

## Holiday Highlights

### Oland

2 – 9 October 2011

**Leaders:** Roy Atkins and Simon Eaves

**Guests:** Lyn & Dave Maslin, Kathy Hilton, Barbara Weeks, Sue & Dave Stickland, Keith Stedman, Sheila & Mark Devlin and Joy & John Chalk

**Day 1:** The flight from Heathrow to Stockholm goes without a hitch and we spent a pleasant time drinking coffee and having a snack in the airport at Stockholm before catching the second flight to Kalmar. The minibuses are waiting for us outside and we are soon on our way arriving at the hotel to settle in before a delicious evening meal is served by our friends Karl and Kerstin. We finish with a quick look at the map and a chat through a rough plan for the coming week - and I mean rough - the main focus being migratory birds means that everything can change on a phone call, but we head to bed excited at the prospect of what might be passing through tomorrow.

**Day 2:** There are flocks of Barnacle Geese and Common Cranes on the move as we head to breakfast at 8:00am though it is rather misty and we suspect they are just moving out to the fields to feed. After we have eaten Dave and Lyn find a couple of immature White-tailed Eagles in the fields the other side of the road and we have a look at them before we set off.

We have hardly travelled any distance at all when we find our first big Barnacle Goose flock in the fields nearby. We check through them and find a few Greylags amongst them while in the distance Simon points out that there is a White-tailed Eagle perched on top of one of the barns - it looks huge! A Hen Harrier appears, hunting the field to our right and as we watch it flushes a small bird from the long grass, immediately a Merlin flies in and catches it! It is well known that Merlins do accompany Hen Harriers sometimes waiting for them to flush small birds but it is amazing to actually witness this in action! There seems to be a constant stream of birds flying through with Linnets, Skylarks, Meadow Pipits and even Wood Pigeons on the move all heading south.

We travel now in short hops stopping to check each new flock of Barnacle Geese as we come to them, though they don't seem to hold any different species amongst them. We get fabulous views of a Rough-legged Buzzard hovering above the fields then stop to check small birds in some rough ground finding Yellowhammers and Tree Sparrows. As we drive down

towards the lighthouse we pause to enjoy some very close Fallow Deer in a small clump of trees and Simon's van spot a Green Woodpecker. The weather is beginning to brighten a little though it is still very hazy but the first sunshine is coming through as we scan the saltmarsh before the lighthouse. Here there are huge numbers of Meadow Pipits and plenty of Lapwings as well as a good sized flock of Brent Geese. Right on the shoreline is a Merlin and we get out to have a look at it through the scopes, and while we do two Peregrines fly through chasing each other and calling noisily. There are thousands and thousands of Barnacle Geese out over the marshes while out in the bays are lots of duck. They are mainly Mallards but there are also plenty of Wigeon, a group of Teal, and a few Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser and Goldeneye. It seems odd to see lots of Mute Swans on the sea and we add Great Crested Grebe and another White-tailed Eagle flies through.

As we arrive at the car park we spot a couple of Goldcrests flitting about on the gravel and then as we start walking towards the lighthouse one of the ringers comes over to show us a female Wigeon that they have just ringed. It is lovely to see the detail of the markings in the hand before they release it.

Inside the lighthouse area we find a ridiculously tame Goldcrest! It is searching for - and evidently finding - tiny insects among the plants beside the path and doesn't seem in the least bit bothered at us taking its photo about three feet away!! It is mesmerising to see such a lovely little bird so close and we are delighted. The garden itself seems quite quiet with a Swallow still flitting round the buildings and a small mixed flock of Chaffinches and Bramblings. We walk out to the shoreline and scan the sea finding more ducks and Brent Geese plus a nice flock of Dunlin and a couple of Grey Plover. On the rocks is large flock of Cormorants and amongst them a single Purple Sandpiper then scanning the shore we add Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruff and lots of gulls including Black-headed, Common, Herring and a Caspian Gull that frustratingly disappears behind the rocks after just a couple of people have seen it. There is a group of Grey Seals on the rocks lounging around like big slugs. We are thrilled when a Goshawk appears scaring the life out of everything - even the Cormorants look nervous and many launch themselves onto the sea and all the waders and gulls go into a blind panic and fly in all directions. Next a Hen Harrier flies through having a similar effect before flying out low over the sea.

We walk back to the vans and decide to have lunch at the picnic tables by the car park. This is very pleasant and we scan the sea and meadows while we eat finding a few good birds. A Blackcap appears in the bushes beside us and we get good close views of a Sparrowhawk but it is the geese

that really steal the show with literally tens of thousands of them in an enormous flock that is constantly being disturbed by White-tailed Eagles that fly through. We see at least four of them, perhaps more and a couple land on the big boulders offshore where they look incredibly majestic. There is a Peregrine perched on a big wooden structure out to sea and we get great views of a female Marsh Harrier. There is a single juvenile White-fronted Goose amongst the Brent and Barnacle Geese. Flocks of Meadow Pipits, Skylarks and small groups of White Wagtails are passing through and we hear the occasional Golden Plover though we don't actually manage to set eyes on one.

