

## **PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS**

### **FINLAND AND ARCTIC NORWAY**

26 May - 10 June 2012

#### **TOUR REPORT**

**LEADERS:** Chris Doughty and Antero Topp.

Our tour to Finland and Arctic Norway was a most enjoyable tour, it went smoothly from beginning to end, the weather was surprisingly good, the food was excellent and best of all, we saw almost all of the local specialities. Despite it being a very bad year for both voles and lemmings, we enjoyed truly memorable encounters with Great Grey, Ural, Northern Hawk, Tengmalm's, Eurasian Pygmy and Short-eared Owls. Other highlights included Red and Black-throated Loons, King and Steller's Eiders, Long-tailed Duck, Montagu's Harrier, an extremely rare bird in Finland, Willow and Rock Ptarmigans, Western Capercaillie and Black and Hazel Grouse, Red-necked Phalarope, lekking Ruffs, Heuglin's Gull, Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas, Bohemian Waxwing, Red-flanked Bluetail, Siberian Tit, Siberian Jay, Pine Grosbeak and Little and Rustic Buntings. Our mammal tally was exceptional and highlights included Wolf, Red Fox, Brown Bear, Stoat, Wolverine and Eurasian Otter.

Following a long and tiring flight from Australia we arrived at Helsinki Airport in the capital city of Finland. We then took a short flight to Oulu, in Finnish Lapland. Following lunch we drove to a Ural Owl territory where we watched two fully fledged chicks. A little later our local guide Antero found an adult female sitting in a nearby tree, unfortunately she did not stay long, before flying away, in an attempt to lure us from her nest. A little later we enjoyed magnificent scope views of a female Great Grey Owl sitting on a nest, with two chicks in it. During our first afternoon of birding two of the very important birds were already in the bag. In the surrounding farmland there was also a supporting cast of more common birds which included Mallard, Western Marsh and Hen Harriers, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Merlin, Common Crane, Northern Lapwing, Little-ringed Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Black-headed and Common Gulls, Feral Pigeon, Barn Swallow, Northern House Martin, White Wagtail, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Fieldfare, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Great Tit, Common Magpie, Eurasian Jay, Western Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, House Sparrow, Common Chaffinch and Eurasian Siskin. Best of the supporting cast was a male Ortolan Bunting in full song. We also enjoyed our first sighting of a Brown Hare, our first mammal for the tour.

The main emphasis the following day was also owls and once again we saw both Great Grey and Ural Owls, getting much better looks at an adult female Ural Owl. We also enjoyed great looks at a female Eurasian Pygmy-Owl in a nest box. Other new birds seen today included Whooper Swan, Common Goldeneye, a Eurasian Woodcock which flew over our heads, a roding Common Snipe, European Herring Gull, Common Wood Pigeon, Common Swift, European Robin, Pied Flycatcher, Crested Tit, Great Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, Common Raven, Eurasian Bullfinch, Common Crossbill and Common Rosefinch. Other highlights today included both Black and Hazel Grouse,

Black and Eurasian Short-toed Woodpeckers, a Red-breasted Flycatcher, a species which does not normally occur this far north, and another bird which does not normally occur around Oulu, the Siberian Jay. We also enjoyed good looks at our first Elk today.

The following day was mainly spent birding a mixture of farmland, woodland and lakes in and around Oulu. New birds came thick and fast, and included such splendid birds as Great Crested Grebe, Greylag Goose, Gadwall, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Tufted Duck, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, White-tailed Eagle, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Ringed Plover, Temminck's Stint, Wood, Green and Common Sandpipers, Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Common, Arctic and Little Terns, Stock Dove, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Common Skylark, Common Sand Martin, Tree Pipit, Western Yellow Wagtail, Whinchat, European Blackbird, Blackcap, Lesser Whitethroat, Wood Warbler, Blue Tit, the very beautiful Scandinavian race of Long-tailed Tit and Yellowhammer. However, special mention should go to three very important species, which we saw today; the dainty and uncommon Little Gull, the leks of Ruffs were a treat to behold and best of all, a pair of splendid Montagu's Harriers, probably the only breeding pair in Finland, which we saw exceptionally well. Following dinner we drove to the nest box of a Tengmalm's Owl, arriving at 10.30 pm. On the way we enjoyed great looks at a couple of Short-eared Owls, quartering roadside farmland. We then waited for the female to leave the nest box, or the male to arrive with food. We stood patiently to attention and vigilantly watched the hole in the nest box. Although it was approaching the middle of the night it was still very light, which felt rather strange. At four minutes to midnight the female suddenly stuck her head out of the nest hole, she stayed there for some time and had a good look at us. Then just as suddenly she took flight and flew off into the night, although it was still light.

Much of the following day was taken up by the long and mainly uneventful drive eastwards across Finland to Viiksimo, on the border with Russia. However, we did see the first of many Mountain Hares along the roadside. We then checked in at the Boreal Wildlife Centre, where we added European Greenfinch to our ever growing list. Following a late lunch we drove to a modern well equipped wildlife viewing hide, complete with heating and beds. On the way we enjoyed super looks at a splendid female Western Capercaillie, which stood motionless in the centre of the road allowing us to enjoyed great looks at this very uncommon species.

