

Finland & Norway: Birding and Nature | June 4-16, 2026

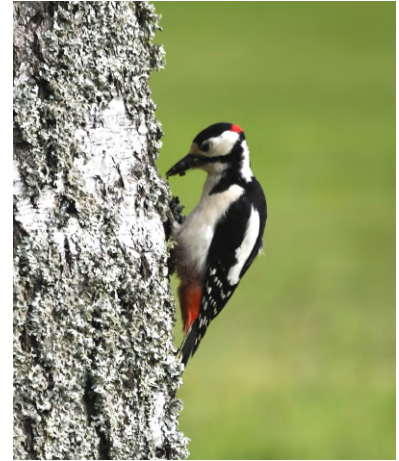
Trip Report by Gerard Gorman



With Gerard (group leader), Riku (local guide), and Nick, Liz, Marilyn, Kaye, Carol, Hal, Ruth, Esther, Matthew, Sacha, Gail and Mark.



As in previous years our Naturalist Journeys tour to Finland and Norway was simply wonderful. We journeyed from Oulu in NW Finland through the taiga (boreal) forest eastwards to Kuusamo near the Russian border and then north into iconic Lapland. We crossed the Arctic Circle experienced the Arctic tundra in Norway and finally arrived at the coast of the Barents Sea. We visited many impressive and diverse landscapes and seascapes and observed a rich range of wildlife. There were countless bird highlights, for example, lekking Ruff in their outlandish breeding plumage, Temminck's Stints doing their fluttering flight display, a Gyrfalcon (the world's biggest falcon) with her chicks. We found several typical "Siberian species", such as Gray-headed Chickadees and Siberian Jays. Owls where, as so often on this tour, a major feature with five species seen, Boreal, Ural, Great Gray, Short-eared and Northern Hawk Owls. Woodpeckers, from Europe's largest, Black Woodpecker, to the smallest, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, were also popular. We saw several Smew, a much requested little duck, a close handsome male Horned Grebe in colorful plumage, dancing Common Cranes, a pair of confiding Eurasian Dotterels, numerous Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers, Fieldfares almost everywhere, and got great views of the endangered Ortolan Bunting. It seems that 2026 was a "good vole" year as some birds which typically prey on small rodents, such as Rough-legged Hawk, Long-tailed Jaeger and the owls, were around in good numbers. In total, we observed 163 species, including 23 shorebirds, 22 wildfowl, 9 gulls, 7 corvids, 10 diurnal raptors and 11 finches. Then there was the stunning spectacle of 1000s of photogenic seabirds (Common Murres, Razorbills, Atlantic Puffins, European Shags and Great Black-backed Gulls - the world's biggest gull species) on Hornøya



Island in the Barents Sea in the very north of Norway. Besides birds, mammals observed were Brown and Mountain Hares, Eurasian Red Squirrel, Gray Seal, Harbor Porpoise, Moose and many Reindeer, the Eurasian version of Caribou. Overall, we were never short of things to see!

Thursday, June 4. Arrivals | Kempele Bay | Welcome Dinner | Night Oulu

We had journeyed to Oulu on separate days, but everyone was present at 7.00pm today for a welcome drink and introductions followed by dinner in our well-located accommodation right by the Bay of Kempele, not far from the city of Oulu.

Friday, June 5. Kempele Bay | Martinniemi | Liminka Bay Nature Centre and Bay | Night Oulu

Before breakfast some of us birded around the hotel and from the nearby and well-placed birding tower that overlooks Kempele Bay. We had good views of a pair of Tufted Ducks, Green-winged Teal, several Whooper Swans (Finland's national bird), a fine male Ring-necked Pheasant, beautiful Great Crested Grebes, a pair of Eurasian Curlews with chicks, Common Greenshank, Northern Lapwing, Common Snipe in flight display, singing Sedge Warblers and Reed Buntings, Common and Black-headed Gulls, Common Terns, White Wagtails, Hooded Crows, a Redwing and Fieldfares hopping around in the hotel garden.

