

Sweden's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 8 September 2014



Black Woodpecker



View from the hotel



Landing stage



2014 Naturetrek Group

Report compiled by Tom Mabbett
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Summary

This tour focussing on Sweden's mammals was an undoubted success with some superb wildlife, incredible scenery and really good fun along the way. Highlights included getting very close to two different Wolf families howling, Beavers, Elk and spotlighting the incredibly elusive and sought after Eurasian Lynx! We all learnt a lot about the wildlife of Sweden and in particular the ecology of the Wolf.

Day 1

Thursday 4th September

We arrived into Vaceras airport without hold ups and met up in the arrivals hall with Marcus soon greeting us and we started our journey in glorious weather. In just over an hour we arrived at our base for the next three nights and were instantly struck with the stunning setting overlooking a beautiful lake. After a quick look over the lake we settled into our rooms and were soon sitting down to a delicious meal of "happy" pork chops and vegetables with all the food being home grown and reared by our hosts Allan and Eva.

After a lovely meal and an introduction from Marcus about the tour we headed out into the field. We drove a short distance passing meadows and through forest before stopping and heading out on foot to enjoy the forest and attempt to see Elk. It was an enjoyable walk and after a short wait for Elk to show themselves we got back in the van and decided to cover a few more areas. Driving around the very next corner we were greeted with a young bull Elk stood out in the open on a meadow. We took time here to really enjoy this impressive animal as it stood not too far from the van. Once the Elk started to move away we continued on and over the next half hour or so, using the spotlight, went on to watch 14 Elk of all different ages along with a few Roe Deer and a Brown Hare with a Beaver glimpsed as we crossed a river.

After a short while we stopped off at another stunning lake and stretched our legs while taking in the star studded sky. We decided here that it was such a perfect night that we would go to an area that Marcus suspected may be a new Wolf territory to try to hear them. Continuing on we had a real bonus as in the spotlight perched in nearby tree was an Ural Owl. It flew rather quickly however but still great to see! Carrying on a short while, Marcus picked up some more eyes in the spotlight and this time it was no Elk or Roe Deer! Fox we thought. As we kept focussed on the eyes and got closer in the van our target was soon in full view on a track and to our amazement it was a Lynx! This is an incredibly difficult animal to see and many people living in these forests have never encountered one. We all saw the animal with some of us getting better views than others and all too quickly the Lynx disappeared. The coat was a straw yellow with very faint spots and the short, stumpy, black tipped tail was clear. What luck! We continued on after this excitement and arrived at the spot where we would listen for Wolves flushing a Mountain Hare as we went!

We stood near the van and as Marcus set up his recording equipment we all wondered if Wolves would howl back. Marcus howled and almost instantly we had a reply! An amazing sound and not too far away! The howls didn't last for long but this was the first confirmation that a family were in this area. After an action packed first night and everyone now ready for bed we returned to the hotel. Some start to the tour!

Day 2

Friday 5th September

With the previous late night we had a leisurely start to the day with a few of us heading out for a morning walk to see what birds were around before breakfast. It was a stunning morning and the area was lively with birds with the highlight being a very showy Black Woodpecker. Other birds included a family of Whooper Swans, Brambling with a Chaffinch flock and Siskin all over the place. It was also nice to see Redwing and Fieldfare on their breeding grounds.

After an excellent breakfast with eggs, bacon, fried potato, cereals and some excellent honey we drove a short distance to a pristine forest for a walk. It was a lovely walk passing some huge wood ant nests and glimpsing a Red Squirrel with some very impressive toadstools along the way. It was beautiful woodland and after a couple of hours we returned to the van and headed back for some late lunch. Before leaving we stopped to see a cracking Adder attempting to cross the road.

After a delicious lamb stew we were soon heading back out again with sandwiches and fruit and visited an eco-retreat not too far away for a walk. Here there are small rooms with grass covered roofs where people come to really get back to basics. We enjoyed a nice walk here and four Black-throated Divers all in full summer plumage showed very well on the lake. It was soon time however to head to a nearby lake to try and watch Beavers!