For once birds took a back seat, we were here to look for mammals. Three very special mammals, Brown Bear, Wolverine and Wolf. We entered the hide at 4.15 in the afternoon and we would not be leaving the hide during the next 15 hours. When we entered the hide we could see the large salmon carcasses that were being used for bait. It attracted large numbers of gulls, at one time there was approximately 150 gulls present directly in front of the hide, made up of 5 different species; the majority where Black-headed Gulls, there were also plenty of European Herring and Common Gulls, with smaller numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls. There was also one surprise; a single Heuglin's Gull, which we all saw exceptionally well. Large numbers of Common Ravens began flying into the viewing area in front of the hide, and at one time there was over 50 present. For most of the night, which of course was like a summers day in Melbourne, we were joined by a sub-adult White-tailed Eagle which we enjoyed watching flying around, sitting on the ground and perched in nearby trees. A solitary Black Kite, a rare resident in Finland, also spent much of the night with us. On one occasion a Whimbrel flew down amongst the gulls and one more species was added to our trip list. However, it was the mammals who took centre stage, we watched six Brown Bears, who spent long periods of the night just a few metres from us directly in front of the hide. A small pack of four Wolves suddenly appeared, they were busy hunting, so they were not on show for very long, but they were very striking and two of them were particularly pale individuals. In the early hours of the morning we enjoyed two quick sightings of solitary Wolverines, who ran across

an open area before disappearing into the forest. Our night time vigil had been very successful and we were all very pleased with the sightings.

The following morning we drove northwards to Kuusamo, close to the Russian border, where we checked into our very smart hotel and then had lunch. In the afternoon we enjoyed great scope views of both male and female Velvet Scoter, a pair of Willow Ptarmigans which flushed right next to us, superb close looks at a pair of fabulous White-throated Dippers, both Willow and Siberian Tits and we also saw the very handsome Little Bunting.

On our final day in Kuusamo we checked out a few of the areas many lakes, where we were rewarded with great looks at four new birds; the superb Black-throated Loon, the lovely Red-necked Grebe, a magnificent male Smew, looking resplendent in full breeding plumage and we also enjoyed good looks at an Osprey in flight. We then took the opportunity to stretch our legs on a gentle uphill walk, in search of Red-flanked Bluetail. In no time at all we were soon enjoying great scope views of a singing male, at the top of a nearby pine tree. Other new birds during the walk included Golden Eagle, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Brambling and Common Reed and Rustic Buntings. Following dinner we drove to a Black Grouse lek, where we counted 29 birds performing their strange jousting tournament.

Much of the following day was taken up by the long drive northwards to Ivalo, in Finnish Lapland, stopping en route at the Arctic Circle, where we toasted our crossing of the Arctic Circle, with a local brew. We broke the long drive with two birding stops; the finds at Ilmakkaapa Swamp, where Meadow Pipit was a new bird for us and the second stop was at Kilopaa Fell. Here we walked to the top of the fell in search of the only species of grouse which we had still not seen, the Rock Ptarmigan. On the way up we enjoyed great scope views of Common Redpoll and a cracking Bluethroat, who sang to us from the top of a bush. On reaching the top of the fell we soon located Rock Ptarmigan, which we saw very well indeed. We also enjoyed great close looks at Willow Ptarmigan at one time the two species of ptarmigan were no more than 100 metres apart! On our way down the fell, we added one more bird to our trip list, a solitary European Golden-Plover.

The following day was very much a travel day, as we drove northwards from Ivalo to Batsfjord. However, it turned out to be the best birding day of the whole tour. Our first new bird for the day was a magnificent Rough-legged Buzzard, seen along the roadside. A little later a Common Redstart flew across the road in front of the bus. We stopped at a roadside cafe which had a feeder and here we enjoyed superb looks at both male and female Pine Grosbeaks. We were also very pleased to watch a European Red Squirrel, who was feeding on leftovers on the ground, below the feeder. Continuing our drive northwards, our bus came to a screeching halt and we enjoyed great looks at a wonderful Northern Hawk-Owl. A little further north we stopped at an area of boggy terrain, where we managed to add Lapland Bunting to our ever growing birdlist. We then crossed the border into Arctic Norway and drove to the Veranger Peninsula, where we stopped at some steep cliffs, where there was a nesting pair of Peregrine Falcons and we saw a single Peregrine very well as it flew along the cliffs. We then visited Hoyholmen a very attractive area where we saw many new birds including large flocks of Common Eiders and a small flock of King Eiders, there were large numbers of Great Black-backed Gulls and Black-legged Kittiwakes, we also saw both light and dark morph Arctic Skuas and a single Black Guillemot. We saw our first Grey Seal, in the water just offshore. We then drove up on to the Gednje Plateau an area of high altitude tundra, with numerous bogs and lakes, the birding here was truly excellent. New birds included a pair of very uncommon Greater Scaup, good close looks at several Long-tailed Ducks, a few pair of Goosanders, a Dunlin in full breeding plumage, delightful Red-necked Phalaropes pirouetting along the edge of the lakes, brilliant Long-tailed Skuas, a Red-throated Pipit sporting a brick-red throat,

and one or two Northern Wheatears. As we neared Batsfjord we found a stunning pair of Red-throated Loons, on a small lake.

The following day began with more birding on the Gednje Plateau, where we enjoyed fine looks at the beautiful Snow Bunting. We then did a sea-watch from the Berlevag Lighthouse. Here we saw Northern Gannet, Great Cormorant, European Shag and Common Guillemot. A little further along the beach, we found a small flock of Purple Sandpipers. We then drove to the Varanger Bird Sanctuary, where new birds for the tour included a flock of 10 or so Red Knots and an Arctic Redpoll. As we were driving to Vardo, for a three nights stay a Ruddy Turnstone flew in front of our bus. In the evening a short walk around Vardo harbour produced a solitary Brunnick's Guillemot.

We spent the following day birding close to Vardo, new birds here included a few very smart Sanderlings, a few Little Stints, a couple of Bar-tailed Godwits, the very uncommon Ring Ouzel and equally uncommon Twite. We also played hide and seek with a very handsome and very curious Stoat, which showed itself wonderfully for us. We also saw a Harbour Porpoise and a Minke Whale, in one of the fjords.