From here we drive round to a car park by the woodland pausing as we go to check pipits and add Shoveler to the growing list. We are about to go for a walk amongst the trees when suddenly Roy's mobile phone goes off and it is our friend Douglas - a local birdwatcher - who has news for us! There is apparently a Pallas's Warbler in a small copse about 30km away! So 'Plan A' is abandoned and we jump back in the vans and are on our way!

It does not take very long to get there as we resist the temptation to stop and check huge flocks of Barnacle Geese as we drive past them in the fields. It is simply astonishing just how many there are. We arrive at the spot to find a few birders already there and discover it has not been seen for about an hour. We wander along the edge of the trees checking any bird that moves but after half an hour or more we have had no luck and neither has anyone else. There are lots of Linnets in the fields behind us and clearly huge numbers of Common Cranes calling somewhere over the back but we just see odd small groups flying by and more geese overhead - but we also work hard at checking everything that moves in the trees until at last Simon brilliantly picks it up and calls everyone over. It vanishes almost immediately and we watch as the other birds that were accompanying it flit across the road to the trees the other side. There are Blue and Great Tits, a Chiffchaff or two and several Goldcrests and after a while nothing more flits over the road so we assume we must have missed it go and head over the other side to check the trees there instead. It takes a while but eventually it is Simon again who picks it up and this time most people manage to see the bird and some people get excellent views. We spend a while trying to get more views and do indeed get a couple more looks at it, a delightful little bird with wing- bars and stripes even on the top of its head.

While all this is happening we are also entertained by Rough-legged Buzzards flying overhead in twos and threes, some pretty close and looking superb. We are really getting the hang of their long winged jizz now and picking

them off some way off as well. Then a huge flock of Common Cranes flies up and we enjoy the most wonderful sight of them wheeling around before landing back in the fields - the noise is quite incredible! With the light now fading fast we head back and add Kestrel to the raptor list making a total of ten species of raptor in one day and around 70 species in total!!

**Day 3** We wake to a much nicer looking day with clear skies and sunshine, though a little hazy as we drive down towards the south end of the island again. We are due at the ringing station at 10:00am for a demonstration and drive slowly south stopping to admire the sight of three White-tailed Eagles, which simply dwarf the Hooded Crows that seem to have gathered around them. One of them flaps lazily away and we decide to leave them be and check some of the flocks of Barnacle Geese en route. There are again thousands of them along the way but there don't seem to be any other species at all amongst them today other than a single Brent Goose.

We meet up with Lynus who is going to show us how they do the ringing here and he leads us over to the Heligoland traps in the garden to show us those first and talk us through some of the history of this - the oldest ringing station in Sweden and one of the oldest in the world having opened in 1946. As he explains how it all works we are constantly distracted by the passing of Rough-legged Buzzards! They seem to be going through in good numbers and in the ten minutes or so he is talking to us at least ten or more fly past some heading straight out to sea. We have already seen six as we were getting out of the vans so we have seen around twenty by the time we head inside to see him ringing a couple of birds. The first bird out of the box is a Robin and he uses this bird to demonstrate how they put the ring on, how they weigh it, measure it and record the condition of the bird by looking at the body fat. Next is a Song Thrush which makes quite a noise but it is lovely to see all the detail of the markings up close. Finally he pulls out a Goldcrest - and if anything it looks even smaller in the hand than in the field!! It is just delightful to see this minute bird so close and he parts the crest feathers to show us the red colour beneath the yellow feathers. This weighs a ridiculous 4gms (only 1gm more than a Brazil nut) yet will set off later to fly right across the Baltic Sea! He then shows us some examples of some of the interesting things they have discovered with the data they have been collecting over the years, including the astonishing story of the numbers of Knot which appears to be linked to Lemming numbers! It is also interesting to see how Yellowhammers have declined in the number caught here while over Sweden in general they have increased! This they think is down to a series of mild winters which means they are not migrating. It is all fascinating stuff and we thank Lynus for everything before heading round to the visitor centre for a look round.

After this we go up into the lighthouse climbing right to the top where you can get a most wonderful view up the island. It is a great vantage point to scan this shore and sea from and soon we have found a nice selection of birds including lots of different duck species including Eider, Red-breasted Mergansers, Goosander, Gadwall and others. Roy picks out a Caspian Gull amongst the Herring Gulls, a classic adult with slim pale bill, dark eye and small speckles on the back of the neck. We add Little Grebe to the list and the flock of Bar-tailed Godwits we saw yesterday are showing well with a couple of Curlews. Small birds like Linnets and Siskins are passing by and flying out to sea as do a couple of Sparrowhawks. It is a nice change to see them from above or even at eye level while they soar around. More Rough-legged Buzzards are still passing.

Once back down we start back towards the vans but stop to scan the bay finding lots more birds including several Pintail, Tufted Duck and Scaup in a small bay to our left and way out beyond the rocks a small group of Long-tailed Ducks fly past. There is a Knot with the Dunlin and Grey Plover amongst the rocks and Simon picks up a Merlin heading straight for us and we get wonderful views as it zips past at great speed. There is also an interesting gull amongst Herring Gulls - an 'Omissus Gull' or yellow-legged form of Herring gull found in small numbers in Scandinavia.

