less critical to be out early or late, with this in mind we decided to try and look for **Taiga Bean Goose**, on route we stopped to check some of their favoured foraging fields, whilst we were unsuccessful, we did encounter a flyover **Golden Eagle**. Our next stop was more productive, we located a substantial flock of **Taiga Bean Geese** as well as a whole host of other great birds, including our first **Smew** of the trip. Another cracking end to a day's birding in Kuusamo.

SUNDAY 31ST MAY

Once again it was up early, but this time we had a well-deserved additional hour in bed. Our main targets were the missing grouse, whilst we were not successful with **Willow Grouse** we did finally, with patience secure views for everyone of **Hazel Grouse**. We finished the trip on a high with **Willow Tit** and singing **Rustic Bunting**.

After packing our bags, we made our way back to Oulu airport where we got our connecting flight to Helsinki then back to Heathrow where the tour concluded.

Systematic List

LIST KEY:

Green = Species expected to be encountered regularly on a typical tour of Finland during this period.

Amber = Species less likely to be seen routinely, but with focused effort are still reasonably achievable.

Red = Species that are difficult to observe on a standard tour and generally require targeted searching; this category also includes vagrants.

No.	Species List	Scientific name
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
3	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>
4	Taiga Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
5	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
6	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>
8	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>
9	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
11	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
12	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
13	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
14	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
15	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>
16	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
17	Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>
18	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
19	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
20	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
21	Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i>
22	Western Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>
23	Black Grouse	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>
24	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>
25	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>
26	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
27	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>
28	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
29	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
30	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
31	Corncrake	<i>Crex crex</i>
32	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
33	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
34	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
35	European Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
36	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
37	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
38	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
39	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>
40	Broad-billed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris falcinellus</i>



41	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>
42	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
43	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>
44	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
45	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
46	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
47	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
48	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
49	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
50	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>
51	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
52	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
53	Baltic Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
54	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
55	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
56	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
57	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
58	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>
59	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>
60	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>
61	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
62	European Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
63	Greater / Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga clanga / pomarina</i>
64	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
65	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
66	Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>
67	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
68	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
69	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
70	Eurasian Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>
71	Eurasian Pygmy-Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>
72	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>
73	Great Grey Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>
74	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>
75	Tengmalm's Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>
76	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
77	Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>
78	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
79	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>
80	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>
81	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
82	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
83	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
84	Siberian Jay	<i>Perisoreus infaustus</i>
85	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
86	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
87	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
88	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
89	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>



90	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
91	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
92	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>
93	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>
94	Siberian Tit	<i>Poecile cinctus</i>
95	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
96	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
97	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
98	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
99	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
100	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
101	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>
102	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
103	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
104	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
105	Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
106	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
107	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>
108	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
109	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
110	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>
111	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
112	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
113	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
114	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
115	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
116	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
117	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
118	Red-flanked Bluetail	<i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>
119	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
120	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
121	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
122	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>
123	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
124	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>
125	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
126	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
127	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
128	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
129	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
130	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
131	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
132	Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>
133	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
134	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
135	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
136	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>
137	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
138	Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>



139	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
140	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
141	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>
142	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
143	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
144	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
145	Rustic Bunting	<i>Emberiza rustica</i>
146	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
147	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>