The following morning we visited the famous seabird breeding island of Hornoy, where we enjoyed a smorgasbord of breeding seabirds at point blank range, which included Common and Brunnick's Guillemots, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, Eurasian Shag and Black-legged Kittiwake. Other birds of interest here included several Red-throated Pipits, a few Twite and I was lucky enough to have a Gyrfalcon fly right past me. We also very much enjoyed watching a Eurasian Otter, which put on a tremendous display for us, swimming around just offshore, we even watched it swim to a small island and eat a fish it had caught. In the afternoon fortune shone on us, but not the sun, and in the harbour of the small fishing village of Kiberg we found an immature Steller's Eider, which rounded off a perfect day, perfectly.

The next day we awoke to find a wet and windy day, our first such day of the tour. As we were to spend most of the day in the bus, as we drove from Vardo in Norway, southwards to Ivalo, in Finland, it wasn't too bad. As we drove south we checked the farmers fields at Ekkeroy, where we found a total of six bean geese, four Taiga Bean Geese and Two Tundra Bean Geese. These were the only new birds of the day. We also enjoyed good prolonged looks at a Red Fox, while birding in this area.

On our last morning of the tour we drove slowly through the endless taiga forest that surrounds Ivalo, searching for any bird that we may not have already seen on the tour. It took a while, but at last we found a beautiful pair of Bohemian Waxwings that were busily nest building. Their delicate plumage was much admired and we felt that we were well rewarded for our mornings effort. Following lunch we drove to a nearby ski resort, where a pair of Eurasian Dotterel had been observed in the high altitude tundra. The weather was not good, banks of fog were sweeping across the uplands, even so, we made the decision to walk the tundra in search of this beautiful species of dotterel. We had walked for some time without any success, then the visibility improved, the fog lifted and Ted, as alert as ever! Spotted our quarry. We very much enjoyed watching a pair of birds, who were very tame. We were even able to watch them copulating! This was a very fitting end to a wonderful tour to Finnish Lapland and Arctic Norway.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

### GAVIIDAE

**Red-throated Loon** *Gavia stellata* A common summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway, where we saw it very well on several occasions.

**Black-throated Loon** *Gavia arctica* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to Finland and Norway, which we also saw very well on several occasions.

#### PODICIPEDIDAE

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* A common summer breeding visitor to the southern half of Finland. We saw a couple of birds at Oulu, plus a few more at Kuusamo.

**Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena* A localised fairly common summer breeding species to the southern half of Finland. We enjoyed very good looks at half a dozen or so birds around Kuusamo.

#### SULIDAE

**Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* A common resident along the coast of Norway, we observed this species well at Berlevag Lighthouse and around Vardo.

#### PHALACROCORACIDAE

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* A locally common summer breeding visitor to the northern coast of Norway, we also observed this species well at Berlevag Lighthouse.

**European Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to the northern coast of Norway, we observed this species well at Berlevag Lighthouse around Vardo and also at its breeding colonies on Hornoy Island.,

#### ANATIDAE

**Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to Finland and an occasional summer visitor to Arctic Norway. We saw it very well on many occasions in Finland, where it is the National Bird and we saw a few birds in Arctic Norway.

**Taiga Bean-Goose** *Anser fabalis* An uncommon summer breeding species to Finland and Arctic Norway. We were fortunate to observe four birds in farmland at Ekkeroy, in Norway.

**Tundra Bean Goose** *Anser serrirostris* A very uncommon summer breeding bird to the coast of Arctic Norway. We found two birds amongst the Taiga Bean-Geese at Ekkeroy, in Norway.

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser* A locally common summer breeding species to coastal Finland and coastal Arctic Norway. We saw it very well around Oulu, in Finland and at Nesseby, in Norway.

**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* An uncommon summer breeding species to coastal areas of southern Finland. We were fortunate to enjoy really good looks at small numbers of birds, close to Oulu.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* An abundant breeding summer visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway, we observed it on almost every day of the tour.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera* The Gadwall is a rare summer breeding visitor to a few highly localised areas in southern Finland. It is slowly spreading northwards as a breeding visitor and it has only colonised Finland in the last few years. Therefore, we very fortunate to observe a few of these birds in the Liminganlahti Wetlands.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta* A locally common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway, we saw small numbers very well on a few occasions, in both Finland and Norway.

**Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to southern Finland, we observed small numbers in the Oulu area.

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway, we enjoyed many good sightings during our time in Finland.

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic

Norway, we observed small numbers in both countries.

**Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* A very uncommon summer breeding visitor to Finland and Arctic Norway. We enjoyed scope views of a single pair on the Gednje Plateau, in Norway.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We observed good numbers in both Finland and Norway.

**Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima* A common resident along the coast of Arctic Norway, where we observed many hundreds of birds.

**King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* An uncommon non-breeding, mainly winter visitor to the coast of Arctic Norway. We predominantly found small flocks of birds in non-breeding plumage along the coast of Arctic Norway. However, on one occasion we found a bird in breeding plumage, amongst a flock of Common Eiders.

**Steller's Eider** *Polysticta stelleri* A rather rare mainly winter visitor, to the coasts of Arctic Norway. Therefore, we were very fortunate to enjoy good close looks at a female in Kiberg Harbour, in Norway.

**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to northern Finland and Arctic Norway. We observed small numbers in both Finland and Norway.

**Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to northern Finland and Arctic Norway. We observed a pair very well at Kuusamo, in Finland and a few birds at Vardo, in Norway.

**Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* An uncommon predominantly coastal species of northern Finland and Arctic Norway. We enjoyed many good looks at this very attractive species of duck, during our time in Arctic Norway.

**Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* A locally common summer breeding visitor to Finland, where we enjoyed many good sightings.