We slowly drive up the road stopping here and there to check the pipits, skylarks and other birds migrating south and then as we get nearer the woodland at Ottenby Lund we are astonished to see how many raptors are above the trees. They are almost all Rough-legged Buzzards! Lots of them!! They are circling around and hovering and generally just messing about above the trees along with Sparrowhawks and a couple of Goshawks and then a falcon appears - but not one we are expecting at all - it is a Hobby! We enjoy wonderful views as it glides around catching the occasional dragonfly and eating it on the wing before zipping off at speed to chase another one. A Peregrine appears and another Merlin - it is just astonishing!

We decide to stop at the picnic site beside the trees and enjoy the spectacle as we eat our lunch. And what a treat it is to sit in the sunshine and enjoy all these raptors so close. There are occasional Sparrowhawk and Goshawk, a Hen Harrier, at least two Common Buzzards and the Hobby reappears flying right over our heads... but it is the Rough-legged Buzzards that really steal the show and there are almost constantly at least half a dozen in view and the best count for a single sweep with the binoculars is sixteen!! Occasionally one perches up allowing great views through the scopes and even long after we have finished eating we just can't seem to tear ourselves away.

Finally we decide to take a walk through the woodland out to the coast and with the odd raptor still overhead we find Nuthatches, a small number of Redwings and get good views of a Treecreeper. At the far end of the woodland we walk out to the edge of the meadows picking up a Marsh Harrier on the way and then scan the shoreline. Here we find a good sized flock of Dunlin, a few Ringed Plover, Curlew, Grey Plover and three lovely Avocets. There are lots of Shelducks, Wigeon and Teal and Barnacle Geese are flying past in good numbers. A Peregrine flies through disturbing everything as it does so then landing on the far shore looking great through the scopes, then another Merlin and there are a couple of Kestrels on the edge of the grassland. We walk back to the trees and take a path along the edge of the trees getting fantastic views of a Hobby again, this time perched in the top of the Hawthorn. It is a superb view and at one point it is perched right beside two Kestrels.

Back at the van we are about to leave when a Green Woodpecker puts in an appearance then as we drive slowly back up the islands we spot three Marsh Harriers above the trees and in the fields find several more Rough-legged Buzzards - goodness knows how many we have seen today! There are a group of Roe Deer and we spot the first adult male Hen Harrier of the trip.

We decide to finish with a quick visit to Gravgards Hamn and here find a nice collection of birds including lots of Herring Gulls and Cormorants, Brent Geese, a big flock of Dunlin with three or four Sanderling, a few Ruff, Goldeneyes in good numbers and plenty of Red-breasted Mergansers while out to sea a couple of Eiders are passing. A huge flock of Barnacle Geese come in to roost and we reckon there must be a minimum of ten thousand birds here!! It is a spectacular sight and we are just blown away by the spectacle of them all coming in to land on the water in the bay. There are a few Common Cranes passing too but the time is also passing and we realise we had better be getting back. We finish the day with a superb big female Goshawk that flies straight across in front of us upsetting a Brown Hare that races off across the field. Then as we unload the van a big flock of Common Cranes fly in to roost in the bay below the hotel - fantastic!

**Day 4:** We meet at 6:00am for an early morning attempt to see Elk (Moose) and are soon driving out to an area of woodlands and fields where we have seen them in the past. It is still dark as we arrive and we even pick up an owl in the headlights as we get there - almost certainly a Long-eared but we don't see well enough to be sure. There are lots of Golden Plovers on the fields and we enjoy excellent views of these as well as several Roe Deer and Brown Hares. These are in surprisingly large numbers and feeding

at the edge of the fields where the Elk are also supposed to be - but aren't! We get a brief view of a Goshawk, see a White-tailed Eagle and there are flocks of thrushes including some Fieldfare. We pause to enjoy the wonderful sight and sound of a field full of Common Cranes and these are perhaps the highlight as we finally head back to breakfast.

News comes in of a Richard's Pipit at the Golf Course in Gronhogen and we head there after breakfast to see if we can find it. We arrive to find the birders there have not seen it but we spend a while checking the area where it was last seen finding many Meadow Pipits and a few Skylarks but nothing else. There are migrating finch flocks going through including Siskins, Chaffinches and Linnets and near the van we get fabulous close views of a Brown Hare that is convinced we can't see it even though we are staring through binoculars from just a few feet away - it even stretches and yawns as it gains confidence.

We head north up the island pausing here and there as we go to enjoy the various birds that we spot. There is another White-tailed Eagle and we see several Rough-legged Buzzards as well as a sunflower field with masses of Greenfinches in it and some big flocks of Barnacle Geese and Common Cranes. We arrive at a lay-by where there are toilets and make a stop to find that there is also a windmill that you can go inside and see all the workings - it is superb with everything made of wood including all the cogs and wheels etc. We spot yet another White-tailed Eagle from here and several Sparrowhawks as well as more passing finch flocks.