Arriving at the lake we enjoyed our sandwiches with a simply stunning view and learned a lot about the Beavers, their lifecycle and remarkable engineering skills before boarding a small boat in an attempt to see them. With the electric outboard we were able to silently glide around the lake visiting some active lodges to look for activity. After seeing plenty of signs we spotted a young Beaver swimming not too far from the boat and managed to get very close, following the animal for a while before carrying on. Excited by our first encounter we soon spotted an adult dragging a branch through the water and watched this far larger animal partially out of the water feeding. It then took to the water and after following it for a short time with a slap of its tail told us enough was enough.

We enjoyed more sightings of swimming Beaver before heading back to the van after a listening to and then seeing a Tawny Owl. With spirits high we decided again to head for a known Wolf territory and try to hear and possibly get lucky with seeing a Wolf. We met up with a friend of Marcus "tracker Baz" soon after arriving who had been in the area for many hours hoping to see the Wolf pack but as yet was unsuccessful. With Marcus keen to add to his recordings after a little encouragement the pack responded. They were remarkably close giving us a stunning prolonged chorus. The alpha female could clearly be heard giving the "classic" howl while excitable pups could be clearly identified. As we stood listening Nick thought he glimpsed the dark shape of an animal crossing the road and Marcus informed us that one animal will come out to check us out. We were very close! After this amazing experience we called it a day and headed back to the hotel with three Bull elk also encountered en route.

Day 3

Saturday 6th September

Again there was an opportunity for a leisurely start with myself and Nick heading out again for a bit of birding. The Black Woodpecker was around once more, giving us its distinctive crying call and a Wheatear was also noted and Crested Tit showed well. It was beautifully clear with mist rising from the lake and again lively with birds.

Following an excellent breakfast once more we had some free time before our early afternoon activity, so myself, Stella, Nick, Mark and Marilyn went for a walk while Tatiana relaxed around the lake. On the walk we had a flyover Honey Buzzard and two more Wheatears while a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker flew off just as we were getting it in the scope. After taking some photos of the very numerous Fly Agaric fungi we made our way back to the hotel seeing fresh signs of Beaver activity as we went.

We headed now to the nearby research station which is the hub for studies on the local wildlife and in particular the Wolf territories. We were given a lecture from leading expert Perahlqvist on the ecology of the Swedish Wolves which was thoroughly enjoyed by all. We learned about their distribution, conflicts with humans and successes and failures with relocations. It was very interesting and we all learned a great deal.

Following this we drove to yet another amazing lake and after making a fire went about fashioning our very own sausage skewers and cooking sausages over the hot embers. We enjoyed a beer or coffee here, watching out for any wildlife, just soaking up the stunning scenery and waiting for dusk to fall.

Suitably fed with delicious wraps and sausages we headed off for a walk into the wilderness. With darkness falling we walked for around half an hour into the forest until reaching a clearing on a lakeside. It was incredibly atmospheric as we led down watching the stars and listening to the Black-throated Divers eerie call. After a couple of hours and not a moment too soon for Tatiana, Marcus encouraged the local Wolves to howl for us. Shortly after this, the local Wolf family responded from just across the lake howling for a very long time. Hearing this sound just got more amazing the more we heard it and after being suitably "wowed" once more we made our way back through the forests (without falling over!) to the vans.

We carried on with a bit of spotlighting travelling towards the hotel spotting yet more Elk and a Roe Deer before one more attempt at chancing upon a Wolf sighting by returning to the new territory we had found on the first night. We again heard the Wolves here but they were rather distant while a Tengmalm's Owl was nearby but not seen. We were soon back at the hotel for some well-earned sleep.