It was an enjoyable and easy start to our trip, with those who were new to European birding already chalking up a bunch of "lifers", and we had not even had breakfast! After a buffet breakfast, with dishes to suit everyone, we set off in our two vehicles for what would be an exciting day. As we prepared to leave, a few Common Swifts were zooming around and screeching above the hotel and a Willow Warbler was singing nearby – a song we would subsequently hear repeatedly throughout our journey. We drove just north of Oulu, to a woodland near the settlement of Martinniemi where we hoped to see the magnificent Black Woodpecker, which is on average slightly bigger than its North American relative Pileated Woodpecker. As we went we saw many Eurasian Jackdaws, Eurasian Magpies and Fieldfares at roadsides. It did not take long to find the woodpecker: an adult male clinging to an aspen tree. Next up was a pleasant spot by a river and lake (we would see a lot of lakes in Finland), a place where local birding friends had recently found a pair of Boreal Owls that were using an old Black Woodpecker cavity. At first things seemed quiet, but then three well-grown owlets were spied, perching low-down in a nearby patch of trees. We had super views of a bird that was a major target for many of our group, indeed Nick, Hal, Sacha, Ruth and Esther all said later that these Boreal Owls were one of their highpoints. We had lunch in the Liminka Bay Nature Center, browsed its impressive exhibition and gift shop, and then walked a short way to a big and sturdy birding tower. We scanned the bay seeing Graylag Geese, a lone Taiga Bean Goose, a pair of Garganey and a host of Eurasian Wigeons, Northern Shovelers and Green-winged



Teals. Shorebirds included Eurasian Oystercatchers, Black-tailed Godwits, Common and Spotted Redshanks and our first Ruff (we would find many more of these amazing birds later in the trip). There were both Western Yellow and White Wagtails here, too. Back by the center there was a Great Spotted Woodpecker, a pair of Eurasian Blue Tits using a nestbox, and a handsome male Eurasian Bullfinch amongst others. In the late afternoon we headed back to our accommodation. Some rested while others continued birding around the hotel. We really were in a perfect location that suited everyone, those that wanted to take it easy and those that wanted to get in as much time outdoors as they could.

Saturday, June 6. Kempele Bay | Muhos area | Villa Finnature | Night Oulu

Before breakfast we visited a small harbour in Kempele Bay just a few minutes from our base. There were around 50 Whooper Swans here, numerous ducks, and about 30 Great Crested Grebes, some pairs displaying to each other. We saw the first Arctic Loon of our trip, though a little far off, a White-tailed Eagle (Europe's biggest raptor, a relative of America's Bald Eagle) and a Western Marsh Harrier gliding over a reedbed. As we left for breakfast, two Great Spotted Woodpeckers appeared. After breakfast, we set off again. At a small lake we had tremendous views of a male Horned Grebe in breeding plumage, a Eurasian Coot, Eurasian Tree Sparrows and a male Common Rosefinch singing "pleased-to-meet-you". Now it was time to look for more owls! We visited a patch of forest where, once again, our local contacts had passed on extremely helpful information, this time about a nesting Great Gray Owl. As we looked for the best spot to observe the owl without disturbing it, a Tree Pipit sang and displayed from a snag. We found a place at a discreet distance from the Great Gray who was sitting in nesting tray, brooding her young whose tiny white heads could just be seen. She was truly magnificent, so much so that at the end of our tour Liz, Marilyn, Carol, Ruth, Sacha and Gail all stated that this bird was one of the absolute best birds encountered. On we went, stopping at the "Villa Finnature" a birding guesthouse near Muhos where we watched Coal Tit, Eurasian Blue Tit, Common Chaffinch, Eurasian Bullfinch and Eurasian Siskins, and Eurasian Red Squirrels, at feeders. We also got coffee and tea here and borrowed rubber boots which we would need in the afternoon when we planned to visit a boggy forest. Before that, however, we watched another fantastic owl using a nestbox, this time a female Ural Owl. Once again, we took care not to get too close. In the afternoon, in our "new" rubber boots, we trekked into the wet forest, our main intention to find woodpeckers, a truly boreal species, Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, and Europe's smallest member of the family, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (about the size of the North American Downy Woodpecker). After fending off a few mosquitoes (they seemed to like some people more than others) we succeeded. First, a male Three-toed was peeping out of his nest cavity and then a bit further on, we watched a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers coming back and forth to their nest with food for their chicks.



