

Finland and Norway: Birding & Nature | Trip Report | June 3 – 15, 2023 | by Gerard Gorman



Naturalist Journeys leader Gerard Gorman, local guide Pirita Latja, and group members Alan, Andrea, Carol, Chitra, Dorothy, Gordon, Jane, and Paul



This second Naturalist Journeys trip to Finland and Norway was an immense success. A marvelous tour that saw us embraced by two welcoming countries, and visits to impressive places within them including many important wildlife habitats, lovely landscapes and superb seascapes. We travelled through the taiga (boreal) forests, peatbogs and lake-lands of Finland, then north through the iconic region of Lapland to the treeless upland arctic tundra and finally to the dramatic coastline of the Barents Sea in Norway. The resident and summer visiting birdlife, mammals and flora fascinated us throughout our journey.

There were countless avian highlights. We saw a remarkable 26 species of waterfowl, 27 shorebirds, five auks, five owls, six thrushes and 10 finches. Specialties included numerous, huge White-tailed Eagles in Norway,



Finland's national bird, and Whooper Swans on most of the lakes we visited. There were confiding, photogenic, Siberian Jays, Bohemian Waxwings, beautiful Great Crested Grebes, "tame" Dotterels and Red-necked Phalaropes, Ruff lekking in their remarkably varied breeding plumages and thousands of seabirds on Hornøya Island. Mammal highlights included both Brown and Mountain Hares, Eurasian Red Squirrels, lots of Reindeer and a Humpback Whale was spotted too! Our accommodations were all in well-chosen, convenient locations for our itinerary. At each place there were birds almost on the doorstep. Even in the arctic, facilities were modern and comfortable. At mealtimes we were often served local dishes, prepared with locally sourced produce and grain-rich breads with boreal berries.

Sat., Jun. 3 Oulu Airport transfers | Meet-up in hotel | Overnight Vihiluoto near Oulu

We had all arrived in Oulu at different times and then met in the evening at our hotel in the small, seaside settlement of Vihiluoto. The name of our accommodation, the Hotel Airport Oulu, is misleading as it is in a quiet, birdy spot right by Kempele Bay, not near the airport, and a good first location to start our tour. Those of us who arrived in the late evening were incredibly grateful that the restaurant stayed open for us. Those who had arrived earlier had kindly waited for everyone to be present. After introductions and a briefing about our next day, we all retired for the evening. But being so far north, at latitude 65.01236, it hardly went dark at night!

Sun., Jun. 4 Hotel Environs | Kempele Bay | Temmes | Liminka Visitor Center | Liminka Bay | Lumijoki

We went out before breakfast, taking a short walk by Kempele Bay, right behind the hotel. We saw a good variety of birds: Greylag Geese, Whooper Swans, Black-headed and Herring Gulls, Common Terns, Great Crested Grebes, Eurasian Curlews displaying, Common Shelducks, Gadwalls, Tufted Ducks and Northern Shovelers. We saw our first Eurasian Marsh-Harriers, and a White-tailed Eagle was spotted perched on a distant boulder. Despite a bit of wind, Sedge Warblers were singing and doing flight displays over the reedbed. A Common Rosefinch sang its "pleased-to-meet-you" song, and a Reed Bunting sat up too. Fieldfares and White Wagtails were on the hotel lawn. These would be common birds throughout our tour.

Our 8 a.m. breakfast was an excellent buffet with something to suit all. We set off at 9 a.m. in our two

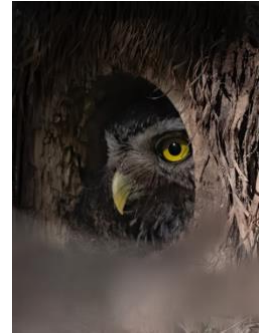
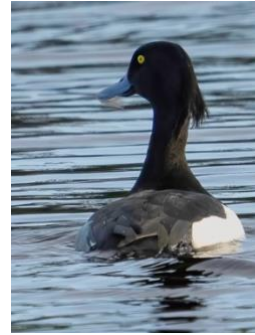


comfortable vans that offered everyone a window seat. Roadside birds included Northern Lapwings, Eurasian Jackdaws, Rooks and Eurasian Curlews. We left the main road and drove on a forest track (we would drive several of these very well-maintained roads in the coming days). We stopped in a clearing and immediately heard, then glimpsed, a Garden Warbler. Nearby a Yellowhammer (an Old World bunting species) was doing its “little bit of bread and no cheese” song. Later, we stopped at a store to buy mineral water, and found a fine singing male Common Rosefinch. Willow Warblers were singing everywhere, as indeed they would throughout the trip, and we also encountered Pied Flycatchers. Our excellent local Finnish guide had up-to-date birding news, and so took us to a forest clearing where Ural Owls had been seen recently. After a short wait, an adult female appeared at the forest edge.