Our next stop is at a woodland where we have seen Black Woodpecker in the past and we take a short walk into the trees listening out as we go. We find Chiffchaffs, Goldcrests and a mixed tit flock but there aren't any woodpeckers today despite our best efforts. The flowers are interesting as we find Hepatica leaves, Guelder Rose and Spindle Tree and back at the vans - parked at the edge of a large area of 'Alvar' - a habitat of limestone grassland akin to Limestone Pavement. We find a few plants still in flower such as Greater Knapweed, Wild Thyme, Spiked Speedwell, Fairy Flax, Shrubby Cinquefoil, Rockrose, Thrift, Knotted Pearlwort and Cut-leaved Cranesbill - it must be wonderful here in the summer!

After we have eaten lunch we drive further north to a large wetland area with reed-beds and mud flats in a large bay. We start by scanning from a tower though it is a bit windy and as well as a good selection of duck, geese and waders that we have seen before we also add Canada Goose, Whooper Swan and find a beautiful male Pintail. We walk round to scan another bay where there are clearly a good number of birds including some

waders and flush a few Reed Buntings as we walk round. Here we find a large number of geese including a big flock of Barnacles but also lots of Greylags and amongst them three White-fronted Geese. There are big flocks of Dunlin and Golden Plover and at least four Ruff, but even better are a lovely group of eight or so Spotted Redshank and further out two Greenshank. There are lots of Teal and out on the sea a few Shoveler. The weather is really turning colder with a strong westerly wind that is not helping us at all, causing the scopes to wobble even on the best tripod and with the light already going with the heavy cloudy conditions we walk back to the vans.

We head back towards the hotel looking out for birds as we travel. We spot yet another White-tailed Eagle, more Rough-legged Buzzards and Common Buzzard, some huge Barnacle Goose flocks of several thousand birds and then make a longer stop to enjoy the sight of several hundred Common Cranes in a field not too far from the road. We take our time to really enjoy the scene as the flock seem relaxed and are feeding and flying around in small groups. They really are wonderful birds and incredibly vocal, calling all the time and many birds even displaying - doing that wonderful dancing that they do, leaping about with spread wings. It is truly a great way to finish the day and after watching them for ages we finally head for home making one final stop when Roy spots a Hen Harrier quartering a field. We stop to watch and after a few moments it suddenly turns and twists to drop onto something in the grass. Moments later it lifts back in the air leaving a trail of small feathers floating in the wind and carrying something tightly in its talons!

**Day 5:** The weather is clearly going to be a feature of today and we start our birding hiding from the howling wind behind one of the huts down by the harbour. It is remarkably sheltered where we are and we enjoy some nice sights including a couple of White-tailed Eagles, an adult and an immature bird, with the adult chasing the young one off its rock as if to prove a point! There are loads of ducks in the bay with large numbers of Goldeneye, Wigeon and Teal and out to sea, lots of Brent Geese. An enormous flock of several thousand Barnacle Geese is in the fields just in from the bay and we find a few Dunlin and Grey Plover on the shoreline. We even have fun examining the Cormorants to see which sub-species they are and identify them as 'sinensis' - we must have been running out of birds to look at I think!

As we are about to leave Roy pokes his nose round the edge of a small hut and finds that in a small elder bush here, sheltered from the wind, several birds have gathered including Tree Sparrows, Goldcrests, Chiffchaffs, Blue and Great Tits and at least a couple of Robins!

Based on the fact that so many birds could be hiding from the wind behind one building we head next to Ossby where there are lots of gardens that could hold interesting migrants and here find more Robins and Goldcrests, when suddenly Roy's Mobile phone beeps - a message from our friend Douglas... "Buff-breasted Sandpiper in a field with Golden Plover at Nasby." That is very nearby so we head straight to the vans and zip round there as fast as we can!! We arrive to find a couple of birders scanning the field and there are indeed large numbers of Golden Plovers and Ruff here but they are still trying to relocate the Buff-breasted Sandpiper which vanished when everything flew round after being disturbed. More and more birders arrive until there is a bank of us all checking every Ruff, Skylark and indeed anything that moves including leaves!! After some time we must have checked every Ruff about twenty times each and have to admit that the bird is not there. Douglas is amongst the crowd and he says that he will let us know if it is relocated so we decide to head off and go next to the Birders shop at Stenasa. This is a superb shop with a huge selection of bird books and indeed books on flowers, insects and wildlife in general. We enjoy a good three quarters of an hour here flicking through books and comparing tripods and telescopes before finally heading off for lunch.

We have lunch in the shelter of the trees down by the shore. It is a delicious mix of pasta and various veggies and shrimps and while we eat we scan the sea, though there is little going past presumably because of the wind. We see a White-tailed Eagle go by, a few Brent Geese, some Red-breasted Mergansers and a flock of Wigeon but little else. On the shore are a few Dunlin and Grey Plover and in the bushes nearby a few Goldcrests and Robins.