**Smew** *Mergellus albellus* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to localised areas of northern Finland. We only observed male birds, as the females were probably sitting on eggs, we saw small numbers at Kuusamo and at Ivalo.

**Goosander** *Mergus merganser* A locally common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We observed many large flocks along the coast of Arctic Norway.

**Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* A locally common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We observed small numbers very well in both Finland and Norway.

#### PANDIONIDAE

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to Finland, we observed one bird close to Kuusamo and a second bird at Ilmakkiapa Swamp, near Sodankyla.

#### ACCIPITRIDAE

**White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* A rare resident of coastal areas of southern Finland and an uncommon summer visitor to northern Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw this species very well on many occasions, especially in Arctic Norway.

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* An uncommon resident of Finland, we observed one bird in flight, close to Kuusamo.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* The Black Kite is a very uncommon summer visitor to a small area of eastern Finland. We observed a single bird extremely well during our time in the hide at the Boreal Wildlife Centre, at Viiksimo.

**Western Marsh-Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* This species is an uncommon summer visitor to coastal areas of Finland, we observed it on two separate occasions, close to Oulu.

**Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus* The Hen Harrier is also an uncommon summer visitor to Finland, we saw a male very well on one occasion, close to Oulu.

**Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus* The Montagu's Harrier does not normally occur in Finland

or Norway; we were very fortunate to enjoy very good close looks at a breeding pair, which was the only known breeding pair in Finland! The observation occurred close to Oulu. Colonel George Montagu (1751-1815) was a soldier and natural history writer and served as a lieutenant-colonel in the English army during the American Revolution. He was later court-martialed for what was referred to as *'provocative marital skirmishing'*! He then devoted his life to ornithology and following a long and distinguished career in the south of England, at the age of 64, he unfortunately died of lockjaw (tetanus) after stepping on a rusty nail.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* A fairly common summer visitor to the southern two thirds of Finland. We enjoyed two separate sightings close to Oulu.

**Rough-legged Buzzard** *Buteo lagopus* The Rough-legged Buzzard is an uncommon summer visitor to the northern half of Finland and Arctic Norway. Numbers vary from year to year depending on the vole and lemming cycles. As this was a very poor year for voles and lemmings, the Rough-legged Buzzard was particularly scarce this year. We observed a bird at close quarters, not far from Inari, in northern Finland and this was followed by a second sighting, close to Vardo, in Norway.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* This species is a fairly common summer visitor to the southern two thirds of Finland. On one occasion a bird flew across the road in front of our vehicle close to Kuusamo and landed in a conifer by the side of the road. By the time we had got out of our vehicle, the bird was nowhere to be seen, however, we did find a raptors nest in the conifer, which we presumed to be the sparrowhawks nest.

#### FALCONIDAE

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* A common summer visitor to Finland, which we saw well on several occasions.

**Merlin** *Falco columbarius* The Merlin is an uncommon summer visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We enjoyed a few good sightings of this diminutive species of falcon, we saw it particularly well on one occasion, in flight and perched, close to Vardo.

**Gyrfalcon** *Falco rusticolus* This stunning species of falcon is a scarce winter visitor to the northern two thirds of Finland and a scarce summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway. I had a bird fly right past me while we were birding on Hornoy Island, just offshore from Vardo.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* The widespread Peregrine Falcon is a scarce summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw a single bird in flight at a known Peregrine nest, close to Luoftjok, in Norway.

#### TETRAONIDAE

**Willow Ptarmigan** *Lagopus lagopus* The Willow Ptarmigan is a locally common resident of both Finland and Arctic Norway, we saw it very well on a few occasions during our time in Finland.

**Rock Ptarmigan** *Lagopus muta* This species is a locally common resident in the far north of Finland and in Arctic Norway. We observed a bird at incredibly close quarters on Kilopaa Fell, near Ivalo, in Finland and Ted and I flushed a pair on the Gednje Plateau, in Norway.

**Western Capercaillie** *Tetrao urogallus* An uncommon resident of Finland, we were very fortunate to enjoy close prolonged looks at a female which stood in the road in front of us, as we were driving to the Boreal Wildlife Centre Hide, at Viiksimo.

**Black Grouse** *Tetrao tetrix* The Black Grouse is an uncommon resident of Finland, we observed a bird from the bus, which was feeding in dense forest, not far from Oulu. Our second sighting of this species was an unforgeable experience, when one evening we drove out to a

large lek, approximately an hours drive from Kuusamo. The Black Grouse's remarkable courtship ceremonies take place at communal display grounds, known as leks. The males arrive about a month before the females. At the lek, males joust with males and, to a lesser extent, females with females. The fighting is mostly mock, with opponents hopping up and down, their tails fully spread; occasional the battles become more serious as birds try to force their way towards the centre of the lek, the best place for securing matings. This species was voted bird of the tour by tour participants.

**Hazel Grouse** *Bonasa bonasia* An uncommon resident of Finland, this shy bird is easily overlooked. We had a couple of brief sightings, one at Oulu and a second, at Kuusamo.

#### GRUIDAE

**Common Crane** *Grus grus* A localised and uncommon summer breeding bird in Finland. We saw a few small flocks in farmland, during our time in Finland.

#### HAEMATOPODIDAE

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* A common summer breeding visitor to coastal areas of Finland and Arctic Norway, which we saw very well in both countries, on many occasions.

#### CHARADRIIDAE

**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* This species is a common summer breeding visitor to Finland. We enjoyed many good sightings of this species while birding in central Finland.

**European Golden-Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* This species is a fairly common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway, where we saw it well on several occasions.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to the southern half of Finland. We enjoyed good looks at a single bird at Oulu.

**Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* This species is a common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw it in both Finland and Norway on many occasions.