Next, we tried two spots for Blyth’s Reed Warbler, a truly “eastern species.” The first was quiet, the second proved successful. Success again. Lunch was a buffet in the Liminka Visitor Centre, right by Liminka Bay, an excellent place with restrooms, a souvenir shop and an impressive conservation exhibition with world-class photographs. We then walked to a bird tower by the bay, seeing several Ruff in breeding dress and Common Cranes, Northern Lapwings, Black-tailed Godwit, Little Ringed Plover, Common Greenshank, Common Redshank and Common Snipe displaying in flight. We also heard a Common Cuckoo calling. There were butterflies on the wing here too: Orange Tip, Small White, Green Hairstreak, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock. On the mammal front, we saw both Brown and Mountain Hares. After a superb first full day, we headed back to base in the late afternoon, in suitable time for dinner at 7 p.m. Before that, some indulged in the sauna (every hotel in Finland has one) while others took time to relax or get in a bit more birding on the hotel grounds.

Mon., Jun. 5 Kempele Bay | Muhos | Ii

It was a little windy this morning, but the sky was clear. We were extremely far north but the weather was mild, and several of us went out to check the bay before breakfast seeing 50+ Great Crested Grebes, some pairs displaying, and Eurasian Coots fighting amongst themselves. A marvelous selection of waterfowl included Whooper Swans, Garganeys, Gadwalls, Tufted Ducks, Common Pintails and Common Goldeneyes. We also got close-up views of Eurasian Curlews calling and in flight, and one stood on a trail right in front of us. Common Swifts and Common House-Martins swirled over the hotel, and two thrush species, Redwing and Fieldfare, were singing. After a fine buffet breakfast, we headed to the forest. Just off a sandy track we waited quietly near a nest box and soon a Eurasian Pygmy-Owl came in and perched in view, with a Blue Tit in its talons. It was the male bringing food to the nest. After seeing Europe’s smallest owl, we then visited another patch of forest to



look for one of the largest. Local knowledge was once again the key, as we were soon scoping, from a discreet distance, a female Great Gray Owl sitting on her nest high in a pine tree. What a morning it had been! Lunch was in a self-service buffet roadside diner: we would do this on several occasions during the trip as these eateries were convenient, habitually used by the locals (which is always a good sign) and the choice and standard of food was remarkably high.

In addition to owls, we also saw Great Spotted Woodpeckers, a pair of Gray-headed Woodpeckers and a magnificent Black Woodpecker, the latter being Europe's largest picid at twelve inches in length. Other passerines included Sedge Warbler, Common Chiffchaff (many were heard, but they were often tricky to see), Lesser Whitethroat, Eurasian Tree Creeper, Spotted Flycatcher, European Pied Flycatcher, Tree Pipit, Eurasian Siskin and Eurasian Bullfinch. Corvids like Eurasian Magpie, Eurasian Jackdaw and Hooded Crow were seen along the roadsides. We also were fortunate to see Eurasian Jay, which would be our only sighting of this species. We returned to our hotel at 5 p.m., ran through our checklist and had a lovely dinner before we reviewed our plans for the next day.

Tues., Jun. 6 Vihiluoto / Kempele / Tyrnava / Pudasjärvi / Latva-Juurikka

Some of us went out early to scan Kempele Bay one last time. After breakfast, we loaded our two vans and headed northeast to our final destination: Kuusamo in the region of Northern Ostrobothnia, some 134 miles away. However, we made several birding stops on the way. First, a village pond near Kempele hosted a pair of Horned Grebes, the stunningly handsome male swimming close to us. Everyone was able to get photographs. We cruised a large agricultural area finding Whinchats, Meadow Pipits and our main target: Ortolan Bunting. This pretty passerine is sadly now a bird in decline here, as it is in many parts of Europe. We also finally saw a few Eurasian Skylarks low down – up to then most had been singing high up in the sky. Brown Hares were active here, too.