Day 4

Sunday 7th September

With our late night we had a slow start to the day enjoying a relaxed breakfast before saying farewell to our superb hosts and heading on our way northwards to the Bear watching hide. It was about a 4 hour drive to get there and we stopped on the way for some lunch and some more stunning scenery before arriving at the lodge in the late afternoon. After a warm welcome from Håkan and Eva and a briefing about the hide we enjoyed a tasty light snack before making our way to the hide. Here we each had a comfortable seat and a bed each and we waited and watched hoping for a Bear to show up.

We enjoyed our packed dinner and a glass of wine and although bears are very often seen we were unlucky before the light faded. Håkan put out oats, fruit and yoghurt to tempt the bears in a very natural setting but they seemingly weren't interested. Nick and I stayed up throughout the night and as it was a very clear with a full moon the shape of a bear would easily have been seen but it was not to be unfortunately.

Day 5

Monday 8th September

After watching a very interesting battle between a Sparrowhawk and the resident Jays we left the hide and admit defeat on this one. Håkan explained the reasons why the bears were not tempted to his food, possibly an Elk being killed nearby or a large male may have put off other local bears from approaching. It is hard to be sure! Although naturally we were disappointed, this is how it goes with wild animals and we had all really enjoyed the experience and saw it as a reason to come back! We had had some incredible luck on this tour and there is always one that gets away.

Returning to the lodge we enjoyed some porridge and a hot drink whilst watching Goosanders out on the lake from the window. With an afternoon flight home we packed up the van and after watching a stunning Osprey said our farewells and hit the road once more. The journey to the airport was hassle free and before getting there we stopped at a copper mine to enjoy a coffee and watched an impressive Eagle Owl which nests in a box here! We were soon back at the airport where we began our adventure and after saying goodbye to Mark, who was driving home to Germany in his Volvo equipped with his Abba collection, we boarded the flight!

We had been treated to some wonderful wildlife sightings, seen some stunning scenery and learnt a lot about the country, with really good fun along the way and delicious food! It was a smooth journey back to Stansted and we said our farewells to each other after a superb few days.

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Species List

Mammals (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common Name	Scientific name	September				
			4	5	6	7	8
1	Eurasian Lynx	<i>Lynx lynx</i>	✓				
2	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓		
3	Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>					?
4	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	H	H	H		
5	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			✓		
6	Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>		✓			
7	European Hare	<i>Lepus europeus</i>	✓		✓		
8	Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>	✓				
9	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
10	Elk (Moose)	<i>Alces alces</i>	✓	✓	✓		
11	European Beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>	✓	✓			
12	Northern Bat	<i>Eptesicus nilssonii</i>	✓		✓		

Birds

1	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>		✓	✓	✓	
2	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓	✓		
3	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓			
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓		✓	
5	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓			
6	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>					✓
7	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓		
8	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>					✓
9	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓			
10	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			✓		
11	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>			✓		
12	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓			
13	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		✓			
14	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓			
15	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>				✓	
16	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>				✓	
17	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓		✓		
18	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>					✓
19	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>	✓				
20	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		✓			
21	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓			
22	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		✓	✓		
23	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓		
24	Lesser-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>			✓		
25	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓		
26	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓			
27	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓	✓			
28	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>			H		
29	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓		
30	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓				
31	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			✓		
32	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓		✓	
33	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓	✓		

	Common Name	Scientific name	September				
			4	5	6	7	8
34	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
35	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓			
36	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓		
37	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓			
38	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	H	✓		
39	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			✓		
40	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		✓			
41	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓	✓		
42	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓			
43	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓			
44	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓			
45	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓			
46	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓			
47	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓	✓	✓
48	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓		
49	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		✓	✓		
50	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>				✓	✓
51	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓		
52	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
53	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
55	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓		✓		
56	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓	✓		
57	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓			
58	Mealy Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>		H			
59	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>	✓				
60	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓			
61	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓	
62	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		✓	✓		

Reptiles & Amphibians

1	Adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>		✓			
2	Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>			✓		