



Sunrise Birding LLC  
**NORWAY**  
June 3 – 9, 2017  
**TRIP REPORT**



PHOTOS: European Shag, Temminck's Stint, Bluethroat, Common Murre, Atlantic Puffin

Sunrise Birding LLC – 2017 Norway Birding Tour – Trip Report



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## TRIP REPORT



**LEADERS:** Pirita Latja, Gina Nichol, & Steve Bird

Sunrise Birding's inaugural Norway tour explored Lapland north of the Arctic Circle and the great wilderness of the Varanger peninsula. Here, spectacular mountain peaks, expansive fjords and the snow covered landscape offered fantastic opportunities to see White-tailed Eagle, Ptarmigan, Dotterel, Red-necked Phalarope and much more. The rocky coast and Barents Sea offered Yellow-billed Loon, King Eider, Long-tailed and Arctic Jaeger, shorebirds of all description, and the bird island of Hornøya had thousands of breeding Kittiwakes, Puffins, Common Murres, **Razorbills**, and Shags. Despite the continued grip of winter which required us to change our itinerary somewhat, this trip was also a smashing success with 24 hours of sparkling blue skies and fabulous birding.

### Highlights and top sightings of this tour were:

- Hornøya – The “Bird Island”
- Ring Ouzel
- Bluethroat
- King Eider in numbers
- Lesser White-fronted Goose
- Rock Ptarmigan
- Temminck's Stint butterfly display
- Twite
- Arctic Redpoll
- Bohemian Waxwing
- Yellow-billed Loons
- Ducks – Steller's & King Eider
- The eye of the shag
- The fjords & northern landscapes
- Gray Heron
- Making it to Båtsfjord
- Red-throated Pipit
- Thick-billed Murre
- Fin & Minke Whales
- Birds on breeding grounds  
Skuas
- Pirita – our awesome, action figure guide!

### Day 7 (continuing from Finland tour)

After finishing the Finland tour and saying goodbye to Craig and Jane we departed Kuusamo and headed north. We checked some frozen lakes which offered Siberian Gull, Smew, Red-necked Grebe, and the unrelenting cold wind. In Haukiniemi, we found and experienced a rogue Capercaillie and Pirita protected us by getting between us and the crazy, attacking bird! This is where she rightfully earned her action figure status!



From here we drove to the Arctic Circle and with a Tree Pipit singing in the background we toasted our crossing with a taste of Cloudberry Liqueur.



We continued north to Ivalo finding Bean Geese and Eurasian Golden Plover at roadside stops. Just outside of Ivalo there was a Hawk Owl on a roadside tree but we only had quick views as it flew into the forest. We searched but could not refind the bird. It was the one that got away unfortunately. We arrived in Ivalo and checked into our hotel for the night. It was busy with tourists but we managed to celebrate another fine day!



## Day 8

This was a traveling day north from Kuusamo to Tana Bru on our way through Lapland to the Varanger peninsula in Norway. Our first stop at Pikku Petsamo near Kuusamo yielded nice views of a Bluethroat in good color. At Toivoniemi, Pirita showed us a nest box that had a Siberian Tit nest and we could hear the bird singing nearby. A very welcome stop at Neljantu ulen ttupa, the Hut of Four Winds (<http://www.neljantuulentupa.com/en/>) offered hot drinks and feeders which had **Pine Grosbeaks**, Siberian Tit, Greenfinch, Brambling, and Common Redpoll. Our lunch was taken at the border of Finland and Norway at a café called Utsjoki where House Sparrows were seen. We crossed the board and birded along the road. In some fields near Sirbma we found a Lesser White-fronted Goose



(rare!) with a Pink-footed and some Bean Geese. We stopped in the rain to see and photograph some Red-necked Phalaropes in a pond close to the road. We drove past Tana Bru to visit Hoyholmen where we saw many shorebirds including Oystercatcher, Dunlin, and both Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas. The rain and wind were unrelenting and we hoped for better weather ahead as it was difficult to bird and keep our optics dry. We spent the night in Tana Bru and celebrated Paul's birthday with a delicious cake.

## Day 9

This morning we woke up to brightening skies finally! We continued our journey to the Varanger Peninsula, making several stops along the fjord and counting 44 White-tailed Eagles along the way. At Skallelv, there was a feeder with **Arctic Redpolls**, Greenfinches, and a Tree Sparrow among the numerous house sparrows. From roadside stops we had great views of Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas



and our first breeding plumage Lapland Bunting. A beach held Purple Sandpipers (found by Bill) and at Kiberg we had our first Atlantic Puffins, a couple of Gannets, and Common Guillemot. The sun was out now but the wind was hanging on. We reached Vardø and checked harbor and had our first views of the bird island – Hornøya.



