



Sunrise Birding LLC
NORWAY
June 3 – 9, 2018
TRIP REPORT



Photos: Puffin, Bluethroat, Snowy Owl, Arctic Redpoll, Ruff, Temminck's Stint, Red-necked Phalarope, Razorbill, Pine Grosbeak by Steve Bird.



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LEADERS: Pirita Latja, Gina Nichol, & Steve Bird

Sunrise Birding's 2018 Norway tour explored Lapland, the northernmost region of Finland which stretches above the Arctic Circle, and the great wilderness of the Varanger peninsula in Norway. This year, spectacular mountain peaks, expansive fjords and the snow covered landscape of the highlands offered fantastic opportunities to see White-tailed Eagle, Ptarmigan, Dotterel, Red-necked Phalarope and even a Snowy Owl. The rocky coast and Barents Sea offered 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. With nearly 24 hours of daylight and fabulous birding, we enjoyed this arctic adventure again this year.

Highlights and top sightings of this tour were:

- Prolonged views of displaying Ruff
- Close views of Bar-tailed Godwit
- Dotterel
- Hornøya – The "Bird Island"
- The fjords & northern landscapes
- Snowy Owl – Pirita's lifer
- Bluethroat
- Temminck's Stint butterfly display

Day 7 (continuing from Finland tour)

After finishing the Finland tour and saying goodbye to Ed and Sue we departed Kuusamo and headed north. Our first stop was at the local dump where there was a Spotted Redshank, Little Gull, Black-headed Gull, Common Teal, Goldeneye and a perched Kestrel. Our next stop was the local sewage plant to look at a **Little Bunting** that was



singing in the treetops close to the road offering great views.



After that excitement, we continued toward Lapland passing many Reindeer along the road, several with large antlers covered with velvet. At Napapiiri, we crossed the Arctic Circle and toasted with a drink of Cloudberry liquor. Rain set in as we approached Ivalo and we made a final stop at a ski area where we had good views of Willow Grouse and Dotterel. The weather was tanking but the views of the Dotterel were worth it! We arrived at our accommodation for the night eager to get started with our Lapland & Norway tour.



Day 8

By the time we got out this morning, the rain had subsided. We packed up and left the hotel to continue our journey north. A quick stop at a nearby forest got us Reed Bunting and Waxwing and a little further on we stopped at a pond that held 3 gorgeous male and one female Smew. The attendant Goldeneyes didn't get much attention as we tried to get photos of the handsome and elusive white ducks.

A very welcome stop at Neljän Tuulen Tupa, (<http://www.neljantuulentupa.com/en/>) the Hut of Four Winds offered hot drinks and feeders which had **Pine Grosbeaks**, Greenfinch, Brambling, and Common Redpoll. A Red Squirrel was making good use of the feeders and a Pied Flycatcher was milling around in the background. Our lunch was taken at the border of Finland and Norway at a café called Utsjoki where House Sparrows were the main attraction. After lunch, we crossed over a river into Norway.



At Høyholmen, an open area in a vast river valley, we had good views of Little Stint, many Ringed Plovers, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Parasitic Jaeger, a breeding plumage Dunlin,

Common Shelduck and a Bar-tailed Godwit. The highlight here were **Temminck's Stints** doing their impressive butterflying display right over our heads. You could have reached out and touched them. What a thrill to be so close to this tiny creature!



Further on, we had our first Common Eiders in flocks just offshore. Sprinkled in with them were several Black Guillemots and there was an adult White-tailed Eagle perched on a mound in the mud. We moved inland entering an area with no trees and lots of leftover winter snow. A Willow Grouse crossed the road in front of us and there was a flyover Long-tailed Skua that landed not far up a hillside.

There were a few lekking Ruff along the road, though by this time the rain was turning to snow and they looked cold. The snow did not deter a Lapland Bunting from singing nearby but it did deter us from spending a lot of time outside the vehicles.