After a day of birds of real quality, and getting fine views of them all, it was now time to head back to our hotel where we had dinner, ran through our checklist and announced our plans for the next day. The Oulu area had been exceptional, the variety of wildlife habitats - forests, lakes, farmland and sea – in a relatively small area had meant that we never had to drive overly long distances.

Sunday, June 7. Kempele Bay | Liminka area | Tyrnävä | Pudasjärvi | Lake Kuusamo | Night Kuusamo

A pre-breakfast walk by our hotel was always worthwhile and this morning Whooper Swans, Eurasian Wigeons, Green-winged Teals, Red-breasted Mergansers, a Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper, Great Crested Grebes, two White-tailed Eagles, European Herring Gulls, Common Terns, our first two Arctic Terns, a Reed Bunting and Sedge Warblers were just some of the birds seen by Kempele Bay. As ever, Hooded Crow, Redwing, European Pied Flycatcher and Common Swift were around the hotel. After breakfast, we loaded up our vans and left, driving to the open farmland of Kempele-Teppola. We soon saw two Stock Doves, around 30 Common Cranes, Northern Lapwings, another Western Marsh Harrier, Eurasian Kestrels and three Short-eared Owls in display flight. Further on, in similar low-intensity farmed land, we paused again as two more Short-eared Owls were spotted – we just could not stop seeing owls! Another rural roadside had Eurasian Linnets and a Yellowhammer (which is a species of European bunting). As we strolled along the quiet road here, a young man and his small son and, presumably, grandmother, came out to greet us. When we said we were looking for birds, they understood at once, indeed our hobby is one all Finns know about. We bade then farewell and continued through this farming area, stopping near Tyrnävä where the main crop seemed to be potatoes. Here we hoped to find Ortolan Bunting, a passerine that is now, sadly, endangered across much of Europe. Quite by chance, we were joined by a local ornithologist who was studying this pretty bunting and soon, we got great views of two birds. Other species seen here were Whinchat, Eurasian Skylark and Yellowhammer, a relative of the Ortolan. It was time to push on, eastwards to Kuusamo, a small city close to the border with Russia, which would be the second base on our tour. We took road 20, pausing for lunch in Pudasjärvi. When we reached Kuusamo we first went to Lake Kuusamo and from the Vihtasalmi Birding Tower saw both Little and Black-headed Gulls, which were nesting here, and two exquisite, Red-necked Grebes. It had been a transfer day, but we had still seen some superb birds. On the non-avian front, we also saw a Brown Hare and our first Reindeer. We checked into our hotel, a sprawling establishment at the edge of town, and after dinner we went through our checklist of sightings and announced our plans for tomorrow.



Monday, June 8. Kuusamo | Oivanki area | Konttainen | River Kuusinki | Lake Vuotunki | Night Kuusamo

The Kuusamo region is typified by taiga forests interspersed with peatbogs and lakes of all shapes and sizes and our first stop today was in a typically picturesque area of pine-dominated forest with small lakes near Oivanki. Our main target here was Gray-headed Chickadee, a bird that mainly occurs in the Siberia taiga; hence it is British English name "Siberian Tit". This species is found in remote parts of Alaska and northwest Canada but is notoriously hard to find and thus was "new" for almost everyone. Once again, local knowledge was the key, and we were soon looking at a pair at a nestbox. There was also a European Pied Flycatcher here and several Eurasian Siskins. From a sturdy tower placed by a quiet pond we saw Mallard and Common Goldeneye mothers with ten ducklings each. At another pond, two Wood Sandpipers put on a display and a Whooper Swan was sitting on a nest. Moving on a short way, we found four Greater Scaup on a larger lake. We then visited Konttainen, a known birding location by the foot of a Valtavaara mountain where bird feeders in the forest attracted Eurasian Siskins, Eurasian Bullfinches, Willow and Great Tits and at least three Great Spotted Woodpeckers. We had hoped to see Siberian Jays here, but they did not turn up today. At a pleasant location by the River Kuusinki near Vuotungintie, a Eurasian Woodpecker flushed as we pulled up but unfortunately rapidly disappeared into the forest.