Well fed, we decide that with the weather as it is it might be better to be in the woodlands where we are a little more sheltered and we head to a large wood where we know Black Woodpeckers occur. Here we try playing the call of the woodpecker in several places but whether it is the wind dispersing the sound or the birds are just not interested who knows - but they certainly don't come flying in, in their droves and in the end the most excitement is caused by Marsh Tit and a huge, bright orange slug in about equal measure!

As we start walking back to the vans it starts raining and comes on quite heavy so that by the time we are back we are pretty wet and with the time now around 4:00pm we decide enough is enough and head back to the hotel. We pass the only Rough-legged Buzzard of the day as we drive back and large numbers of Common Cranes in the fields as well as more huge

flocks of Barnacle Geese then enjoy a wonderful sit by the fire with tea and coffee when we get back.

**Day 6:** We wake to glorious sunshine and clear skies though there is still a strong westerly wind, and we take a walk down to the coast to check bushes and see if we can find any rarities as perhaps with clear skies they might have started moving. Before we have even got into the vans we are delighted to see three Rough-legged Buzzards flying over the hotel heading south, then another, then another and there are more out over the fields - clearly there is some movement going on today.

As we drive south we spot raptors over a woodland and pause to check out what they are - a Rough-legged Buzzard, a Hen Harrier and a Goshawk!! The Goshawk is a particularly impressive big female and is bigger than the Hen Harrier! A Common Buzzard appears as well and then a Sparrowhawk flies through. The Goshawk starts grappling with the Common Buzzard which is joined by a second bird and it is very impressive watching them tussling with each other. Next a White-tailed Eagle flies through looking enormous and dwarfing a couple of Ravens that fly past. Six species of raptor over one tiny bit of woodland! There are more Rough-legged Buzzards flying through and also out towards the coast and we must be up to twenty already! There is also a big flock of Common Cranes in the field behind us and in the background another White-tailed Eagle perched on a dry stone wall and the whole scene is superb through the scopes. Makes you wish you could paint!

We finally drag ourselves away and pass some huge flocks of Barnacle Geese in the fields as well as more raptors as we head on down the island. We park the vans and take a walk that follows a wall down to the coast and we check the flocks of Skylarks and Meadow Pipits going over as we walk. There are lots of Lapwings too and still more Rough-legged Buzzards then when we get to some woodland we find several Chiffchaffs and Goldcrests and a few Yellowhammers in the bushes and scrub at the edge of the trees. We work our way through the bushes checking for any migrants but mainly find more Chiffchaffs and lots of Robins then as we get into a more grassy area suddenly there is a Short-eared Owl. We get wonderful views as it flies past and starts quartering the ground ahead of us gradually getting further away before dropping to ground some way off - fantastic.

At the coast we get a brief view of a passing Peregrine while out on the water there are lots of Red-breasted Mergansers flying past and smaller flocks of Brent Geese, Wigeon and a large group of Goldeneye. There are a couple of Grey Plovers and Dunlin and yet more Rough-legged Buzzards

are passing all the time as well as a couple of distant White-tailed Eagles, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk. A few Tree Sparrows and Linnets are flying south and as we walk back we get fabulous views of a female Hen Harrier.

With more Rough-legged Buzzards overhead we decide to have a look at the south end of Ottenby Lund as many of these birds may well be gathering there. We drive slowly south enjoying the sight of huge flocks of Barnacle Geese in the fields and Golden Plover, Lapwings and Skylarks in mixed flocks in some fields. We drive very slowly through the scrubby bushes checking the tops of the bushes for Great Grey Shrikes and it pays off as Roy spots one perched right out in the open. It is a superb looking bird and shows very well indeed so we set up the scopes and get fabulous views as it flies even closer, catches a dragonfly and even hovers for several seconds.

We stop for lunch at the picnic area at Ottenby Lund and here enjoy wonderful views of loads of Rough-legged Buzzards above the trees. There are often several in view at a time as well as two or three Common Buzzards, the occasional Sparrowhawk and at least three big female Goshawks. Simon picks out a Marsh Harrier and Roy suddenly shouts excitedly, "Golden Eagle!" It is a superb second year bird with white wing markings cruising around with the Rough-legged Buzzards above the trees and we enjoy several good views over the next hour or so... at one point even with a White-tailed Eagle.

Delighted with our sightings we eventually drag ourselves away to see what has been found at the lighthouse and check whether they might be doing any owl ringing this evening. As we get out of the vans we spot the eagle again above the trees and Sheila asks if the bird flying overhead is a tern - but to our surprise it is a juvenile Kittiwake!! This is actually a rarer bird than a Golden Eagle here with very few sightings each year and we make absolutely sure we are not mistaken as Little Gull is more likely - but it is definitely a Kittiwake and to clarify things even further we later spot a juvenile Little Gull as well!

From the lighthouse area we see the usual ducks such as Eiders, Red-breasted Mergansers, Wigeon, Teal, Gadwall etc, as well as waders such as Bar-tailed Godwit, Purple Sandpiper and a single Knot with a flock of Grey Plover flying past. We enjoy a coffee at the café which gives us a chance to warm back up after being out in the cold wind for a while and with such big windows we can carry on birding at the same time! We have a quick scan from behind the café before we go but add nothing new other than the

juvenile White-fronted Goose which looks like the same one that was here the other day.