We stopped at roadside lakes, seeing our first Common Mergansers and Smews, including handsome males, these beautiful ducks had been a main target for several in our group. At another large lake we saw our first Arctic Loons. Common Cranes were often seen in fields or flying overhead. Lunch was in another excellent diner - we were really getting to like these places. As we continued, we passed vast forests and many wetlands, and



someone remarked that there were very few vehicles on the roads. Indeed, Finland is a sparsely populated country with just 5.5 million or so residents. Everything was unhurried, which suited us.

At yet another lake, there are so many in Finland, we climbed up a convenient birding watch tower. From here we had splendid views of numerous ducks, shorebirds and both Little and Black-headed Gulls, both on the water and flying up close. A Hen Harrier on the far side of the lake was our only one of the trip. All day long, wherever we stopped, Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Redwings were singing, and everyone now knew their songs by heart. We checked into our comfortable hotel, a kind of winter sports centre, in the late afternoon. Interestingly, a reindeer graces the coat-of-arms of Kuusamo municipality, which is most appropriate as we had begun to see many, including several grazing within the city limits! It had been another bird-filled day in this pleasant, picturesque country.

Wed., Jun. 7 Kuusamo | Saynaja | Lamsankyla | Vihpasalmi Bird Tower | Konttainen

We spent all day visiting sites in the Kuusamo area. We birded its key taiga forests, dominated by pines, with fewer spruce, birch and aspen. There were, of course, lots of lakes, big and small, but now also rushing rivers where we saw the occasional angler fishing for salmon and trout. In the morning, grouse species were high on the agenda. Our first Willow Ptarmigan of the trip was seen by some of us as it flew rapidly across the road – we’d catch up with this bird again later in Norway. Similarly, a huge male Capercaillie rose from the roadside, but this would be our only sighting. We searched a spot where a “rogue” male had been observed recently but our luck was out on this one. We did have success with Black Grouse, seeing 22 males at two different leks. Some of our targets were eastern and Siberian specialties such as Rustic Bunting, a bird that is rare in Europe, much more common to the east. It occurs in small numbers here in Finland, and we saw two. A logged forest was not the most scenic site we visited, but a few trees were left standing, and one hosted another great species: a pair of Northern Hawk-Owls were nesting in a hole in one of the snags, and with patience, we all saw this magnificent predator well. At the well-known site of Konttainen, we parked and watched a feeder. There were Bramblings, Common Chaffinches and Willow and Great Tits here, and it did not take long before the first Siberian Jays arrived. A Eurasian Red Squirrel also came in to take the seed from time to time.

When doing our evening checklist, we realized we had seen many new trip birds today, such as Red-necked



Grebe, Whimbrel, Dunlin, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Arctic Tern, Osprey and Western Yellow Wagtail. Later that evening we had a surprise at dinner. The main hotel restaurant was closed, so we were directed to the hotel's "Irish American Bar," a tad peculiar in Arctic Finland!

Thurs., Jun. 8 Hepojoki | Vuotunki | Oulanka National Park | Vihpasalmi Bird Tower

After breakfast we drove north to the Oulanka National Park, a wild and beautiful place. This Finnish park adjoins the Paanajärvi National Park in Russia, and the two administrations cooperate, hence a vast international conservation area is protected. On the way we made several stops. A pleasant spot by a bridge over the River Hepojoki proved productive with a cooperative White-throated Dipper perched on a branch over the water and flying on the rocks. There was also a mixed raft of Common Goldeneye, Common Mergansers and Smews – the males are surely one of the world's most attractive ducks.