On the river a pair of White-throated Dippers, one of our main target birds here, were seen going back and forth between at their nest below a bridge. A Gray Wagtail was glimpsed and a Common Sandpiper stood on a log. Another short drive, and we were at Lake Vuotunki. This large wetland was full of birds which we watched from another conveniently placed tower: the Finns certainly like their birding towers and build and place them very well. Ducks included Eurasian Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Tufted Duck and six Smew, a species that many in our group had mentioned that they really wanted to see. There were also Arctic Terns, Common Gulls and Red-necked Grebes here. We headed back to Kuusamo on a looped route, stopping at a logged forest near Ruka where we found a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Spotted Flycatcher perched on a snag. Back at our hotel we had dinner at 7pm and then compiled our list of sightings. It had been another varied and productive day.

Tuesday, June 9. Ruka-Valtavaara | Oivanki area | Lake Kuusamo | Night Kuusamo

We went on an early morning pre-breakfast drive on forest roads and tracks around Ruka and the foot of Valtavaara mountain, just north of Kuusamo. We hoped to come upon some grouse but had no luck with that. We spoke to some other birders during our tour, and it became apparent that this was "not a good year for grouse" as sightings were exceedingly rare. On the other hand, we found a party of Siberian Jays, a social species that everyone really wanted to see. As we watched the jays, a Bohemian Waxwing, another bird that is always popular, was noticed perched atop a tree. Other birds seen on our exploration included Willow Warbler,



Whinchat, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Meadow Pipit, Western Yellow Wagtail and Mistle Thrush. We returned for breakfast and were greeted by a gorgeous male Common Redstart signing above the hotel. Later, we visited Oivanki and its bird tower again. This lovely area proved fruitful again with Eurasian Curlews, Wood Sandpipers and Common Greenshanks, a Golden Eagle that soared high overhead, and a Common Cuckoo that was first heard and then seen in flight. In the forest, Bramblings, Eurasian Siskins and European Pied Flycatchers all showed well and the trumpeting of Common Cranes provided an atmospheric background. Next we walked by Lake Toranki, in the south of Kuusamo itself. There were many Whooper Swans, a few Tufted Ducks and Little Gulls and two Ospreys, one with a fish, flew over the lake. The adjacent boggy woodland had Willow and Eurasian Blue Tits, European Pied Flycatchers and, as almost always, Redwings and Willow Warblers were singing. As we left a gorgeous, bright, male Yellowhammer dropped onto the path in front of us. Owing to our early start this morning, we finished earlier than usual today. Some of us took the opportunity to rest, others continued birding around our hotel, in particular scanning the small lakes where ducks and loons were often present. After dinner we, as usual, ran through our checklist of the day's sightings and saw that we had done well for mammals, too, with Mountain Hare, Eurasian Red Squirrel, Reindeer and Moose all observed. Finally, we made plans for tomorrow when we would move on again.

Wednesday, June 10. Kuusamo | Suomu | Kemijärvi | Ilmakkiaapa | Kaunispää | Night Ivalo

We checked out at 8am and drove northwards following road 5 into Lapland and on beyond the Arctic Circle. But, as usual, we would not rush but interspersed our journey with various stops. We were soon in Lapland, the region called Sápmi by the indigenous Sami people. We stopped near the village of Suomi, right on the Arctic Circle. As the tradition of this tour dictates, we took photographs and tasted some cloudberry liquor to celebrate this event (unfortunately Riku and I, as drivers, had to skip this). We paused in Kemijärvi and then pushed on further north, seeing more and more Reindeer as we went, often at roadsides and sometimes on the road itself. These mammals are believed to do this in order to escape the hordes of mosquitoes in the swampy forest. At the Ilmakkijärvi bog we saw another special Arctic breeding species, Broad-billed Sandpiper, two birds doing a flight display. On we went. Birds on lakes and at roadsides as we continued included Common Crane, Arctic Tern, Eurasian Magpie, Eurasian Jackdaw, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Redwing, Fieldfare, White Wagtail and two White-tailed Eagles.

