



Northumberland & Tyneside Bird Club

Registered Charity No. 517641

ÖLAND, SWEDEN 19TH-26TH JULY 2002 Martin Kitching & Sarah Barratt

We had decided to take our annual birding holiday in Sweden, and were fortunate in being able to book the last place on the DFDS Seaways crossing for 19th July, the first day of the school summer holidays. We had previously been advised that the ferry was fully booked, but our persistence, in phoning every day, paid off when we were told that there was one space available. In order to economise we were intending to camp, and therefore took advantage to DFDS's special offer of the car, two passengers and five nights camping at any of Sweden's 650 participating campsites, which in fact worked out cheaper than the crossing for the car and two adult passengers with no camping! We weren't able to find any real bird information prior to departure, so we probed the knowledge of Mike Henry, a Northumberland birder who has spent many summers in Sweden. Our main objective was to visit Öland, an island in the extreme southeast of Sweden, which is famed for its passage of arctic waders, and also for Siberian vagrants. The wader passage starts at about the time we were visiting so our hopes were high for species such as Broad-billed Sandpiper.

Petrol in Sweden was noticeably cheaper than in Britain. Even the busiest road that we travelled on, the motorway out of Göteborg, was very quiet compared to the amount of traffic that we face every day in Northumberland. The roads are well maintained and there are many speed cameras. Swedish driving offence penalties can be severe so it is advisable to stay within the speed limits at all times. Distances are so great, and everyone so adherent to speed limits, that we were told that Swedes measure distance in hours rather than kilometres. We were stopped at a random police checkpoint in a tiny village one day and Martin was breathalysed. It is also a good idea to not drink and drive, as again the penalties can apparently be draconian. All of the campsites at which we stayed were clean and had good amenities. The people are very friendly and, with only one exception, all of the Swedes that we spoke to spoke very good English and were extremely helpful.

Day One - Friday 19th July

Not a promising start, as it was cold and rainy. We boarded the MV Princess of Scandinavia at about 14:00 (BST) in North Shields. After finding our cabin (an outside cabin, at no extra cost, as this was all that was left) we went up on deck. Viewing was only possible from the back of the boat, both to the sides and looking directly out over the rear of the boat. Departure was at about 14:50, although scheduled for 14:30. Good numbers of gulls were seen in the Tyne; Herring Gulls, including fledged juveniles, Kittiwakes, with a Common Gull in among them, and smaller numbers of Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and also Black-headed Gull. As we progressed along the Tyne, Shag, Cormorant and Feral Pigeon were added to the list. Common Terns were fishing along the river and Sandwich Tern was added as we passed by North Shields. As we passed the mouth of the river, Fulmar could be seen on the cliffs beneath Tynemouth Priory. By this time most people had left the "sun" deck, and so we were able to get some shelter from the rain by one of the support pillars.

Gannet was soon added to the list, as was Puffin, although only two of the latter were seen. Good numbers of Guillemots were seen, many with young. This was interesting, as Martin noted on a trip to the Farne Islands on 18th July that there were very few guillemots as most had fledged and departed. A Manx Shearwater was seen and periodically small rafts of Fulmar were noted. Gannets were quite common. The birds of the day had to be Arctic Skua being chased by a Great Skua, which were seen briefly before disappearing in front of the boat. Surprisingly they did not seem interested in the passing fishing boat that was followed by a large number of Herring Gulls and Gannets.

One cetacean was seen, a probable Minke Whale, approximately 50m from the boat, although only one brief view was had. Bird numbers decreased as we headed on, and we retired to our cabin at about 16:45. Although it had stopped raining it was still dull and grey and visibility was not fantastic.

About five hours into the crossing a check out of the window revealed a Gannet, a Fulmar, and also an oil platform. At about 21.30 - 22:00 (Scandinavian time) a further Gannet and Fulmar were noted together with a party of auks, probably Razorbills, and a party of Guillemots; 2 adults and 1 juvenile.

Day Two - Saturday 20th July

The following morning was bright and sunny, with a calm sea. After a Scandinavian buffet breakfast we went on deck as the boat was arriving into Kristiansand, Norway where we were docked for two hours. In the harbour, we noted Eider and Mute Swan, and also Herring Gull, Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gull, Common Gull, and flying around the boat were three or four House Sparrows. Also, a few Hooded Crows, a flock of Starling, Swift and House Martin were all seen.

The journey to Göteborg was fairly quiet. The sun was shining, and the sea was calm, but bird wise, only the odd Herring Gull or Black-backed Gull were occasionally seen.