At a wet meadow, we watched a group of wary Taiga Bean Geese. A lake held our first Velvet Scoters, a bird which was high on the request list of several of our group. There were also the "usual suspects:" Whooper Swans, Tufted Ducks, Arctic Loons, Common Terns, Barn and Bank Swallows and Little, Black-headed, Common and Herring Gulls. A great find here was Little Bunting, another eastern specialty. Upon arriving at Oulanka, we were greeted by a calling Black Woodpecker and singing Eurasian Siskins and European Pied Flycatchers. We then had an outrageously unobstructed view of a Parrot Crossbill that was hopping about on the ground right by the visitor center. These birds are most often only glimpsed as they fly over the forest or perch high on the tops of trees. After that, we walked a pleasant forest trail that followed the rapids of the Oulanka River. Gray Wagtail, a bird typically inhabiting such clean, fast-flowing, rock-dotted European rivers, was soon added to our list. The Calypso Orchid graces the emblem of the national park, and we soon found specimens growing in shady spots below the pines.

After a really productive morning, we had lunch in the center. This is a top-notch facility, ideal for a midday break, with a nature-themed exhibition, a reference library, restrooms and a gift and gear shop. In the afternoon, we took a long, undulating, gravel road that went east towards the Russian border and a couple of Green Sandpipers flew up from the roadside ditch. We stopped at a barrier beyond which was a restricted, out-



of-bounds, area: the true frontier. Here we posed for photographs and then got back to birding. Our drive back to Kuusamo included another stop at the birding tower close to the hotel where watching the gulls, terns and waders was short-lived as a downpour ensued.

Fri., Jun. 9 Konttainen | Arctic Circle stop | Kemijärvi | Ilmakkiaapa | Kaunispää fell

Today we checked out of our lodging and headed north, stopping once more at Konttainen to see the Siberian Jays again, as well as a very cooperative Great Spotted Woodpecker. We also added a Dunnock singing at the top of a spruce to our growing list. A Eurasian Red Squirrel appeared here too. Near the town of Tuohilehto we entered the region of Lapland, or Sápmi, as it is called in Sámi, the Finno-Ugric language of the Indigenous Sámi people. The names of settlements and road signs were now in two languages. With so few vehicles on the road, stopping for birds was easy and we kept watch for jaywalking Reindeer!

Our next stop was at the Arctic Circle, latitude approximately 66°30' N, where we took photographs and drank a little cloudberry liqueur (a tradition, but not for the drivers!). After lunch in Kemijärvi, we passed through more open, nearly treeless, peatbog landscapes. At the Ilmakkiaapa bog, we walked out a little way on a boardwalk. This reserve is part of a larger Mire Reservation Programme in northern Finland that seeks to protect water levels, and hence the special flora and fauna of these habitats, as well as the traditions of berry picking and reindeer management. Soon we found another new trip bird, a classic Arctic peatbog breeder, a displaying Broad-billed Sandpiper. The landscape was now getting increasingly arctic as we continued up a road to an open moorland on Mount Kaunispää.

The landscape here looked more like tundra than taiga. The key bird we were looking for here was Eurasian Dotterel, but we failed to find it. No worries as we knew that we'd have more chances later in Norway. We did see our first European Golden-Plovers here, males in stunning summer plumage. In the late afternoon we arrived in Ivalo (Avvriil in the Sámi language), a major fishing and winter sports centre. In this region the culture of the Sámi people, who inhabit the northern part of the Scandinavian Peninsula and the Kola Peninsula in Russia, prevails. Our hotel was extremely comfortable, and in a lovely spot right on the bank of the tranquil Ivalojoki River. We ran through our checklist, had a good dinner, discussed the plans for the next day and then retired after a long, but super day.



Sat., Jun. 10

Ivalo | Nejjan Tuulen Tupa (Four Winds Café) | Utsjoki into Norway | River Tana | Varangerhalvøya NP