Before getting to today's final destination in Ivalo, we drove up to the top of Saarisselkä Kaunispää, a treeless peak which operates as a ski resort in winter. Our main aim here was to find yet another iconic bird, Eurasian Dotterel, which is a member of the plover family. We parked at the top, where Western House-Martins were building their nests on the buildings and then watched a Rough-legged Hawk high in the sky above. We walked a



short way and scanned the open tundra. Dotterel can be hard to spot as they blend in with the vegetation, rocks and stones very well. Nevertheless, it did not take long before we found a pair of these charming and confiding birds, a species in which males rather than females conduct the incubation of the clutch. It was a genuinely great way to end the day. We checked into our comfortable hotel, on the bank of the River Ivalo, dined an hour later and then prepared for the next day when we would head into Norway.

Thursday, June 11. Ivalo | Neljän Tuulen Tupa | Nuorgam | into Norway | Luftjok | Høyholmen-Tanafjorden | Varangerhalvøya Peninsula | Night Båtsfjord

After breakfast we checked out of our pleasant hotel and drove north towards Norway. Our first stop was at Neljän Tuulen Tupa, the “Four Winds Inn,” a terrific little café and inn near Kaamanen. Besides offering drinks, tasty pastries and other goodies, the proprietor maintains feeders for the birds which attract a range of forest species. From both inside and outside the building we watched Gray-headed Chickadees, Great Tits, Bramblings, Eurasian Bullfinches, European Greenfinches, Eurasian Siskins and Pine Grosbeaks, all at close range. Eurasian Red Squirrels often visited the feeders, too. In addition, three Velvet Scoters were watched on the lake behind the café. Moving on we followed the River Tana and had lunch in the hamlet of Nuorgam which lies just before the frontier with Norway and then entered that country. As usual, there no one at the border and we sailed through. We had, however, gone back an hour in time - Norway being one hour behind Finland. We took a side road following a tip-off from birding friends to a location where a Northern Hawk Owl had been hanging around.

Sure enough, there it was on a wire, hunting by day. An excellent observation of a species that Mark, Sacha, Hal, Matthew and Kaye all rated high on their list of trip bird favorites. Two Eurasian Kestrels and a Rough-legged Hawk were seen here, too, as well as some decidedly curious sheep which came out of their barn to scrutinize us. Up next was Høyholmen-Tanafjorden, the estuary of the River Tana where it merges with the Barents Sea. The bird life here was exceptional. Almost the first species we saw was a Parasitic Jaeger, than another. On the water there were Common Eiders, hundreds of Common Mergansers, Black Guillemots, Great Cormorants and Common Ringed Plovers and rather raucous Eurasian Oystercatchers on the shore. At least four White-tailed were spotted, too. Yet, for most of us, the best bird here was Temminck’s Stint. We saw around ten of these little shorebirds, some doing their incredible, fluttering, flight display right by us. A couple of Gray Seals were also seen in the estuary. Tearing ourselves away from this super spot, as the day was getting on, we followed roads 890 and then the 891, a scenic route that passes up and through the upland tundra of the Varangerhalvøya National Park. We saw our first Long-tailed Jaegers over the tundra and Long-tailed Ducks on still icy lakes, as well as several Mountain Hares. We finally reached the fishing port of Båtsfjord which was thronging with gulls, especially Black-legged Kittiwakes. Interestingly, although located in a very remote corner



of Norway, at an approximate latitude of 70.6° N. (about the same as Barrow in Alaska), Båtsfjord is said to be one of the country's most diverse communities, where people from over 30 countries live.