We decide that perhaps we should try the Common Crane roost on the west side of the island as it can be very spectacular and we set off driving slowly north and checking the fields as we go. There are a couple of fields with flocks of Golden Plover and Lapwings and amongst them a few Ruff, and there are a few enormous flocks of Barnacle Geese with smaller numbers of Greylags. We arrive at the bay where the Crane roost is and being there early we check out the waders and ducks here first finding more of the same species as we have been seeing at other places - Dunlin, Grey Plover etc plus lots of Teal, Wigeon and a few Pintail. There are lots of birds in fact but nothing different and after checking everything we drive round to the spot where we hope to watch the Cranes coming in to roost. We sit in the vans to keep warm as there is a very cold wind now and wait. It is good fun chatting and laughing together as we wait for birds to come in but as the time passes we begin to wonder if anything going to happen. As the light really starts to fade the first flocks of geese arrive. Three big flocks fly in and it is a lovely sight seeing them coming in against the evening sky - no Cranes at all. In the end we admit to ourselves to that they are really not coming, perhaps they are roosting somewhere a bit more sheltered, so we head back for the hotel and our evening meal - a superb local dish with a starter that includes a topping of Cloudberry Jelly and the main course is Zander - delicious!! Overnight the forecast is for the wind to turn north-easterly, which might create a bit of movement in the birds, so we head to bed excited about what tomorrow may bring!

**Day 7:** The weather is not what they said it would be! The wind is almost non-existent and coming feebly from the north west... and what is more there is thick fog!! This makes it quite tricky to decide what to do but obviously we aren't going to be looking at anything any distance away so we try heading round to Ossby in the hope that the fog has brought down a few migrants.

The village is incredibly quiet with just a couple of Robins at first then we add Tree Sparrow and finally a few Goldcrests and a couple of Chiffchaffs but nothing more. We decide to call it a day there and head somewhere else perhaps over the other coast to see if there are any woodland birds showing at all and as we cross the centre of the island we start trying to build up a bit more of a list for the day in the fog. We soon add Yellowhammer and a couple of flocks of Skylarks and Meadow Pipits then a nice flock of Golden Plovers and Lapwings so things are looking up but we are very surprised

when we add a new bird for the trip - a Wheatear - two in fact! We have never been so excited to see a Blackbird either!

We continue round to the main road on the other side and decide to try for Black Woodpecker again since, with no wind, playing the recording might work better today. As we drive down towards the woodland we pick up our first Rough-legged Buzzards of the day then Kathy spots a Great Grey Shrike on top of one of the Juniper bushes. The lighting is very nice so we jump out and scope it enjoying lovely views before it finally flies further away into the mist. We have not gone far when a second bird flies across in front of us.

We park up and walk down the track in the trees. It seems very quiet with just a Sparrowhawk of interest as we walk and as we enter the woods there is the odd Goldcrest and Chiffchaff calling and then we find a Great Spotted Woodpecker working a fallen tree. We add Wren before we continue to the clearing where Roy wants to try for the Black Woodpecker. Once everyone is there we take out the player and the call of Black Woodpecker rings through the trees. After a few moments we hear it again but this time Roy is not playing it!! Then a dark shape comes looping through the tree tops calling as it comes - a fabulous Black Woodpecker and it flies right over our heads and away into the trees beyond. It realises this 'other bird' is now behind it, so it turns and flies round in a big arc and away again. Roy plays a bit more of the call and it reappears calling loudly and at last lands in full view and within moments we have the scopes trained on it. It behaves wonderfully tapping at the tree and calling loudly and looking a little crazy with its white eye staring around, looking for the intruder as if it is going give it head-butts!! What a spectacular bird it is and we are absolutely thrilled to see it at last.

We walk back to the vans with big grins on our faces then with the fog now lifting nicely we set off for the other side of the island where news has come in of a Bluethroat. We arrive in the area as news of another bird breaks - a Pallas's Warbler in the same area and of course everyone is arriving to go and see that - the Bluethroat is forgotten or never known about by most of these people and it takes a while to find out where it was seen. There is also nowhere to park so we decide to stay calm and drive back out to the main road and find somewhere to have lunch as it almost 1:00pm.