After a one-night stay in Ivalo, we drove north towards Norway. We were heading for the extreme northeastern part of mainland Europe, the Varanger Peninsula in the Finnmark region of Norway. But before we left Finland behind, we made a few last stops. At one, Bohemian Waxwings showed well and we watched Gray-capped Chickadees at a nest box. At the Nejjan Tuulen Tupa café (the name of this famous birder's stop translates into English as the "Four Winds," the owners had several feeders. As we drank coffees and soft drinks, we watched Great Tits, Common Chaffinches, Brambling, European Greenfinches, Common Redpolls and the stars of the show: Pine Grosbeaks. We saw Rough-legged Hawks, a clear sign of how far north we were. We had lunch in a delightful restaurant overlooking the river in Utsjoki (Ochejohka in Sámi) and then crossed the River Teno (Tana in Norwegian) via the Sámi Bridge into Norway. There were no border checks at all, indeed we hardly noticed we were leaving one country for another. The landscapes were changing again, for example, stunted birch woods started to prevail over stands of pine, and there were fewer lakes. We could also see snow on the surrounding fell tops. Other things had changed too – the currency was now Norwegian crowns (Krone) not Euros. We ate a picnic lunch right by the mighty Varangerfjord, watched by Eurasian Oystercatchers that had decided to nest right by the parking lot. There were also new ducks for our trip list on roadside tarns: Greater Scaup, Common Scoter and Long-tailed Ducks. Shorebirds included colorful Ruff and Temminck's Stints engaging in display flights where the snow was melting, exposing the boggy ground.

At other tarns we watched Red-throated Loons and Red-necked Phalaropes, both in breeding plumage. Passerines included Red-throated Pipits and Horned Larks. Clearly, after a long dark winter, spring was bursting through here. We passed over a high fell, part of Varangerhalvøya National Park. The arctic panoramas were inspiring, and we saw several Long-tailed Jaegers, which were often in pairs nesting close to the road. Finally, we reached our small hotel in the quiet fishing port of Båtsfjord, situated on the Barents Sea around 282 miles north of the Arctic Circle at a latitude of 70.634501 and a longitude of 29.717845. To put that in perspective, we were east of Istanbul, Turkey!

Sun., Jun. 11

Båtsfjord Harbor | Varangerhalvøya NP | Gednje

Some of us took a pre-breakfast stroll around the fishing port right by our hotel. Once again, we were staying in a place with birds almost on the doorstep. Indeed, a Eurasian Oystercatcher stood on top of a shipping container by the parking lot! Larids abounded. There were Common, Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls; Arctic Terns



and hundreds of Black-legged Kittiwakes, which were nesting in colonies on town buildings. A dozen Black Guillemots were out in the bay, and we also saw our first Common Eiders – in the next few days we'd see more. We drove just out of town to a rocky river valley, soon finding a pair of Ring Ouzels and a Bluethroat, a gorgeous little chat that has a rusty tail and a blue breast with a red patch at its center. We then headed back up into the nearby upland tundra of Varangerhalvøya National Park, a landscape that seems barren at first, but it's not. Once one looks, one finds. In fact, some birds found us! For example, it was apparently a good year for Long-tailed Jaegers, as yesterday several pairs were seen by the road we travelled. This was Rock Ptarmigan habitat, and we eventually saw a few, some flying and others perched on boulders. We ate a packed lunch near Gednje, near a pair of Fieldfares that were nesting in a building. Suddenly, a large raptor appeared overhead: a Golden Eagle. It showed wonderfully well in an open sky as it fended off a mobbing Rough-legged Hawk. The size difference between these two raptors was startling. We continued exploring the uplands in the afternoon, finding several small groups of lekking Ruff, some quite close to the main road. These multicolored shorebirds, some with white heads, others black, rufous or yellowish, delighted us all.

Indeed, there were many great sights, but an undoubted highlight was a Eurasian Dotterel that we were able to watch from just a few yards away. Like many arctic birds, this species often allows close approach, but the view we had of one particular bird was astonishing. We saw more Red-necked Phalaropes and Red-throated Loons on tarns, and another Broad-billed Sandpiper. Common Ringed Plover was a new trip shorebird. Passerines included Common Redpoll, Meadow Pipit, Red-throated Pipit, Horned Lark, Northern Wheatear and Snow Bunting, the latter a new trip bird. We headed back to Båtsfjord with time to rest and recuperate before dinner, though some of us checked the port again. It had been another momentous day.