Friday, June 12. Båtsfjord | Varangerhalvøya Fells | Gednje | Kongsfjord | Night Båtsfjord

The birding began today close to our hotel. On a pre-breakfast walk around the port we saw Common Mergansers, Black Guillemots, Black-legged Kittiwakes, European Herring Gulls, Great Black-backed Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Great Cormorants and Arctic Terns. We were now getting used to Eurasian Oystercatchers being everywhere. There were hardly any trees, but patches of bushes held Redwing, European Greenfinch and, of course, singing Willow Warblers. There was even a few House Sparrows. After breakfast, our first stop was in the town center where 100s of pairs of Black-legged Kittiwakes were nesting on buildings, on window ledges and even on air-conditioning units. It was quite a spectacle, and the birds allowed close approach so getting photographs was straightforward. We then drove up to the Varangerhalvøya tundra fells, following the same road we had arrived on yesterday; indeed, it is the only road into Båtsfjord. The landscapes were splendid, vast areas of open, rolling tundra interspersed with lakes, some still partly frozen and the higher ground topped with snow. But, it was not that cold, spring was taking hold. A Rock Ptarmigan and a couple of Rough-legged Hawks were seen, and we were able to compare Long-tailed and Parasitic Jaegers. From a convenient parking area known as Gednje, where snowplows and other winter maintenance machinery are stored, we scanned a lake and immediately found some more great birds like Tundra Bean Goose, Long-tailed Duck, Red-necked Phalarope, Red-throated Loon and around thirty Ruff, all in diverse colored plumages. We took a road northwards to the old fishing town of Kongsfjord, but we often stopped as birds at the roadside were spotted: songbirds such as Northern Wheatear, Red-throated Pipit, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting, for example. We took in a pleasant little café and bakery in Kongsfjord which also had a wildlife art gallery and shop. A Fieldfare was also nesting on the building. It proved to be a popular place. Refreshed, we then scanned the small harbor and sea. The panorama was stunning. Many Black-legged Kittiwakes were nesting on the old buildings, Arctic Terns and various gulls. A Harbor Porpoise was spotted offshore, too. Just north of town we found a Rock Pipit and a male Ring Ouzel, the latter actually a member of the thrush family. In mid-afternoon, we headed back the way we had come, but then took a track up into the tundra, finding two Eurasian Dotterel and a male Horned Lark which perched nicely on a rock. The weather was beginning to deteriorate, a few drops of rain fell and the wind got up, so we drove down off the hills and drove a more sheltered side road. There were more jaegers here, another Rough-legged Hawk (it really was a good year for this raptor) and also, arguably the highlight here, a male European Golden Plover that performed a magical aerial display. Our final stop was just outside Båtsfjord where we watched many Common and Red-breasted Mergansers and Common Eiders and picked up a Eurasian Whimbrel. It had been yet another thrilling and productive day in Arctic Norway.



Saturday, June 13. Båtsfjord | Varangerhalvøya Fells | Nyborg | Varangerfjord | Nesseby | Vadsø | Svartnes | Night Vardø

Today we left Båtsfjord for our next base at Vardø, another Barents Sea fishing port. To get there we had to take the road over the tundra again. But this time it was windy and drizzly, so we did not make any prolonged stops. Nevertheless, we still saw some of the birds that we had become to expect in this wild landscape: Red-necked Phalaropes, Ruff, Temminck's Stints, Long-tailed Jaegers and Rough-legged Hawks. As we descended on the western side of the fells, the weather was better. A Willow Ptarmigan flew across the road but vanished in the undergrowth. We had seen a Northern Hawk Owl a few days earlier but decided to try another place where a pair of these birds lived and which was on today's route. Why not? You can never see enough owls! We pulled in at the spot and there one was, right before us, perched on a utility pole. Better still, another joined it soon after and we had tremendous views of both of them side-by-side. We now followed the shore of Varangerfjord, first stopping at the noted birding site of Nesseby which lies by a bay and has a church that dates from the early 1700s. It was still a little windy and chilly, and we had brought boxed lunches, so tucked into them using our vehicles as wind breaks. No one minded as the place was packed with birds: Graylag Geese, Northern Pintails, Common Shelducks, Ruff, Common Ringed Plovers, Dunlin and around fifty Bar-tailed Godwits, most in smart reddish summer plumage. Very vocal Eurasian Oystercatchers with chicks running around were particularly popular. Gulls included Common, European Herring, Great Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed. Just as we prepared to leave two Short-eared Owls appeared, too. We stopped for fuel and a "comfort break" at Vadsø and then at Ekkerøya but did not linger long. Then the weather improved significantly, the wind dropping, and just at the right time, as we pulled off the road near Svartnes to look for another incredibly special Arctic species. Gyrfalcon is the biggest falcon on the planet, and we were soon watching a female attending her chicks, three in an old White-tailed Eagle eyrie on a cliff and one on a ledge below. Through our telescopes we all had great views of this rare raptor.