## Day 10

This morning we boarded a small boat and cruised out of the harbor to spend the morning at Hornøya, the Bird Island. As we approached the island hundreds of birds were in the water





getting out of the way of the boat and as we arrived birds were everywhere. It was a feast for the senses, the sights, the smells were awesome. The cliffs were full of Kittiwakes, **Common Murres**, Shags, Thick-billed Murres, and Puffins. Shags were nesting around and under the shelter, birds were flying in from the sea and out to the sea, squabbling over space on the tightly packed cliffs and screaming at passing Ravens and Great Black-backed Gulls. We hiked the trail around the island taking in as much as we could and the cameras were clicking at full tilt. The weather was perfect, sunny with no wind to speak of and all in all it was a spectacular morning and highlight of the trip.

We returned for lunch at the hotel and spent the afternoon birding northern part of Vardø, starting off this a search for Twites. A couple of Twites may have disappeared over the hill and as we searched we found a gorgeous Bluethroat that came in close for us.



We traveled out through the tunnel to the mainland. At Svartnes, we had good views of Glaucous Gulls in with Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls and a few Temminck's Stints. At Smelror, we scanned another small offshore island that was a nesting site for Great



Cormorants, Goosanders, and Black Guillemots. Some inland marshes at Barvikmyran had Lapland Bunting, Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot, Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas, and Red-throated Loons. A **Common Snipe** was doing a flight display and circled by several times allowing us to experience its remarkable sounds and movements. Back at Smelror, we had great views of a Red-throated Pipit. Back at the hotel, we enjoyed another delicious meal and celebration of a great birding day!

## Day 11

Today we woke up at a sparkling sunny, warm day! Long underwear and parkas were retired! After breakfast, we once again searched and found two Twite near the coast north of Vardø. Also here were Willow Warbler, White-tailed Eagle, and a Common Snipe warming in the morning sun. Once again we traversed the tunnel to the mainland stopping at Svartnes for views of Bar-tailed Godwit. The marshes at Barvikmyran had Whooper Swans and a Peregrine Falcon.



We continued further today on the road to Hamningberg stopping at Persfjord Bay where we found White-billed Diver, Goosanders, Long-tailed Ducks, and another Peregrine. The stunning landscape was illuminated by a clear blue sky and we marveled at the geologic formations, the beaches and the calm sea. Near the border of Vardø and Batsfjord, we had great views of Ring Ouzel. A stop at Sandfjord found us Arctic Redpolls in the willows, a **Stoat** scampering along the shoreline and some butterflyling Temminck's Stints. At Hamningberg, we had Northern Gannets, both Skuas, a Peregrine and a Fin Whale close to shore. On the way back at Sandfjord, there was a pair of Red-necked Phalaropes in the river and at one point Paul filmed them copulating. Wow! At Persfjord, there was

a large flock (167!) of **King Eiders** in all plumage varieties and it was fun watching them move on the water. We returned to Vardø for the night and had a special "Cod is good" dinner and reviewed our sightings for the day.







## Day 12

Today we traveled from Vardø to Ivalo again under sparkling blue skies. We found 25 **White-tailed Eagles** as we traveled along Varanger Fjord. At Kiberg, there was a Minke Whale close to shore, some Harbor Porpoise further out in the sea. We found a couple of Bohemian Waxwings (obviously in love) in the treeless landscape nearby and a Hen Harrier was seen hunting low along the beach at Hungint. At Vadso, we spotted some nice looking Red Knots feeding in some seaweed. At Nesseby, near the church there was a visible Whimbrel. We crossed the border to Finland and had lunch and then prepared for a potentially exciting ride up the fell to the top of Ailigas Mountain to look for Rock Ptarmigan. We battened down and Kari navigated the road like a pro and we were up in no time. Very soon we were looking at a male **Rock Ptarmigan** standing on a rock and then a female further to the right. The female vanished and the male moved toward the van where Steve, Donna and Kari got great views in the scope. We continued on to Vardø, checked

into our hotel and shared our highlights of both the Finland and Norway tours after another delicious meal.







## Day 13

Since our flight back to Helsinki was in the late afternoon, we had time for some birding today and hoped to catch up on some of the passerines we had missed due to the continued cold weather. Spring had now arrived in Finland and we were out early in the morning without winter gear and bunting hunting. At Pikku Petsamo we found both Rustic and Little Buntings and had fairly good views of each. We spent some time at the Mielikköjärvi birdwatching tower where we saw Common Cranes, Short-eared Owl, Pied Flycatchers, a Whimbrel, and a Yellow Wagtail. On the trail out, we had close views of a Siberian Tit which were much appreciated. We drove south of Ivalo to Purnumukka and a road through the forest that had few birds except for a Greenshank on the dead tree and a Golden Plover possibly on a nest near the road. After a picnic lunch, we headed back to Kaunispää where we saw two Dotterels, a distant Short-eared Owl flying high and a Long-legged Buzzard. We arrived at the airport and received a heartfelt goodbye from our driver Kari. We said good





bye to our awesome guide Pirita and headed back to Helsinki and points beyond with great memories, sightings and numerous photos of our arctic adventure.



Photos: Red-necked Phalarope, Long-tailed Skua, Purple Sandpiper, Mountain Hare, Thick-billed Murre, Common Murre by Steve Bird.