**Eurasian Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* A scarce and highly localised summer breeding visitor to the far north of Finland and Arctic Norway. We were very fortunate on the last day of the tour, to observe a pair of very tame birds, on the Arctic tundra close to Ivalo.

#### SCOLOPACIDAE

**Eurasian Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* This species is a fairly common summer breeding visitor to the southern half of Finland. We observed a few birds in flight during the early days of the tour.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* This species is a common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We enjoyed good sightings in both countries throughout the tour.

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* A common summer breeding visitor to the southern two thirds of Finland and a very uncommon summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway. We saw it on a daily basis, during the first week of the tour, in central Finland.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to the northern two thirds of Finland and to Arctic Norway. We saw it on a few occasions in both Finland and Norway.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* A very rare summer breeding visitor to only Oulu, in Finland. A bird was observed well on the first day of the tour at Oulu.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to the far north of Finland and the southern areas of Arctic Norway. We saw small numbers very well at a couple of places in coastal Norway.



- Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway; we saw small numbers close to Oulu and Palomaa in Finland and in Luoftjok, in Norway.
- Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to Finland, somewhat surprisingly, we only observed this species on one occasion, at Oulu.
- Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw it very well in both countries, on numerous occasions.
- Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to Finland, where we saw it well on a few occasions.
- Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* A common summer breeding visitor to coastal Finland and Arctic Norway, we saw it well in both countries on a number of occasions.
- Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* The majority of Siberian breeding Red Knots migrate to their wintering grounds through Scandinavia. We saw a flock of a dozen birds or so in flight, in the Varanger Bird Sanctuary and we also saw a few birds along the shoreline in the Varangerfjord, in Arctic Norway.
- Sanderling** *Calidris alba* The only area where this species breeds in Europe, is in Spitsbergen, birds on migration pass through Scandinavia. Small numbers were present along the shoreline in the Varangerfjord, near Vardo, in Norway.
- Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway. Once again, we found small numbers along the shoreline in the Varangerfjord, near Vardo, in Norway.
- Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* An uncommon breeding summer visitor to coastal Finland and inland areas of northern Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw it in both countries but it was far more numerous in Arctic Norway. We very much enjoyed watching them fluttering around like butterflies, during their display flights. Coenraad Jacob Temminck (1778-1858) was a Dutch ornithologist, illustrator and collector. He was appointed the first Director of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, in Leiden, in 1820 and held that post until his death. He was a wealthy man who had a very large collection of specimens and live birds. His first task as an ornithologist was to catalogue his father's very extensive collection. His father was Jacob Temminck, for whom Le Vaillant collected specimens.
- Purple Sandpiper** *Calidris maritima* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to the very far north of Finland and an uncommon winter visitor to coastal Arctic Norway. We observed small numbers feeding along the shoreline on a daily basis in the Varangerfjord.
- Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* The Dunlin is a common summer breeding visitor to coastal Finland and Arctic Norway. We enjoyed small numbers on the Gednje Plateau and feeding along the shoreline of the Varangerfjord.
- Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* An uncommon and localised summer breeding visitor to the northern half of Finland. A single bird was observed well on the first day of the tour at Oulu.
- Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* A common summer breeding visitor to coastal areas of Finland and Arctic Norway. Once again we saw small numbers feeding along the Varangerfjord.
- Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw it very well in both countries and enjoyed great views of lekking birds, as we admired the full range of colour variants.
- Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to northern Finland and Arctic Norway. We very much enjoyed watching these birds pirouetting along

the edge of a lake in the Varanger Bird Sanctuary. We also observed them on small lakes on the Gednje Plateau and along the coast of the Varangerfjord.

#### LARIDAE

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* A common resident in coastal Finland and a common summer visitor to the southern half of Finland. It proved to be the commonest gull during the first half of the tour.

**Common Gull** *Larus canus* A fairly common summer visitor in both Finland and Arctic Norway, which we saw on most days of the tour.

**European Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland and a common resident in Arctic Norway. We saw this species on almost a daily basis.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* A common summer breeding visitor to southern Finland and Arctic Norway, which we saw well in both countries.

**Heuglin's Gull** *Larus heuglini* This species is a rare visitor to eastern Finland and it may even breed in very small numbers. We were very fortunate to observe a single bird amongst the many Lesser Black-backed Gulls present at the Boreal Wildlife Centre, at Viiksimo. Theodor von Heuglin (1824-1876) was born in Ditzingen, Germany, where the local school is named after him. He became a mining engineer and ornithologist. He is recorded as exploring Central Africa and Ethiopia in 1861. He also explored in eastern Africa and he published an account of its birds, *Ornithologie Nordost Afrika*, in 1869. Heuglin was a vocal opponent of evolutionary theories, perhaps since he was the son of the local priest in Ditzingen. He died of pneumonia and is buried in Stuttgart.

**Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus* A common resident of Arctic Norway, we saw large numbers on a daily basis, throughout our time there.

**Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to Finland; we very much enjoyed watching these beautiful birds during our time in Finland.

**Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* An abundant summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway, which we saw on a daily basis during our time there.

#### STERNIDAE

**Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons* This species is a rare summer breeding visitor to Finland and only breeds in the Liminganlahti Wetlands, where we saw a couple very well.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw good numbers nesting in the area around Oulu.

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* An abundant breeding summer visitor to coastal areas of southern Finland, inland areas of northern Finland and to Arctic Norway. We observed it on most days of the tour.

#### STERCORARIIDAE

**Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to coastal areas of Finland and Arctic Norway. We found lots of birds nesting during our time in Arctic Norway.

**Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway, it was a real treat to see this incredibly graceful bird flying above the Arctic Tundra of the Gednje Plateau.

#### ALCIDAE

**Common Guillemot** *Uria aalge* A locally abundant summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway,

where we observed many hundreds of birds.