As we traveled we recorded Eurasian Golden Plovers, Red-throated Loons and Long-tailed Ducks in the small ponds. A Red-throated Pipit showed near the road and we registered Snow Bunting, Northern Wheatear and Rock Ptarmigan. By the time we reached Båtsfjord, the rain/snow had let up a bit and we settled into our hotel for the next two nights. We reviewed our long list of sightings from today and then retired in anticipation of what we might see in the far north of Norway over the next days.

Day 9

This morning we started birding from Båtsfjord where the weather was threatening rain and snow. We checked the harbor gulls and found the usual suspects in addition to many Black-legged Kittiwakes and a few Black Guillemots. We again headed into the interior where the snow was blowing over the road but that did not deter some Ruddy Turnstones from mating roadside in full view of our van. We traversed the barren landscape and found Eurasian Golden Plover, Snow Bunting, Lapland Bunting, Rock Ptarmigan, Purple Sandpiper, Rough-legged Buzzard and noted a Bar-tailed Godwit in nice, colorful breeding plumage.

A Red-necked Phalarope foraged in a pond and as we moved through sideways snow squalls, we appreciated the chance to watch from the warmth of our vehicle. A few mammals were about including Red Fox and Reindeer.

We stopped at Kongdfjord village, a municipality of Berlevåg and photographed **Black-legged Kittiwakes** nesting on building. There were Oystercatchers and Arctic Terns around and we sampled some local culture at the only shop in town.





We continued along coast noting the numbers of Goosanders (Common Merganser) on the beaches and near shore waters. One count totaled at least 224 but we probably missed a few. We scanned the flocks of gulls and found a large Glaucous Gull in with the Herrings and Kittiwakes.

At one spot, a **Bluethroat** showed very well but an Arctic Redpoll was not so accommodating. We had several White-tailed Eagles along the coast but could never get close enough for good pictures. Our intrepid drivers had to watch the narrow road lined with jagged rocks so chasing the eagles was challenging and exhilarating.

We followed the coast road all the way to the end at Berlevåg and commenced a very cold and windy sea watch that produced Razorbills, distant Fulmars and some Oystercatchers. We stopped in town and used a bathroom in a pub and then worked our way back via the highlands.

New to our list were Shore (Horned) Larks, and there were some lekking Ruff and Snow Buntings. Heading back to town, we were hoping to catch a glimpse of the Snowy Owl that had been reported. We met up with another group who had seen the bird an hour ago but lost it in the icy landscape. It was time to head back but Steve suggested one more run along the main road. In a few minutes, Pirita radioed back to say that she thought she could see the owl. We caught up and were soon out with the scopes watching a white shape against a rock and it was indeed the **Snowy Owl**. The rock was shielding the bird from the wind but we were facing the wind trying to use the van as cover. We could see the bird looking around and as we were leaving it flew off. A few minutes later we caught up with it again, this time perched on the post of a fence. It was a little closer now and we could see that it was an adult male. We scoped and photographed it again and Pirita was beaming with this bird, a lifer for her!



We made our way back to Båtsfjord ticking a few more birds just outside of town including Arctic Loon, Red-throated Loon, Northern Pintail, Goldeneye and more Goosanders. Our evening festivities included a celebratory beer for Pirita's lifer!

Day 10

It was snowing as we left Båtsfjord this morning. A quick check of the harbor yielded Black Guillemot and some gulls but nothing new. We headed inland over the hills where the fierce wind was blowing snow on to the road causing near polar conditions. We marveled at the sideways snow which finally subsided a little allowing a photo session with some Ruff and

Lapland Buntings near the road. There were several Common Snipe flying around and we had Meadow and Red-throated Pipit.

A stop at the Birders Basecamp at Vadsø did not offer any relief from the gale force winds and we sat in the parking lot watching Common Eider, Common Redshank and Ruddy Turnstone while mustering the courage to exit the van. A few intrepid birders walked out the path and received their just reward with at least 33 very close **Red-necked Phalaropes** in a small pond at the end of the trail. The birds were feeding and cavorting very close to shore allowing great views and photos and making the walk back to the vans not quite so painful.



