

Finland

Owls

16–19 May 2014



Eurasian Pygmy-owl

Participants

Ben Appleton
Phil Aylen
David Booth
Jeremy Bruce
Adie Collingwood
Bill Dixon
Jem Donald
Barbara Greatorex
Tim Harrop
Gordon Kirk
Peter Muriel
Sally Muriel
Steve Rudge
Jorg Schmitz

Leaders Antti Vierimaa and Peter Lansdown

Day 1: The group assembled at Oulu Airport, boarded two minibuses and made the short transfer to a hotel on the shores of Kempele Bay. In sunshine and a cool westerly wind we were soon enjoying birding in the hotel grounds, seeing Barnacle Goose and Osprey and hearing Great Bittern. After an early dinner we drove to Liminka and claimed our first northern owl of the tour: a Tengmalm's Owl, which stared at us from the safety of its nest-box in the gloom of a pine plantation.

Day 2: A very early start enabled us to visit at this special time of day several sites in the forests near Siikajoki. One locality produced a look at the tail and top of the head of a Ural Owl in a nest-box, fairly brief views of a flying Great Grey Owl and a much appreciated lengthy gaze at its mate on the nest. Other species seen in the forests included Eurasian Capercaillie, Black Grouse, our second Tengmalm's Owl, again peering out from a nest-box, Eurasian Wryneck, Bohemian Waxwing, Crested Tit and Common Redpoll, while the journey back to the hotel was halted for Ortolan Bunting. A late breakfast was followed by a rest-period, which some took as an opportunity for more birding in the hotel grounds and were rewarded by seeing Temminck's Stint and hearing Spotted Crake. In warmer weather

than on the first day and in a lighter, easterly breeze, we made an afternoon/evening excursion to Oulu Harbour, Bykosjarvi and Tyrnava and saw Slavonian Grebe, Eurasian Dotterel and Ortolan Bunting.

Day 3: Our pre-breakfast trip to Sanginjoki Forest produced great views of Eurasian Pygmy-owl as well as Eurasian Capercaillie and heard-only Black Woodpecker, while a last look behind the hotel gave us Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. The journey to Kuusamo was broken at Kiiminki for excellent views of Black Woodpecker and at Hirvisuo Bog for distant views of Taiga Bean-goose. It was warm and sunny with little wind when we checked into our hotel in Kuusamo, after which we ventured into the area of forests and lakes to the north and west of town. At various places we saw Black-throated Diver, Taiga Bean-goose, Eurasian Capercaillie, Black Grouse and Hazel Grouse. At one site the birding began with Rough-legged Buzzard, continued with the tail and top of the head of a Northern Hawk Owl on its nest and climaxed with superb views of the owl's mate perched in a nearby pine. The pair remained in place throughout our stay, occasionally calling to each other. The Northern Hawk Owls were widely considered to be the highlight of the tour and completed our quest for the five special northern owls.

Day 4: A very early start at nearby Moujarvi rewarded us with Black-throated Diver, Red-necked Grebe, Taiga Bean-goose, Velvet Scoter and Smew at the lake and Willow Grouse, Hazel Grouse, Siberian Jay and Rustic Bunting close by. The journey to Valtavaara produced Eurasian Capercaillie, Black Grouse and Eurasian Wryneck while the hill itself gave us Black Woodpecker and Red-flanked Bluetail. By now the day was well on its way to becoming the warmest of the tour. We returned to the hotel for breakfast, after which we visited a forest to the north of Kuusamo and saw both Siberian Jay and Siberian Tit. Eurasian Capercaillie and Black Grouse were seen again on our way to another area where only a super-quick few got on to a flying Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, which sadly did not return. We then drove back to Oulu to catch a flight to Helsinki which connected with our international flight home.

For the statistically-minded, the temperature on our last day started at a chilly 3.5 degrees C and had risen by mid-afternoon to a very warm 32.0 degrees C; we drove a total of 1075km; and we recorded 135 species: Black-throated Diver, Great Crested, Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes, Great Bittern, Whooper Swan, Taiga Bean, Greater White-fronted, Greylag and Barnacle Geese, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Gadwall, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Tufted Duck, Common and Velvet Scoters, Common Goldeneye, Smew, Red-breasted and Common Mergansers, Western Marsh-harrier, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Rough-legged Buzzard, Osprey, Common Kestrel, Willow Grouse, Eurasian Capercaillie, Black and Hazel Grouse, Grey Partridge, Common Pheasant, Eurasian Coot, Spotted Crake, Common Crane, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Greater and Little Ringed Plovers, Eurasian Dotterel, European Golden-plover, Northern Lapwing, Temminck's Stint, Ruff, Eurasian Curlew, Whimbrel, Black-tailed Godwit, Common and Spotted Redshanks, Common Greenshank, wood, Common and Green Sandpipers, Eurasian Woodcock, Common Snipe, Black-headed, Little, Common, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Little, Common and Arctic Terns, Common Wood-pigeon, Rock and Stock Doves, Common Cuckoo, Short-eared, Northern Hawk, Ural and Great Grey Owls, Eurasian Pygmy-owl, Tengmalm's Owl, Common Swift, Eurasian Wryneck, Black, Great Spotted, Lesser Spotted and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers, Sky Lark, Sand Martin, Barn Swallow, House Martin, Tree and Meadow Pipits, White, Grey and Yellow (Grey-headed) Wagtails, Bohemian Waxwing, Dunnock, European Robin, Red-flanked Bluetail, Common Redstart, Whinchat, Northern Wheatear, Eurasian Blackbird, Fieldfare, Redwing, Song and Mistle Thrushes, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, European Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Willow, Siberian, Coal, Crested, Great and Eurasian Blue Tits, Eurasian Wren, Eurasian Treecreeper, Siberian and Eurasian Jays, Eurasian Magpie, Eurasian Jackdaw, Common Raven, Hooded Crow, Rook, House and Eurasian Tree Sparrows, Common Chaffinch, Brambling, European Greenfinch, Common Redpoll, Eurasian Siskin, Northern Bullfinch, Yellowhammer and Ortolan, Rustic and Reed Buntings. Mammals included Northern Hedgehog, Brown and Mountain Hares, Red Squirrel, Water Vole, Musk-rat, Roe Deer and the domesticated but free-ranging Reindeer, while Common Toad was the only amphibian recorded.

Birdfinders will be repeating this popular and exciting tour in May 2015.