

Finland

Owls

17-20 May 2013

Participants

Ruth Day
Terry Foxton
Paul Hindess
David Hughes
George Jones
Martin Pitt
Ben Rackstraw
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Red-flanked Bluetail

Leaders Antti Vierimaa and Peter Lansdown

Day 1: Our international group assembled in the late afternoon at our comfortable hotel in Kempele, near Oulu, where we were to spend the first two nights. After an early dinner we set off for a few hours' local birding. From an observation tower overlooking Kempele Bay we saw an Osprey and a male Common Redpoll and heard the rasping call of a Corn Crake, while Teppola Fields held a Common Crane. On our return to the hotel some of the group took advantage of the late-evening sunshine to look at Kempele Bay from a different angle and discovered a Temminck's Stint.

Day 2: A 04.00 start enabled us to visit Sanginjoki Forest, Liminka Bay and Siikajoki Forest, while the area around the hotel again proved popular on our return. Black Grouse, Northern Goshawk, Common Crane, Temminck's Stint, Eurasian Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Willow and Crested Tits, Bluethroat, Bohemian Waxwing, Ortolan Bunting and Common Redpoll were all watched in the warm, sunny conditions. What proved to be the only Black Woodpecker of the tour was heard then seen briefly from in between the spruces as it flew overhead. Very few of us were lucky enough to glimpse two Hazel Grouse as they flew low across our path in the forest, while just a couple more participants spotted only the rear bird, so the species remained firmly on our wanted list. A Finnish rarity, Gull-billed Tern, which was returning to the same locality for the third consecutive year, was discovered by the group. The day's highlights, however, were a Eurasian Pygmy-owl, which posed in full view in a slender birch, and a Boreal (Tengmalm's) Owl, which showed its face and upper breast as it glared at us from the safety of its nest-box: each bird lingered for a prolonged period.

Day 3: Liminka Forest was our destination as we left the hotel at 05.00 and the hotel grounds were once more covered by some on our return for breakfast. This session produced Black Grouse, Common Crane, Bohemian Waxwing, Common Rosefinch and Common Redpoll as well as the undisputed highlight, Ural Owl. One sat on its nest inside the top of the broken trunk of a large tree; only the bird's under tail was consistently in sight, however, although different viewing angles allowed parts of both wings and some of its face to be watched through cracks in the trunk. After breakfast we left the Oulu area, heading north-east on our way to Kuusamo, pausing at Hirvisus Bog where we saw Taiga Bean Goose. We checked into our hotel before setting off into the

forests to the north of the town. The east of Finland lacked the warmth and sunshine of the west coast but it remained dry for us and Taiga and Tundra Bean Geese, Smew, Black Grouse, Black-throated Diver and Willow and Crested Tits were recorded during the afternoon and early evening. A short wait at a nest-box gave us exceptional views of two Siberian Tits, while two Siberian Jays eventually performed equally well nearby. The last top bird of the day was a fine male Hazel Grouse which, unlike those seen on the previous day, allowed everybody a decent view.

Day 4: Our 03.00 start meant that it was cold, as well as windy, at nearby Muojarvi, but our sightings of Eurasian Capercaillie, Willow Grouse, Red-necked Grebe and particularly the star bird, a stunning singing male Rustic Bunting, more than compensated for the discomfort. After breakfast at the hotel we again headed off into the forests north of Kuusamo, where we saw Smew, Eurasian Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Willow Grouse, Black-throated Diver, Northern Goshawk, Bohemian Waxwing and a splendid singing male Red-flanked Bluetail which gave us prolonged close-range views on the slopes of Valtavaara. With time running out we said farewell to our German participants in Kuusamo and returned to Oulu, where we said farewell to our Dutch participants. The rest of the group then flew back to the UK via Helsinki.

Only selected species are mentioned in the above account. A full tour list follows: Taiga Bean Goose, Tundra Bean Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, Greylag Goose, Whooper Swan, Common Shelduck, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Tufted Duck, Common Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Smew, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Grey Partridge, Common Pheasant, Eurasian Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Hazel Grouse, Willow Grouse, Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Red-necked Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Osprey, Western Marsh-harrier, Hen Harrier, Northern Goshawk, Common Buzzard, Corn Crake, Common Crane, Northern Lapwing, European Golden Plover, Greater Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Common Redshank, Eurasian Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Temminck's Stint, Ruff, Common Snipe, Eurasian Woodcock, Black-headed Gull, Little Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull *fuscus*, Little Tern, Gull-billed Tern, Common Tern, Arctic Tern, Stock Dove, Common Wood-pigeon, Eurasian Collared-dove, Common Cuckoo, Eurasian Pygmy-owl, Ural Owl, Short-eared Owl, Boreal (Tengmalm's) Owl, Common Swift, Eurasian Wryneck, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Black Woodpecker, Common Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Red-backed Shrike, Siberian Jay, Eurasian Magpie, Eurasian Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Sky Lark, Sand Martin, Barn Swallow, Common House-martin, Willow Tit, Siberian Tit, Coal Tit, Crested Tit, Great Tit, Eurasian Blue Tit, Eurasian Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Sedge Warbler, Blackcap, Lesser Whitethroat, Spotted Flycatcher, Bluethroat, Red-flanked Bluetail, European Pied Flycatcher, Common Redstart, Whinchat, Northern Wheatear, Eurasian Blackbird, Fieldfare, Redwing, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Common Starling, Dunnock, Yellow Wagtail *thunbergi*, White Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Tree Pipit, Bohemian Waxwing, Yellowhammer, Ortolan Bunting, Rustic Bunting, Reed Bunting, Common Chaffinch, Brambling, Northern Bullfinch, Common Rosefinch, European Greenfinch, Red Crossbill, Common Redpoll, Eurasian Siskin, House Sparrow and Eurasian Tree Sparrow. The total number of bird species recorded was 131.

The following mammals were seen: Brown Hare, Mountain Hare, Reindeer and Elk.

Birdfinders will be repeating this exciting short tour in May 2014.