Mon., Jun. 12 Båtsfjord Harbor | Varangerhalvøya NP | Gednje | Tana bru | Varangerfjord | Nesseby | Vadsø | Skalelv

Today we headed to our next Norwegian destination, Vardø, which lay to the southeast. In fact, it is the easternmost town in all Norway, further east than St. Petersburg, Russia. But to do this we had to retrace our route for an hour or so, passing over the fells again, as there is no road that links Båtsfjord to Vardø. But this was a pleasure as the drive was scenic. We were also therefore able to get repeat views of lekking Ruff, displaying Temminck's Stints and Long-tailed Jaegers. We followed the River Tana again before joining road E75 which ran to the east along the northern shore of Varangerfjord. The large body of water is a long, wide bay of the Barents Sea. We pulled over when a Northern Hawk-Owl was spotted in a roadside tree and continued making various



stops along the shore of the fjord itself. We visited Nesseby where an old, wooden church dates from the early 1700s. At Vadsø we took a break, got fuel and met some local birdwatchers. At Ekkerøy we had close-up views of many shorebirds and White-tailed Eagles fighting with each other over fish. At Skallelv and Kiberg we scanned sheltered bays where birds congregated. As we progressed, we started to see more White-tailed Eagles, adults and immatures, often perched on rocks by the shore. We found new ducks for the trip, Red-breasted Merganser, a drake Surf Scoter (a major rarity in Europe), four female Steller's Eiders and a drake King Eider. Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone, Little Stint and Sanderling were all new shorebirds. Many of these were in smart, summer, breeding plumage, unlike the winter-plumaged birds we were used to seeing elsewhere. Before we reached our final destination, we made a stop to watch two Short-eared Owls in flight. Yet another species to add to our already impressive owl list! Vardø is on Vardøya Island and is accessed by a tunnel that passes under the Barents Sea. Just before we reached our hotel, we saw hundreds of pairs of Black-legged Kittiwakes nesting on the window ledges of the adjacent buildings. We had a fine dinner of local fish and ran through our checklist. The waiter informed those of us who ordered a Norwegian beer that it was from the Mack Brewery, the most northerly in the world at 69 degrees North!

Tues., Jun. 13 Vardø Harbor | Hornøya Island | road to Hamningberg

Our trip would soon be at an end, and we had already experienced some wonderful days. Someone asked whether it could get any better? There was good news at breakfast, the weather was fine, the sea not rough, so we would be able to take the 9 a.m. boat from the dock behind our hotel to Hornøya Island. Indeed, we were at about the same latitude as Barrow, Alaska, and were quite fortunate not to have had any severe weather at all. Just a 10-minute sail across a stretch of the Barents Sea that even the most devoted land lovers found comfortable. This uninhabited, 99-acre island was packed with birds, tens of thousands breeding in a protected reserve, among them European Shags, Common Murres, Thick-billed Murres, Razorbills, Atlantic Puffins, Black-legged Kittiwakes and huge, Great Black-backed Gulls.

As we approached the dock, the sky and sea were teeming with auks. Many of the Common Murres were the "bridled" form, with a white eye-ring and line behind the eye, like a pair of spectacles. These are not a subspecies but a dimorphic plumage form. Some decided to trek to the lighthouse, at the rear of the island at its highest point, while others decided to stay near the dock and simply take in the masses of seabirds. Those who



walked to the lighthouse saw two new trip birds: a few pairs of nesting Barnacle Geese and singing Rock Pipits. Those who remained by the dock were rewarded with brief views of a Humpback Whale! It had been a privilege to witness Hornøya's avian abundance, truly a seabird paradise. We sailed back to our hotel for lunch and a short break. In the afternoon, we drove through the tunnel from Vardø to the mainland, then north towards Hamningberg. Our route was scenic, passing through rugged, rocky terrain with the open sea always nearby. One of the first birds we saw was a solitary Tundra Bean Goose. We also saw the most Parasitic Jaegers yet, mainly dark morph birds. At several spots there were rafts of ducks on the sea, including Common Eiders, Velvet Scoters and both merganser species, and a host of shorebirds on the beaches. We made our way back to our comfortable hotel and then went through our established routine: rest, drinks as we completed our daily checklist, discussion on the day to come and then dinner.

Wed., Jun. 14 Vardø | Kiberg | Varangerfjord | into Finland | Nuorgam | Utsjoki | Nejjan Tuulen Tupa (Four Winds Café)

After breakfast, we left Vardø skirting the coastline of the Barents Sea and then Varangerfjord. We made stops and saw many of the same birds we had seen along that route a few days earlier: sea ducks, terns, gulls, shorebirds, a Rough-legged Hawk and dozens of White-tailed Eagles (Norway has Europe's biggest population of these magnificent birds). A Willow Ptarmigan flew across the road, providing outstanding views. We also added a new, stunning species, a rarity hereabouts in summer, to our trip list: a Yellow-billed Loon that, uncharacteristically, allowed close approach as it hung around a small fishing haven.