We park in a small car park at the edge of the alvar and as we get out lunch the sun appears and all the fog and cloud is pushed out by blue skies. There is a big flock of Cranes nearby and we are enjoying the lovely close views of these birds - which we never seem to tire of seeing - then the change

of weather suddenly causes the mass departure of the geese! We are astounded to see enormous flocks of Barnacle Geese take to the air in the distance and more appear over the trees heading our way. There must be tens of thousands of birds all calling noisily as they gain height and form long snaking lines and Vs and we watch as they steadily set off southwards. It is somehow an incredibly moving sight to see them set off like that and while some of the lines of birds become distant dots as they leave the island behind for the winter more flocks are appearing from the north and passing by followed by yet more and more. It is quite overwhelming and impossible to estimate the numbers of birds involved - there may be fifty thousand birds or even a hundred thousand! After a while flocks of Cranes appear as well and this triggers some of the birds nearby to take off and start spiralling up to follow them. It is interesting to see how the geese simply take off and fly gaining height as they head south and stringing out. The Cranes however spiral round and round in a loose flock gradually gaining height that way before, once at a good height, they start heading south gliding or with slow flaps. We are spellbound and stand there watching for a good hour or more before it suddenly feels like the north of the island must have emptied of geese and Cranes and it falls almost eerily quiet after all the noise. It has been an astonishing stroke of luck to witness such a special and impressive sight and we feel very privileged to have chanced upon that moment when it happened.

Follow that! The Bluethroat suddenly seems almost insignificant after that but we decide to take a walk and see whether there is any sign of it, though in truth we are not optimistic since it has not been seen since. We enjoy the walk checking the hedge rows for migrants and finding lots of Robins and a couple of Song Thrushes and Goldcrests but as predicted there is no sign of the Bluethroat and with the Pallas's Warbler a long walk over the fields we wonder if the wind - now picking up from the north-east - might be bringing sea-ducks down the coast.

We head for Seby Badet, a great place from which to watch passing sea birds and try scanning the sea from here, and yes there are indeed lots of birds passing and lots of birders here watching. There are masses of Eiders in flocks of anything from twenty or so to more than fifty and amongst them are much smaller numbers of Common Scoter. We pick up a few passing Long-tailed Ducks and there are flock after flock of Red-breasted Mergansers. The occasional Great Crested Grebe is passing by and there are also a small number of divers, mostly very far out and hard to identify though any we do identify are Black-throated. We add Velvet Scoter to the list and a single Sandwich Tern passes by - a very late record. Much closer in we find a few wildfowl such as Gadwall, Pintail, Shoveler,

Wigeon and Teal and along the shoreline there is a flock of Dunlin in which there are three or four Sanderling and Grey Plover

We finally call it a day here as the wind is incredibly cold and we drive for a last quick look at the harbour. Here we find lots of gulls and Cormorants and amongst some Dunlin and Grey Plover a single Turnstone but nothing else different so we head back to the hotel for a warm through before our evening meal and a final run through the check-list

We finish the day with our usual end of holiday round up of memories by going round the group and asking if people have a bird of the trip, favourite place and a magic moment. As always it is great to hear what people have enjoyed and species include Common Crane, Rough-legged Buzzard, Brown Hare and Black Woodpecker but three species share the top spot - Barnacle Goose and bizarrely the extremes of Goldcrest and Golden Eagle! Of the many places we have visited this week it is the southern end of the island with the lighthouse garden, the coastal meadows and boulder strewn coastline and the woodland where we saw so many raptors that scores by far the highest number of votes. We then ask what people have chosen as their magic moment and I have never had so many people vote for one moment on any trip before - from when the geese first started to lift off, through the incredible sight of so many geese in the air together, to the moment that the last geese became dots in the distance and the sound of their calling was lost and all became suddenly quiet - the sudden migration of geese out of the island with the change in wind and clearing of the skies this lunchtime proved to be the magic moment of almost the entire groups - and a truly magical moment it most certainly was.

We enjoy a few moments of chat and coffee before people start to head back to their rooms but just when we thought the day was over we get a message that they have caught a Tengmalm's Owl at the observatory! There is a mad dash round all the bedrooms and we are soon all gathering again at the vans and then racing down the island. We arrive to be told they have released this bird but that they will check the nests every half hour and bring it over to show us if they catch another and they are hopeful they will. We have a quick look round the garden then we are back ten minutes later to watch them go round the traps then one of the ringers comes over to tell us they have caught not just one but two!!! They ring them first then bring them over to show us and what delightful birds they are - small and with the most exquisite markings and a rather startled expression. We take photos and enjoy wonderful close up views of what is one of the hardest owls to see in Europe! They are just wonderful and after five minutes or so they

ask if we are OK that they release them and grinning from ear to ear we walk back to the vans and head back to the hotel. It has taken about an hour to get from the hotel, see the owls and get back - how efficient is that!

**Day 8:** Another beautiful morning greets us and we gather at the vans in cool but sunny weather and clear blue skies. We put all the bags into the old dining room and as we are about to set off a group of five Rough-legged Buzzards appear circling over the garden. They are great to see but make us a little bit worried about whether the Short-toed Eagle that was reported to have roosted in the Kungsgarden might already have taken flight so we get a move on and drive at speed down the island to the southern end. Here we find lots of birders with scopes all set up scanning the sky above the wood and stop to ask how things are looking. The Short-toed Eagle has not appeared yet apparently so we breathe a sigh of relief and drive to a vantage point that we feel might be better as the sunlight would be more on the bird.