After a quick pit stop in Vadsø, we stopped along the road for some close **Bar-tailed Godwits** in great afternoon light. There were males in colorful breeding plumage and duller females which showed obviously longer bills.



Our next stop was at a feeder close to the road that hosted Common Redpolls and one Arctic Redpoll which eventually showed well among the Greenfinch and Bramblings.

We continued on past some open fields overlooking the sea and found four Barnacle Geese and a few Graylags. The highlight here though was a band of displaying **Ruff**, a total of 14 males and one female. We watched their antics from the van on the side of the road and were intrigued by the chaos that ensued when the female moved. The journey along the Varanger coast offered us at least 14 White-tailed Eagles today. There were several Jaegers as well, a pair of Willow Grouse and a distant King Eider in with a flock of Common Eider. The wind continued until we entered the tunnel to Vardö. We eventually arrived at our hotel, checked in and met a little later in the evening to review our day and make plans for tomorrow.



Day 11



Overnight, the relentless wind shook the windows of the hotel but this morning we were thrilled to see that the wind had died down for our trip to Hornøya, the Bird Island. After breakfast, we boarded a small boat and cruised out of the harbor to spend the morning at Hornøya, a renowned birders paradise. 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 sounds, the smells were awesome. The cliffs were full of nesting Kittiwakes, **Razorbills**, Common Murres, Shags, Thick-billed Murres, and **Puffins** all seeming to jockey for position. 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 Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. We made good use of the shelter and some wandered the trails of the island taking in as much as we could and the cameras clicked at full tilt. At one point, a



White-tailed Eagle flew over flushing thousands of birds off the cliffs. It was a nonstop river of fleeing birds for several minutes and the noise was deafening. What an experience! The weather was changeable with a few rain drops now and then but that did not dampen the excitement of being on Hornøya, a place described by some in the group as “heaven”. All in all, it was a spectacular morning and highlight of the trip.



We enjoyed a delicious lunch at the hotel and a visit from the chef who explained his love for Cod exhibited by the “COD IS GREAT” tattoo on his arm.

In the afternoon, we navigated the tunnel to the mainland to explore the road to Hamningberg. As we traveled north along the shores of the Barents Sea, we enjoyed rugged scenery and views of several White-tailed Eagles along the coast. The stunning landscape was jagged and sharp and the weather ranged from driving rain to wind to calm for a few minutes at a time. We took in a variety of geologic formations adjacent to the sandy beaches and crashing surf and made several stops to scan for birds. At Hamningberg, we had Northern Gannet coming into the bay and there were numbers of Black Guillemots and Goosanders but surprisingly few Eiders.

Hamningberg is an abandoned fishing village along the northern coast of the Varanger Peninsula and still has a few buildings that survived the German retreat at the end of WWII. The rest of the buildings are well kept summer cottages now vacant until the warm weather arrives (does it ever?)

We returned to Vardö late in the afternoon and enjoyed a nice dinner after reviewing our list for the day.

Day 12

Today we traveled from Vardø to Ivalo again under sparkling blue skies. The drive was long but the gorgeous landscape offered **White-tailed Eagles** and several Rough-legged Buzzards. We passed a pond with three Red-necked Phalaropes and ticked a Golden Eagle from our lunch spot. We continued on to Ivalo, 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 early afternoon, we had time for some pre-breakfast birding today. A walk along a forest trail yielded Rustic Bunting, Pied Flycatcher, and a few mosquitos. The chicks in the Fieldfare nest at hotel were getting big and we bid them and Bert and Heike farewell. We said goodbye to Pirita at the airport and she drove one of the vans back to Oulu, stopping to twitch a Roller, her prize for the long journey and her second lifer in a week. Roller and Snowy Owl in the same week! That's birding!