**Brunnich's Guillemot** *Uria lomvia* A locally abundant summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway. We observed a single bird in the harbour at Vardo and then we saw many birds amongst the

Common Guillemot breeding colonies on Hornoy Island, a little offshore from Vardo.

Morten Thrane Brunnich (1737-1827) was bird curator in Copenhagen and worked on Guillemots. He is described by the Danish bibliographer Jean Anker as the 'founder of Danish faunistic zoology' and was a highly praised systematist. He wrote *Ornithologia borealis* in 1764, which was a description of a private collection of birds of Denmark, Iceland and other parts of northern Europe.

**Black Guillemot** *Cephus grylle* A locally common summer breeding visitor to coastal Finland and coastal Arctic Norway. We observed small numbers just offshore in Arctic Norway.

**Razorbill** *Alca torda* A locally abundant summer breeding visitor to coastal areas of southern Finland and coastal areas of Arctic Norway. We enjoyed excellent looks at the 500 or so pairs that were breeding on Hornoy Island.

**Atlantic Puffin** *Fratercula arctica* A locally abundant summer breeding visitor to coastal Arctic Norway. We were able to get very close to some of the 5,000 – 10,000 pairs that nest on Hornoy Island.

#### COLUMBIDAE

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia* An abundant resident throughout the southern two thirds of Finland, where we saw it well.

**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* A very uncommon breeding summer visitor to southern Finland, reaching the northern edge of its range at Oulu, where fortunately, we saw one very well in flight.

**Common Wood-Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* A common summer breeding visitor to the southern two thirds of Finland, where we saw it well on many occasions.

#### STRIGIDAE

**Great Grey Owl** *Strix nebulosa* An uncommon resident in Finland, we saw an adult female sitting on a nest with two chicks, not far from Oulu.

**Ural Owl** *Strix uralensis* An uncommon resident of southern Finland, we enjoyed good scope views of an adult female and enjoyed close looks at two fledged young, not far from Oulu.

**Northern Hawk Owl** *Surnia ulula* An uncommon resident of Finland and Arctic Norway, which we saw well in both countries.

**Tengmalm's Owl** *Aegolius funereus* A fairly common resident of Finland, we saw a female peering out from a nest box for quite some time, before flying off into the forest not far from Oulu. Peter Gustaf Tengmalm (1754-1803) was born in Stockholm and studied medicine at Uppsala University. He spent his spare time studying birds and became an accomplished taxidermist. In 1792 he travelled to Scotland and England, meeting other naturalists including Joseph Banks. He contributed papers on both medicine and ornithology to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, becoming a member in 1797. He died of dysentery, which he caught from his patients during an epidemic. He was interested in owls and improved upon Linnaeus' owl classification in a paper to the Academy of Sciences. Johann Friedrich Gmelin named the Tengmalm's Owl after him in 1788 (*Strix tengmalmi*) in the mistaken belief that Tengmalm had been the first to describe it.

**Eurasian Pygmy-Owl** *Glaucidium passerinum* An uncommon resident of the southern two thirds of Finland. We enjoyed very good looks at a female inside a nest box, not far from Oulu.

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw two separate birds flying over farmland, close to Oulu, in Finland and then we saw a single bird flying over farmland close to Vardo, in Norway.

#### APODIDAE

**Common Swift** *Apus apus* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland, which we saw well on several occasions.

#### PICIDAE

**Black Woodpecker** *Dryocopus martius* A fairly common resident of Finland, we enjoyed great looks at a bird at a nest hole, not far from Oulu.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* A common resident of Finland, we saw a bird close to Oulu, which was followed by a second sighting at the Boreal Wildlife Centre, at Viiksimo.

**Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picoides tridactylus* A fairly common resident of Finland, we saw a bird very well indeed at a nest hole, not far from Oulu.

#### ALAUDIDAE

**Common Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland and Arctic Norway. Somewhat surprisingly, we only observed this bird on one occasion, in farmland not far from Oulu.

#### HIRUNDINIDAE

**Common Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland and a very uncommon summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway. We observed many small flocks in central Finland and we were very fortunate to observe a single bird, not far from Vardo, in Norway.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* A common breeding summer visitor to the southern two thirds of Finland and a very rare summer breeding visitor to one small area of Arctic Norway. We saw it on a daily basis in central Finland and then we were very fortunate to observe a single bird at Nesseby, the only area where this bird breeds in Arctic Norway.

**Northern House Martin** *Delichon urbicum* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland, where we saw it well on many occasions.

#### MOTACILLIDAE

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* A common breeding summer visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw it well in both countries but it was particularly numerous in Arctic Norway.

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland, we saw it well on one occasion close to Oulu.

**Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to the extreme far north of Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw a few small flocks during our time in Arctic Norway.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway, which we saw on every day of the tour.

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* A locally common summer breeding visitor to Finland, which we saw well on a number of occasions.

#### REGULIDAE

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* A common summer visitor throughout the northern half of Finland, where we saw it well on several occasions.

#### BOMBYCILLIDAE

**Bohemian Waxwing** *Bombycilla garrulus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to the northern half of Finland. We watched a pair nest building, on the last day of the tour, close

to Ivalo.

#### CINCLIDAE

**White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus* A fairly common localised resident in parts of northern Finland and Arctic Norway. We very much enjoyed watching a pair of these birds at their nest site, not far from Kuusamo.

#### TURDIDAE

**Redwing** *Turdus iliacus* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway, where we saw it on most days of the tour.

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to Finland, which we saw well on several occasions.

**Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway, which we saw on almost every day of the tour.

**European Blackbird** *Turdus merula* A common summer breeding visitor to the southern half of Finland, we saw a few birds well around Oulu.

**Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to Arctic Norway. We saw a bird very fleetingly at Varangerfjord, near Vardo, in Norway.

#### SYLVIIDAE

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway, where we saw it on most days of the tour.

**Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to southern Finland, we saw a single bird at very close quarters, in woodland close to Oulu.

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* A common summer breeding visitor to coastal Finland, it reaches the northern edge of its range at Oulu, where I saw a pair, while watching a Great Spotted Woodpecker.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* A common summer breeding visitor to the southern half of Finland. One bird flew in front of the bus close to Oulu and a second bird did the same thing close to Kuusamo.

#### MUSCICAPIDAE

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland, which we saw well on several occasions.

**Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland, which we saw very well on numerous occasions.

**Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to the southern third of Finland. Therefore, we were very fortunate to enjoy very good looks at an immature male, not far from Oulu, where the bird does not normally occur.

**European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* A common summer visitor to the southern half of Finland, we saw a bird very briefly, close to Oulu.

**Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica* A fairly common summer visitor to northern Finland and Arctic Norway, we saw it very well in both countries on a number of occasions.

**Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* This species has only recently colonised one area in the far east of Finland, around Kuusamo. So we were very fortunate to enjoy good looks at a singing male during our time there.

**Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland, which we saw well on a few occasions.

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw small numbers very well during our time in Norway.

**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* A locally common summer visitor to Finland, we saw a couple very

well not far from Oulu.

#### AEGITHALIDAE

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus* There is an isolated race of Long-tailed Tits at Oulu and we were very fortunate to observe a pair of birds in the woodland there, for an extended period of time.

#### PARIDAE

**Great Tit** *Parus major* A common resident in both Finland and Arctic Norway, which we saw well on numerous occasions in Finland.

**Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* A common resident in southern Finland, which we saw well on a few occasions.

**Crested Tit** *Lophophanes cristatus* A fairly common resident of coniferous forests in southern Finland. We saw a bird very well on one occasion, close to Oulu.

**Willow Tit** *Poecile montanus* A common resident of Finland, we saw it very well on one occasion, in the company of a Siberian Tit, not far from Kuusamo.

**Siberian Tit** *Poecile cinctus* An uncommon resident of northern Finland and Arctic Norway. We enjoyed two sightings during our time in Finland, the first at Kuusamo and the second, at Ivalo.

#### LANIIDAE

**Great Grey Shrike** *Lanius excubitor* An uncommon breeding summer visitor in Finland. We saw it well close to Oulu and again at Ivalo.

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to southern Finland, which reaches the northern edge of its range at Oulu. Fortunately, we observed a single bird very well at Oulu.

#### CORVIDAE

**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* A common resident in southern Finland, we observed a few birds during our time around Oulu.

**Siberian Jay** *Perisoreus infaustus* An uncommon resident of the northern two thirds of Finland, we saw it very well at Oulu and again at Ivalo.

**Common Magpie** *Pica pica* A common resident in both Finland and Arctic Norway, where we saw it on every day of the tour.

**Western Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula* A common resident in the southern half of Finland, it reaches the northern edge of its range at Oulu, where we saw several large flocks.

**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* A common but highly localised summer breeding visitor, to three separate areas in southern Finland. It reaches the northern edge of its range at Oulu, where we saw several large flocks.

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix* A common resident throughout both Finland and Arctic Norway, which we saw on every day of the tour.

**Common Raven** *Corvus corax* An uncommon resident throughout Finland and Arctic Norway, where we saw it well on many occasions.

#### PASSERIDAE

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* A common resident throughout Finland and Arctic Norway, where we saw it well on many occasions.

#### FRINGILLIDAE

**Common Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* A very common summer breeding visitor to Finland, where we saw it very well during our time there.

- Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* A fairly common summer visitor to Finland and a fairly common resident in Arctic Norway, we saw it very well in both countries on a number of occasions.
- Twite** *Carduelis flavirostris* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to coastal areas of Arctic Norway, we encountered small numbers along the coast of the Varangerfjord, near Vardo.
- Common Redpoll** *Acanthis flammea* A common resident of both Finland and Arctic Norway, we saw it well on Kilopaa Fell and at Ivalo.
- Arctic Redpoll** *Acanthis hornemanni* An uncommon resident of Arctic Norway, I saw a couple of birds in the Varanger Bird Sanctuary.
- European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris* A common summer breeding visitor to Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw it in both countries on a number of occasions.
- Eurasian Siskin** *Spinus spinus* A fairly common summer visitor to the southern two thirds of Finland, where we saw it well on a few occasions.
- Eurasian Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* A fairly common resident of Finland, we saw this beautiful bird at Oulu and again at Kuusamo.
- Pine Grosbeak** *Pinicola enucleator* An uncommon resident of Northern Finland, we enjoyed great looks at both males and females at a bird feeder near Kaamanen.
- Common Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra* A locally fairly common resident of Finland, which we saw well on one occasion, close to Oulu.
- Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to the southern two thirds of Finland. We enjoyed great looks at a singing male, close to Oulu.

#### EMBERIZIDAE

- Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus* A common summer breeding visitor to both Finland and Arctic Norway, which we saw well in Finland on a few occasions.
- Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* A very uncommon summer breeding visitor to localised areas of northern Finland. We observed two separate individuals in woodland close to Kuusamo.
- Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* A fairly common summer visitor to the far north of Finland and Arctic Norway. We watched a small flock of three birds feeding on the ground on the Gednje Plateau.
- Lapland Bunting** *Calcarius lapponicus* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to the far north of Finland and Arctic Norway. We saw our first individual close to Palomaa, in Finland and then we enjoyed much closer looks at a few birds along the Varangerfjord, in coastal Norway.
- Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* A fairly common summer breeding visitor to Finland, we observed a pair very well close to Kuusamo.
- Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to the southern two thirds of Finland, we saw a singing male very well indeed, close to Oulu.
- Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella* A common resident in the southern two thirds of Finland and a common summer breeding visitor to the northern third of Finland. We saw a couple of birds very well at the Liminganlahti Wetlands and we saw a couple of birds at the Boreal Wildlife Centre at Viiksimo.