Göteborg itself had several birds in the harbour area, including a large number of Mute Swans, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser and Greater Black-backed Gull and Common Tern. A Wigeon was also seen flying by.

Once off the ferry we headed East on the E40. The landscape was heavily wooded and restricted our view for birding whilst driving along, although a few birds were seen. Hooded Crow, Jackdaw and Magpie were noted, and also Jay, Grey Heron, Fieldfare, White Wagtail and Collared Dove.

We spent our first night at E4:ans Camping, next to Lake Vidöstern. Whilst eating tea, Blue Tit was seen. A short walk along the edge of the lake produced Mallard, Common Tern, Song Thrush, Willow Warbler and Greylag Goose, and a Woodcock was seen roding over trees close to the tent.

Day Three - Sunday 21st July

We rose quite early to a warm sunny start. Several White Wagtails were flushed from the path first thing, and a wander down to the lakeside revealed only Common Tern and early morning bathers. However we did note Great Tit, Siskin, Nuthatch, Chaffinch and Common Buzzard.

Driving back through Tännö, Sand Martin, Skylark and Swallow were all seen, as well as Common Buzzard and Hooded Crow.

Travelling East, it was difficult to stop and scan as roadsides were mostly lined with trees, not allowing good views or any good vantage points. However, a stop near a spot of clearfell near Lessebo allowed us to see Raven. Nothing further of note was seen until Kalmar where a Common Buzzard passed by.

Passing over the magnificent bridge between Kalmar and Öland allowed us to see gulls and ducks on the Baltic Sea below, although due to the distance, and speed of travel they were difficult to identify. We decided to press on to the campsite rather than making lots of stops along the way, although we did see Marsh Harrier at Algustrum. This was the first of two noted on our way south. On arrival at the campsite, reception was closed and so we decided to head for the reserve at Ottenby. We wandered around the displays and joined a guided tour of the ringing station. The guide was able to guide the party in English, which made things much easier. On checking the traps no birds had been caught (other than a rubber duck for illustration purposes) but then we saw no other passerines other than Swallows and House Martins, and also Swifts. The guide's colleague did though recover three juvenile Starlings from the wader traps. One of these birds was shown to us, and proved to be very noisy indeed! House Martins were nesting under the eaves of the various buildings and we were able to watch them feeding young, including a bird apparently from a first brood helping to feed the young of a second brood.

We then went to book in at Ottenby Vandrahem och Camping; not as picturesque as E4:ans but less crowded - the site consisted of a square field. A good view over the wood was had, and we hoped to get another view of the Common Buzzards that we had been watching as we left Ottenby. It was not to be, however, and we sat and ate our tea, enjoying the many Swifts, House Martins and Swallows overhead. They did alarm once, but we could see no raptor. The gulls in the field next to ours, mainly Common Gulls and Herring Gulls also joined in. Yellowhammer could be heard calling, and on the path next to the field, a Red-backed Shrike could be seen. Several flocks of Greylag Geese, totalling several hundred birds, were also flying over.

After tea we decided to have a drive and look for raptors and owls. We soon found a male Marsh Harrier in heavy moult. We went down to the shore at Össby but there was no beach and nowhere suitable for waders, although large flocks of Mute Swans sat off shore. We went in search of Harriers at Eketorp borg, but to no avail, although a very bright Greenfinch was flushed off the road in front of us. We then headed back along the coastal road on the East side of the island and stopped a short distance north of Eketorp junction, where looking back along the sea we saw a juvenile Montagu's Harrier sitting in a bush just in from the sea. The bird showed well, preening but did not fly. We noted the spot for future reference and headed to check the coastal village of Gräsgårds; a fishing port, but again this was not really suitable for waders, although there were a good number of Black-headed Gulls. We came back to the campsite via the West coast and the villages of S Möckleby and Degerhamn. We noted that the coastal areas were very reminiscent of North Norfolk, and the central area of the island, very reminiscent of the sparsely vegetated areas of Speyside. The only bird of note on the way back was a Wheatear at Grönhögen.