Another surprise during our journey was yet another Northern Hawk-Owl, spotted perched in the open. From time to time, Mountain Hares were seen along the roadside. At Tana, we followed the River Tana, this time on its southern side, and entered Finland at Polmak/Pulmanki. Here again there were no formal immigration procedures at all. Our only delay was for a herd of big, bull Reindeer with fine antlers, that stood in the road trying to make a statement. After lunch in Nuorgam, we pushed on through changing landscapes, working south. We took a break at the Four Winds Café again, watching the birds at the feeders. After dinner in Ivalo on our final evening, we chatted about the trip, and everyone chose their top three birds (not at all easy to do) and also their most memorable non-avian highlight. Here are the results: Chitra chose Atlantic Puffin, Siberian Jay and European Golden Plover. Andrea chose Bluethroat, Atlantic Puffin and Eurasian Dotterel. Carol's favorites were Eurasian Golden-Plover, White-bellied Dipper and Golden Eagle, and Paul's Eurasian Pygmy-Owl, Black



Woodpecker and Long-tailed Jaeger. Alan's top three species were Yellow-throated Loon, Long-tailed Jaeger and Great Gray Owl. Gordon's were Eurasian Dotterel, Eurasian Pygmy-Owl and Red-necked Phalarope. Jane chose the first bird she saw on the trip in Finland, Wood Pigeon, as her favorite, followed by Black Woodpecker and Smew. Dorothy chose Thick-billed Murre, Little Bunting and Redwing. In addition to the birds, other things that impressed the group included the arctic flowers (Chitra), the mostly fine weather we had - better than expected (Carol), walking in Finland's National Parks (Alan), forest bathing among the old trees near Kuusamo (Andrea), the statues in Vardo (Gordon) and paddling bare foot in the Barents's Sea (Jane)! All excellent choices!

Day 13 / Thursday June 15 / Morning around Ivalo / Inari Museum / Transfer to Ivalo airport.

Our journey around the north of Finland, Lapland and the Arctic region of Finnmark in Norway was ending. It had been splendid, enlightening and often spectacular. We had found and observed many great birds and stopped in some outstanding locations and habitats. At times we had been in awe of the landscapes and seascapes before us. Also, the Finns and Norwegians we met had all been welcoming and helpful. Before going to the airport, half of the group went to the Sámi Museum and Nature Centre in Siida and the Northern Lapland Nature Centre in the town of Inari. Others did some final birding in Ivalo. But then it was time to head to Ivalo airport, just a 10-minute drive from our hotel, for our flights to Helsinki. From there we would all go our separate ways. I would like to thank everyone who participated in making this latest Naturalist Journeys tour through Finland and Norway so enjoyable and successful.

Photo Credits: Ural Owl (Paul Pitch - PP), Black Woodpecker (PP), Atlantic Puffin (PP), Northern Hawk-Owl (PP), Group Photo (Gerard Gorman - GG), Great Crested Grebe (PP), Ural Owl Chicks (PP), Pied Flycatcher (PP), Ural Owl (PP), Eurasian Curlew (PP), Red-backed Shrike (PP), Eurasian Bullfinch (Alan Green - AG), Northern Pygmy Owl (PP), Great Gray Owl (PP), Tufted Duck (PP), Eurasian Pygmy Owl (PP), Bohemian waxwing (PP), Black Grouse (PP), Horned Slovenian Grebe (PP), Siberian Jay (Chitra Ramaswami - CR), Common Gull (PP), Long-tailed Jaeger (PP), Reindeer Sign (GG), Red-necked Phalarope (PP), Ruff (AG), Northern Hawk Owl (PP), Razorbills (CR), Parasitic Jaeger (PP), European Shag (PP), Atlantic Puffin (NJ Stock), White-tailed Eagle (PP), Bar-tailed Godwit (PP), Parasitic Jaeger (AG), Hawk Owl (AG), Dotterel (AG)