We arrive to find lots more Rough-legged Buzzards and also several Common Buzzards circling above the trees while on the shoreline are four White-tailed Eagles and a couple of Ravens. One of the eagles is tugging bits of flesh off something they have caught and the Ravens are very keen to have a bit too and keep pulling on the eagle's tail to try and distract it so they can get a bit. It is great to watch but we must not forget to keep an eye on the skies as well. Next we find a juvenile Peregrine perched on one of the rocks nearby and get fantastic views through the scopes and later right overhead as it takes flight and circles above us. An enormous female Goshawk flies south along the shore mobbed by Hooded Crows that must be risking things a little surely? We keep scanning the skies above the woodland and add Sparrowhawk and Kestrel to the list of raptors for the morning. There are lots of finch flocks passing through as well including Goldfinch, Linnets, Greenfinches and a few Chaffinches and Bramblings but none seem to want to stop where we can see them. There are certainly lots of birds passing this morning and out to sea even gulls are flying past in numbers. Small flocks of geese including both Barnacle and Brent Geese pass overhead as do mixed flocks of Wood Pigeons and Stock Doves and a nice flock of Bewick's Swans.

Roy then picks up a bird over the wood which looks promising. It looks exactly right for a Short-toed Eagle with broad wings and the way it is holding its wings is just right and he calls everyone to try and get on it. It is very distant but as it circles round the sun catches the white belly and you can see the contrasting dark head and chest - this is it! Seconds later the message comes through from Douglas that the bird has taken flight

adding confirmation if any is needed. Over the next half hour or more the bird is constantly in view though at times it is very distant, there are also periods when it is much closer and we can see a lot of the detail of the plumage. We take turns enjoying it through the scopes and for a while it is joined by an immature Golden Eagle which looks like the same bird that we saw the other day. It is great to see both birds in the same field of view and compare their shape and size, the Golden Eagle in honesty the better looking bird by far! At times there are two species of eagle, two species of Buzzard and Goshawk all in the air in the same area - incredible!! Eventually, to our surprise, it drifts off northwards and we decide to spend the last hour of our time down at the observatory and lighthouse to see what birds have gathered there. It is lovely to see the garden here as it can be alive with little birds. There are dozens of Goldcrests and Robins, a few Blackbirds and Song Thrushes and lots of Chiffchaffs as well as Chaffinches and Bramblings. Many of the Goldcrests are pretty tame and we just take pleasure in the lovely close views of these birds before our time finally runs out and we have to head back to the hotel to re-pack our things and have lunch. We say our fond farewells to Karl and Kerstin and Dawn and load up the vans for our final journey to the airport and our flight back home.

**BIRDS**

Black-throated Diver  
Great Crested Grebe  
Little Grebe  
Cormorant  
Grey Heron  
Mute Swan  
Bewick's Swan  
Whooper Swan  
White-fronted Goose  
Greylag Goose  
Canada Goose  
Barnacle Goose  
Dark-bellied Brent Goose  
Shelduck  
Wigeon  
Gadwall  
Teal  
Mallard  
Pintail  
Shoveler  
Tufted Duck  
Scaup  
Common Eider  
Long-tailed Duck  
Common Scoter  
Velvet Scoter  
Goldeneye  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Goosander  
White-tailed Eagle  
Golden Eagle  
Short-toed Eagle  
Hen Harrier  
Marsh Harrier  
Goshawk  
Sparrowhawk  
Common Buzzard  
Rough-legged Buzzard  
Common Kestrel  
Merlin  
Peregrine  
Hobby  
Pheasant

Coot  
Common Crane  
Avocet  
Ringed Plover  
Golden Plover  
Grey Plover  
Lapwing  
Knot  
Purple Sandpiper  
Sanderling  
Dunlin  
Ruff  
Common Snipe  
Bar-tailed Godwit  
Curlew  
Spotted Redshank  
Greenshank  
Turnstone  
Little Gull  
Kittiwake  
Black-headed Gull  
Common Gull  
Herring Gull  
Caspian Gull  
Great Black-backed Gull  
Sandwich Tern  
Stock Dove  
Woodpigeon  
Collared Dove  
Feral Pigeon  
Short-eared Owl  
Tengmalm's Owl  
Green Woodpecker  
Black Woodpecker  
Great Spotted Woodpecker  
Skylark  
Swallow  
Meadow Pipit  
White Wagtail  
Wren  
Robin  
Northern Wheatear  
Blackbird  
Fieldfare

Song Thrush  
Redwing  
Blackcap  
Chiffchaff  
Pallas's Warbler  
Goldcrest  
Marsh Tit  
Blue Tit  
Great Tit  
Nuthatch  
Treecreeper  
Great Grey Shrike  
Jay (heard)  
Magpie  
Jackdaw  
Hooded Crow  
Raven  
Starling  
House Sparrow  
Tree Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Brambling  
Greenfinch  
Goldfinch  
Siskin  
Linnet  
Yellowhammer  
Reed Bunting

**MAMMALS**

Grey Seal  
Roe Deer  
Fallow Deer  
Brown Hare

**BUTTERFLIES**

Red Admiral  
Painted Lady  
Large White

**DRAGONFLIES**

Migrant Hawker  
Common Darter  
Black Darter