Day Four - Monday 22nd July

The following morning, the weather was fair, despite heavy overnight rain, a large quantity of which had penetrated the tent and fallen on Sarah's head. A fellow camper/birder, Anders, was able to direct us to Seby as the place to go. We had previously been told about this place, but could not find it on the map because despite only having four letters, it has as many syllables, pronounced something along the lines of "Say-er-ber-er", and we were looking for a much longer place name! Our fellow camper told us that he had seen Red-necked Phalarope, Avocet and Broad-billed Sandpiper there the previous evening. We therefore headed for Seby, and stumbled across a twitch as several other birders arrived shortly after us. Apparently a Pectoral Sandpiper had been seen there earlier. We did not see the Pectoral Sandpiper, however we saw many other waders, including Dunlin (some of which were already in winter plumage), Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Common Sandpiper, five Wood Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Turnstone, Greenshank and flyby Sanderling. There were also plenty of gulls, terns and cormorant, and a Whitethroat was song-fighting from a nearby bush.

We then headed for Möcklemossen on the Stora Alvar, a bleak landscape which we headed across hopefully to see Black Tern. Unfortunately, we did not see any, but later found out that instead of scanning the pool from the front edge (which we did) you actually need to carry on. We did however see Kestrel, which is rather uncommon in Sweden. Common and Herring Gulls were also present, and of course plenty of Swifts and House Martins. On the way to Möcklemossen we had passed a small roadside pool with a family of Coot.

We then headed for Mörbylånga, as this town has a supermarket, so we could buy food for lunch. This is quite a modern town, with a variety of shops and restaurants. We drove to Barby, as we had been told that Red-necked Grebe could be seen from the Borg, but it was by this time extremely windy, and we were unsuccessful. We decided to head for Eckelsudde as Anders, who had directed us to Seby, said that this was the place to see waders on the West Coast. We had to leave the car at Eckelsborg and then walk out to the point; a walk of a few kilometres. There were plenty of hedgerows and bushes along the path and we hoped for some interesting passerines. There were plenty of Yellowhammers, and we had brief views of a Thrush Nightingale feeding along the base of a dry stone wall. Heading out to the point, walking through a field of cows, we arrived to see Dunlin, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Redshank and Greenshank. There were hundreds of Mute Swans offshore, and plenty of gulls and starlings. A flock of Little Terns was an addition to the trip list. On the walk back to the car, several Red-backed Shrikes were found in the bushes close to the footpath.

Day Five - Tuesday 23rd July

The following morning we were greeted by views of Red Backed Shrike in the hedge, near where the tent was pitched. A Green Woodpecker was also seen in the trees by the reception block. We had decided to head to the north of the island today, but had a brief stop at Seby en-route, and as well as the many Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper and Knot, we saw 14 Greenshank, 6 Wood Sandpipers and 3 Broad Billed Sandpiper and a flock of Barnacle Geese flew South.

We headed North along the West side of the island, and saw two Common Cranes flying over, and a Honey Buzzard drifting over woodland near Alböke. We noted, as we arrived in the North, that this half of the island is geared much more to the tourist and visitor, and was generally busier and more commercialised than the Southern half. After a lunch stop in Byxelkrok, we headed to Nabbelund, to view the large natural harbour. Few birds were noted, other than Cormorant, Tufted Duck, Goosander and Heron. We then continued round, rejoining the only road south, before diverting to Lyckeback for a walk around the pine forest. This is a place

where much longer could be spent. Plenty of Yellowhammers and Chaffinch were seen, as well as Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, a party of Crossbills (both Parrot and Common), Treecreeper and Robin. Great Spotted Woodpecker was also heard. Further south, a stop at Kappeludden provided fantastic views of a male Montagu's Harrier quartering over nearby fields.

The nature reserve at Petgårde träsk gave us the opportunity to view more Yellowhammers, Teal, Shoveler, Coot, Snipe, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, and Raven. Quail were heard calling and a Sparrowhawk was seen as we left the reserve. A further stop at Seby allowed good views of about 60 Bar Tailed Godwits, and 20 Greenshank.

Further south, as we returned to the campsite, a Goshawk flew across the road at Näsby. We later discovered that a nest had recently been located nearby, and previously even the local birders had been unaware of the birds' presence. A further lucky sighting was Common Pheasant, a rare bird on Öland due to the lack of any history of hunting gamebirds on the island.

That evening we ate out a restaurant in Grönhögen where we were able to sample the local speciality; Kropkakkor - an interesting dish of minced pork and onion surrounded by mashed potato, which is then boiled. The dish is served with melted butter and accompanied by Lingonberry sauce!