We approached Vardø where we spend our next two nights. This port town actually sits on an island but is reached via a road tunnel of about 1.8 miles long (9480 feet/2890 metres) that runs under the sea. Finally, after another wonderful, adventure-packed day, we checked into our comfortable hotel right by the harbor.

Sunday, June 14. Vardø | Hornøya Island | Persfjorden | Night Vardø

We had travelled far, experienced some incredible landscapes and seen many brilliant birds, but today was going to be extra special. At 10 am we took a boat to the island of Hornøya, which is less than a mile away and so a journey of only around 10 minutes. Soon after leaving the harbor, we had a taste of what was to come;



innumerable seabirds were in the air around us. We disembarked and were immediately amongst European Shags, some nesting at our feet, with Razorbills and Common Murres standing on the slabs of rock unfazed by our presence. Many more, including a few Thick-billed Murre, were crammed on the cliffs above us. Atlantic Puffins, perennial favorites, were at their burrows and simply looked at us as we walked by. Getting photographs was easy, even with smartphones, no long lenses were needed here. Most of us took a trail below the cliffs, others did not stray far from the landing stage as there many birds right there. Besides the auk species, there were many gulls, too, and some of us saw two Tundra Bean-Geese and, something of a surprise, around forty Northern Gannets, Passerines included Rock Pipits and a Twite. We spent around two wonderful hours on the island before heading back to Vardø by the same boat. Once again, as ever year, Hornøya Island was a phenomenal experience. After lunch back in our hotel, we returned to the mainland via the tunnel and then followed a minor road north from Svartnes to Persfjorden. We stopped at various sea bays and lakes, finding more Red-throated Loons, Common Eiders, Long-tailed Ducks, Common Mergansers, Black Guillemots and various gulls. Shorebirds included Dunlin, Ruff, Common Ringed Plovers and Sanderling, a new species for our trip. On the boggy open tundra there were European Golden-Plovers, and we estimated at least twenty-five Parasitic Jaegers, mostly the dark morph. Pairs of Common Gulls were nesting on the ground here, unlike their relatives which mostly prefer cliffs. We also saw about seven different White-tailed Eagles this afternoon. We headed back to base, had dinner and ran through our now impressive checklist. Besides birds, Gray Seals had been sporadically seen today, too, including in Vardø harbor.

Monday, June 15. Vardø | Varangerfjord | into Finland | Nuorgam | Neljän Tuulen Tupa | Night Ivalo

We left Vardø after breakfast and began our return journey to Finland. We were not far out of the road tunnel, and thus on the mainland, when two Moose, a female and a large calf, were spotted out on the open tundra. Quite an unusual place for this mammal which typically in habits the taiga forest belt. A little later, another Willow Ptarmigan was briefly seen in flight, too. Our route along Varangerfjord was the same as that we had driven a few days earlier and thus more or less the same birds were seen: many gulls resting on the shoreline, Common Eiders and Common Mergansers on the sea and shore, Eurasian Oystercatchers, Common Ringed Plovers, Parasitic Jaegers of both color morphs, three Rough-legged Hawks and a few White-tailed Eagles. But there was a surprise when we found seven Snow Geese in a field near Skalvel. It should be noted that when Snow Geese are seen in Europe they are regarded as being of uncertain origin, perhaps “escapees” from a non-naturalized population elsewhere in Europe. Certainly, some of the birds we saw, perhaps all, were banded. We