#### MAMMALS

- Wolf** *Carnis lupus* Sadly, only 150 wolves remain in Finland, so we were very pleased to see a pack of four Wolves hunting together, while we were in the Boreal Wildlife Centre Hide, at Viiksimo. Two of the Wolves were extremely pale in colouration. In Europe Wolves are largely nocturnal, due to persecution by man. A pack of Wolves is dominated by an 'alpha' pair; other members of the pack are largely their adult offspring.
- Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* We saw a single animal in farmland at Ekkeroy, along the edge of Varangerfjord. The Red Fox is the major vector of rabies in Europe; attempts to contain rabies by killing foxes, had no noticeable effect. Recent attempts to control rabies by feeding foxes an oral vaccine, delivered in bait such as chicken heads, has drastically reduced the disease. The notorious habit of 'surplus killing' when foxes get into chicken coups, pheasant rearing pens, or other similar situations where prey cannot escape, e.g. ground nesting colonies of herons, is inappropriately judged according to human morals and is often referred to as wicked or vindictive. In reality, it is a 'pathological' situation where prey fails to run away, a circumstance not often met with in nature and the fox has not evolved to cope with it.
- Brown Bear** *Ursus arctos* One of the great highlights of the tour was watching up to six different Brown Bears that fed on the bait provided for them at the Boreal Wildlife Centre, at Viiksimo. They spent a great deal of time just a few metres from us, directly in front of the hide. We were even able to watch a pair mating just beside the hide. It is a little surprising to learn that the main food items of such a large animal is made up predominantly of berries, grasses, herbs and insects. Brown Bears hibernate during the winter months.
- Stoat** *Mustela erminea* Joanna saw one of these delightful animals not far from our hotel at Kuusamo and we all got to see an extremely playful immature, which we played hide and seek with, on a stone wall, close to Vardo. This beautiful animal may look very cuddly but in reality it is a very ferocious carnivore, which preys mainly on rodents, hares and birds. Females specialise in catching voles and males, hares and birds. Prey is followed by scent and killed by a bite at the back of the neck. In summer the Stoats fur is chestnut-brown above and yellowish-white below, in winter the fur is predominantly white.
- Wolverine** *Gulo gulo* One of the other highlights of the tour was the observation of a Wolverine, we enjoyed two sightings, which may have been the same animal seen twice, or it may have been two separate animals. It is the largest of all the mustelids and somewhat surprisingly, it is mainly nocturnal during the summer months. When there is no snow on the ground it feeds mainly on berries, alternatively, when there is snow on the ground it feeds mainly on carrion, encountered during long daily wanderings. It also feeds on Reindeers trapped in heavy snowdrifts and ptarmigan. Its habit of removing and eating bait from traps makes it very unpopular with fur trappers and consequently it is hunted remorselessly. The population is declining in Finland, where it is supposedly protected, but killing licences are easily granted to Reindeer owners and illegal hunting using snowmobiles is commonplace.
- Eurasian Otter** *Lutra lutra* We enjoyed a prolonged look at an otter swimming just offshore at Hornoy Island, we also watched it eating a fish, which it took onto a small island to eat. It is largely nocturnal. It eats mainly fish, but will also eat birds, water voles, rats, amphibians, crayfish, crabs, worms and insects.
- Grey Seal** *Halichoerus grypus* We observed small numbers on a daily basis during our time around the Varangerfjord. The grey Seal rests by day, at low tide and at sunset. It does not need to eat every day. It is a coastal feeder and salmon is the main food item, followed by cod.
- Harbour Porpoise** *Phocoena phocoena* Seen briefly on a couple of occasions in Varangerfjord. The Harbour Porpoise rests by floating on the surface of the ocean, but appears not to sleep. It feeds almost exclusively on Herring, which feeds at deeper depths during daylight hours,



but feeds close to the surface of the ocean at dawn and dusk, which is when the porpoise hunt them.

**Minke Whale** *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* An individual was observed breaking the surface on a number of occasions in the Varangerfjord. It is the most likely species of whale to be seen from land in the northern hemisphere. They are migratory, spending the winter months in their northern feeding grounds and the summer months in their southern breeding grounds.

**Elk** *Alces alces* We enjoyed a few good sightings during the tour of this massive species of deer. It swims well and often enters water. It can unfortunately be a traffic hazard.

**Eurasian Red Squirrel** *Sciurus vulgaris* Observed well on one occasion, at the bird feeder at Kaamanen. The European Red Squirrel is strictly a vegetarian and is most active during the first three to four hours after dawn.

**Muskrat** *Ondatra zibethicus* This species originated in North America, it escaped from fur farms in the early 1900s and has spread throughout much of Europe. It reached Finland in 1919 and is now widespread throughout the country. We observed large numbers swimming and building lodges on the lakes around Kuusamo. It is a proficient swimmer and diver and eats mainly vegetable matter.

**Brown Hare** *Lepus europaeus* The Brown Hare is a fairly common resident of the southern half of Finland and we saw a few individuals around Oulu. It is predominantly nocturnal, but is moderately active during daylight hours. It feeds mainly on grasses and agricultural crops and is also known to tear bark from saplings. Courtship involves 'boxing'. This Mad March Hare behaviour is actually an unreceptive female chasing off males.

**Mountain Hare** *Lepus timidus* We enjoyed many sightings of this attractive species throughout the tour. During the summer months it has a grey-black coat and in winter it is white. The den is normally placed under cover of bushes or rocky outcrops. It survives predators by outrunning them and it has been recorded travelling up to 64 kilometres per hour.