Day Six - Wednesday 24th July

This was the day when we were to leave Öland. A quick trip to Ottenby provided evidence of wader passage, with an increased number of waders present, particularly Redshank.. We decided therefore to give Seby one last look, as it is free and regarded by birders we met there as being superior to Ottenby. The waders were very mobile, but five Avocets and a recently fledged Ringed Plover were noted. The Greenshank and the Bar-tailed Godwits of the previous evening had though apparently moved on, however two Black Tailed Godwits were present. A very oddly plumaged Marsh Harrier was also seen perched on hay bales in the adjacent field. A small flock of Barnacle Geese flew south just inland from the beach and a Black Tern flew south just offshore. We also were fortunate on this day to meet Krister Mild, the well-known and very knowledgeable Swedish birder, who was amused that we had travelled to Sweden to see arctic waders - as he visits Norfolk for the same purpose!

As we headed off the island, and returned to Göteborg we scanned for Black Woodpecker. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful, although Osprey, Mistle Thrush, Wren and Grey Wagtail were all new additions for the trip.

We spent the final night in a large noisy commercial campsite in Åsa, before heading off for the ferry on the Thursday morning for a quite uneventful journey back to North Shields.

We strongly recommend Sweden to any birders who would like a nice relaxed holiday with lots of opportunities to find their own birds. There is very little in the way of information available for this area and the local birders that we met were all very friendly, extremely helpful and spoke perfect English. Despite being there in late July, which is by no means an ideal time to visit, we still managed to record 125 species between the time of departure from North Shields and the time when we docked on the return journey. The systematic list, which follows, has additional details for some, but not all, of the species we recorded.

Systematic List of species

Fulmar Fulmarus glacialis

Sooty Shearwater Puffinus griseus

One seen approx 3 hours before arriving back in North Shields on 26th.

Manx Shearwater Puffinus puffinus

One seen shortly after leaving North Shields on 19th.

Northern Gannet Morus bassanas

Great Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo

Shag Phalacrocorax aristotelis

Grey Heron Ardea cinerea

Mute Swan Cygnus olor

Greylag Goose Anser anser

Canada Goose Branta canadensis

Barnacle Goose Branta leucopsis

Common Shelduck Tadorna tadorna

Common Teal Anas crecca

Mallard Anas platyrhynchos

Northern Shoveler Anas clypeata

Tufted Duck Aythya fuligula

Common Eider Somateria mollissima

Red-breasted Merganser Mergus serrator

Goosander Mergus merganser

Honey Buzzard Pernis apivorus

A single bird soaring over woodland near Alboke on 23rd.

Marsh Harrier Circus aeruginosus

Several birds seen at a number of sites on Öland.

Montagu's Harrier Circus pygargus

Two birds seen; a female/immature perched on a small bush on the clifftop near Eketorp on 21st, and an adult male hunting coastal marshes near Kappeludden on 23rd.

Northern Goshawk Accipiter gentiles

A single bird flew low across the road at Näsby on 23rd.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk Accipiter nisus

Common Buzzard Buteo buteo

Osprey Pandion haliaetus

A single bird was seen on the journey across Sweden on 24th.

Common Kestrel Falco tinnunculus

Single bird seen at Mockelmossen on 22nd

Grey Partridge Perdix perdix

Common Quail Coturnix coturnix

One bird heard calling near the second hide at Petgårde träsk on 23rd.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*
Common Coot *Fulica atra*
Common Crane *Grus grus*
 Two flew S near Alboke on 23rd.
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Great Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
 A newly fledged juvenile was at Seby on 24th.
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
 Six flew S at Seby on 23rd.
Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
Red Knot *Calidris canutus*
Sanderling *Calidris alba*
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*
Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*
 Three were together on the beach at Seby on 23rd.
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*
Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
 Two at Seby on 24th were the only birds noted.
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*
 60 were at Seby on 23rd.
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
 The maximum count was of 20 at Seby on 23rd.
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*
Great Skua *Catharacta skua*
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
Common Gull *Larus canus*
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*
Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*
Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*
Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*
Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*
Razorbill *Alca torda*
Puffin *Fratercula arctica*
Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*
Stock Dove *Columba oenas*
Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
Common Swift *Apus apus*
Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*
 Seen and heard on 22nd, 23rd and 24th around the campsite at Ottenby.
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
House Martin *Delichon urbica*
Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*
Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia Luscinia*

One was feeding along the base of a dry stone wall on the path to Eckelsudde on 22nd.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Territorial birds, alarm-calling, were noted at Seby on 22nd, 23rd and 24th.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

A single bird was song-fighting at Seby on 22nd.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Coal Tit *Parus ater*

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*

Great Tit *Parus major*

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Magpie *Pica pica*

Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Hooded Crow *Corvus corone corone*

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

A male was singing in the woods next to the Ottenby campsite on 23rd.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*