stopped in Kiberg, another small fishing village where there is a “Kittiwake hotel,” that is, rows of shelves erected on a building to provide nesting places. As this “hotel” was fully booked, some pairs had decided to nest amongst rocks on the ground itself. We crossed back into Finland and had lunch once again at Nuorgam. In mid-afternoon we visited Neljän Tuulen Tupa, the “Four Winds Inn” as we had done on the way north. The usual songbird suspects were on the feeders: Gray-headed Chickadee, Great Tit, Eurasian Bullfinch, European Greenfinch, Eurasian Siskin, Brambling, and about five Pine Grosbeaks, along with some feisty Eurasian Red Squirrels. The rest of our drive today was largely uneventful, apart from encountering the occasional family of Reindeer on the road. We arrived in Ivalo just after 5pm and had ample time to rest and relax before dinner, which was another typically Finnish buffet with dishes to suit every diet.

Tuesday, June 16. Ivalo area | Ivalo Airport

This was our final day and after a good breakfast we spent the morning visiting a few sites around Ivalo, seeing a Common Snipe, a Wood Sandpiper that perched on top of a snag, Meadow Pipits, Eurasian Siskins, Brambling, a couple of Whinchats, Reed Buntings and we heard a Little Bunting. Redwings were also singing and a Common Cuckoo flew by. From a birding tower that overlooked a lake and bog, we spied Whooper Swans, a pair of dancing Common Cranes, Eurasian Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Tufted Ducks, Common Goldeneye, a Smew and both Bank and Barn Swallows. From here we also saw a bull Moose grazing out in the bog. On the walk back to our vehicles, we saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Gray-headed Chickadee at a nestbox. We had the afternoon free before driving the short way to Ivalo Airport. Check-in was smooth, the airline staff and security personnel friendly, and we were soon on our way to Helsinki. The previous evening, I had asked everyone to list their top three birds of the trip. It is always difficult to select just three, but these are the choices made:

- **Nick** Long-tailed Jaeger, Boreal Owl, Siberian Jay.
- **Liz** Great Gray Owl, Gyrfalcon, Smew.
- **Marilyn** Gyrfalcon, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Gray Owl.
- **Kaye** Temminck’s Stint, Ruff, Northern Hawk Owl.
- **Carol** Great Gray Owl, Razorbill, Great Spotted Woodpecker.
- **Hal** Northern Hawk Owl, Boreal Owl, Smew.
- **Ruth** Boreal Owl, Great Gray Owl, Ruff.
- **Esther** Razorbill, Boreal Owl, Gyrfalcon.
- **Matthew** Northern Hawk Owl, Temminck’s Stint, Eurasian Golden Plover.
- **Sacha** Great Gray Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Boreal Owl.

- **Gail** Eurasian Golden Plover, Atlantic Puffin, Great Gray Owl.
- **Mark** Northern Hawk Owl, Atlantic Puffin, Blue Tit.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in this latest Naturalist Journeys tour to Finland and Norway. Gerard.

Photos: Atlantic Puffin (Gail Heymann - GH), Moose (Mark Pinto - MP), Great Spotted Woodpecker (GH), Eurasian Blue Tit (MP), Boreal Owl (Sacha Pearson - SP), Short-eared Owl (MP), Great Gray Owl (MP), Ural Owl (MP), Scenic (MP), Red Squirrel (MP), Whooper Swan (Esther Schwartz-McKinzie - ES), Common Greenshank (SP), Aberrant Crane (Nick Rutter - NR), Cafe (ES), Ruff (MP), Meadow Pipit (SP), Common Eider (SP), Northern Hawk Owl (SP), European Shag (MP), Razorbill (MP), Atlantic Puffin (MP), Reindeer (ES), Arctic Tern (SP), Scenic (MP)