

Breeding birds of the High Arctic

This tour concentrates on the breeding birds of Northern Norway and along the border with Russia. At this time of the year there is very little darkness although the daytime temperatures can be low even in June. We have exceptional opportunities to watch and observe many familiar birds that winter in Britain, plus the addition of spectacular birds of the High Arctic which includes several species of owls, waders and warblers.

Day 1: Fly to Oslo and onward connections to the mining town of Kirkenes in extreme Northern Norway. One of our first birding stops is the large wetland of Ferdesmyra which is a good place for Tundra Bean Goose, Common Crane and Short-eared Owl. Our journey takes us towards the Varanger Fjord where we may encounter divers, seabirds and the first White-tailed Eagles of the tour. Transfer to Vadsø where we stay for three nights.

Day 2: This morning we visit the fishing port at Vardø for a trip to the fantastic birds cliffs at Hornøya. It is a short boat trip from the harbour to the cliffs where Common and Brunnich's Gull, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, Black-legged Kittiwake and European Shag all breed. The island is also home to the largest Herring Gull colony in Europe. Back on the mainland, we check the area around Ekkerøy for Common, King and

Dates

Thursday June 8th-Saturday June 17th 2017

Leaders: Anders Mæland
and Mark Finn
Group Size: 7
Birds: 140-180

Steller's Eiders, Little and Temminck's Stints, Purple Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Long-tailed Skuas. Passerines comprise Lapland and Snow Buntings, Red-throated Pipit, Mealy and Arctic Redpolls.

Day 3: Today we head towards the old, deserted fishing village at Hamningberg. This is a beautiful drive along the Persfjord and through the delta at Sandfjord. This is a good area for the rare White-billed Diver whilst Red-throated and Black-throated



Little Bunting Photo: Chris Bradshaw



Siberian Jay Photo: Anders Mæland

Divers can be numerous and Red-necked Phalaropes are on almost every patch of water. Sea-ducks form loose flocks and comprise Long-tailed Duck, Velvet and Common Scoters, all three eiders and Common Goldeneye. Other species we search for along the coast include Little Stint, Temminck's Stints, Willow Grouse, Red-throated Pipit and Bluethroat. We drive into the Komag valley to look for colourful, lekking Ruffs, Jack Snipe and dainty Little Gulls. There are also several other localities we visit including Vadsøya for ghostly white Arctic Redpolls.

Day 4: After leaving Vadsø, we drive along the Varangerfjord towards the Tana Valley. We make stops in the inner part of the fjord, at the Tana river delta. Spotted Redshanks occur here along with other waders. As we cross the Tana Valley with its rocky outcrops we should keep an eye out for Rough-legged Buzzards, Golden Eagle and, in recent years, Gyrfalcons. Passerines are few in this bleak landscape but good numbers of Ring Ouzel and Bluethroat are present in mid-June. Hawk Owls are a distinct

possibility along the road as we approach our base at Kongsfjord for the next three nights.

Days 5-6: The next two days are spent birding around Batsfjord and Berlevåg. The landscape and scenery is quite dramatic with snowfields, lakes and Arctic tundra. If it is a lemming year, we expect to see high numbers of the beautiful Long-tailed Skua and Rough-legged Buzzards, and we have an outside chance of Snowy Owls. Waders using the tundra comprise Eurasian Dotterel, Common Ringed and European Golden Plovers. Passerines such as Horned Lark, Snow and Lapland Buntings, Rock Pipit and Willow Warbler may be present. On the higher passes Rock Ptarmigan occur. This is also a good area for Greater Scaup and Long-tailed Ducks which breed on the small ponds. The fishing port of Batsfjord has Goosander and Common Goldeneye whilst the seaweed-strewn beaches attract Purple Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones to feed. On the second day, we drive to the little fishing village of Berlevåg, a good place to find Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. Along



Long-tailed Skua *Photo: Anders Mæland*

the way, we look for Gyrfalcon and Twite. Kjølnes lighthouse is a great sea-watching point with passing Northern Gannet, Northern Fulmar (blue phase birds) and Pomarine Skuas, if winds are favourable.

Day 7: Today we drive towards the taiga forest in the Pasvik valley where our base is at Svanvik for three nights. The vegetation of Pasvik is dominated by pine and birch forests.

Days 8-9: We birdwatch along the border with Russia and in the Pasvik National Park. Some of the species we look for include Smew, Eurasian Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Pine Grosbeak, Siberian Jay, Siberian Tit, Arctic Warbler and Little Bunting with the latter two species not arriving until mid-June. Moose is often seen and, if we are lucky, Brown Bear is also possible. The shallow parts of the river and adjacent wetlands attract Whooper Swan, Tundra Bean Goose and other wildfowl. Birds of prey include Merlin, White-tailed Eagle and Osprey. We also have a good chance of seeing Hawk and Short-eared Owls and, if it is a good

rodent year, Great Grey Owl. Bogs and marshes are breeding areas for a variety of waders, including Bar-tailed Godwit, Jack Snipe and the scarce Broad-billed Sandpiper.

Day 10. Return to Kirkenes for our flights south to Oslo and on to London with arrival later the same day.

Prices

Ground Price: £2,995
 Single room: £300
 Deposit: £250
 *Air Fare: £400

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*