

## Holiday Highlights

### Oland

6 – 13 October 2024

**Guide:** Roy Atkins

**Guests:** Julia Bevan, Chris Barker, Jeanette Seaman, Jane Moore, Marilyn Davidson, Jane Atkins

**Day 1:** Travel day. Our flight departs from Heathrow heading to Copenhagen, where we pick up the vehicle. This proves to be a very nice minibus with potential for rotating two of the seats should we wish to!

It is a very long drive of over four hours, but we spot a few birds along the way including our first Rough-legged Buzzard, Common Buzzard and lots of Lapwings. As well as common species like Starlings, Hooded Crow, Magpie etc. Julia manages to spot a White Stork briefly and we spot several Red Kites and thousands of Cormorants as we cross the bridge into Sweden.

We are very happy to finally arrive at our hotel, where we are greeted by Stephan and Susanne and we enjoy our first of many truly delicious meals... the quality of the food here really is outstanding.

**Day 2:** Around the time we are waking up, hundreds of Barnacle Geese are leaving the bay below the hotel and we are pleased to discover there are also a large flock of Common Cranes there too also leaving the roost before we go to breakfast.

Breakfast is very relaxed and enjoyable, then we gather at the minibus and Roy explains that there has been a Hume's Leaf Warbler in trees at the nearby harbour for the last three days, so we are going to start there and see if it is still present. Having just had a clear night we are not too surprised when there is no sign of it... however the area has plenty of birds none the less.

As we get out of the van our first White-tailed Eagle flies by almost over our heads – an immature bird with a dark tail and very impressive. The bay is full of ducks with a nice mix of Wigeon, Teal, Mallards, a few Shoveler, Red-breasted Merganser and Goldeneye. The sea however is surprising quiet with no sea-ducks passing by which feels surprising. There is a small flock of Dunlin and a few gulls out there and on the rocks in the distance, an adult White-tailed Eagle. Barnacle Geese seem to be in good numbers and we see birds flying around in the background.

A group of three or four small birds fly in and vanish into the weeds by the sea and we are not sure what they are, so we go in search. They turn out to be Tree Sparrows but while we are looking we discover at least two or three Rock Pipits of the Scandinavian race - looking less dark and less heavily streaked than those

in the UK and with a slight supercilium. A White Wagtail is here too looking very dapper.

Checking the trees for the warbler we find a small number of Goldcrests, Great Tit and Blue Tit, a Robin, Chaffinch and not a lot else.

We decide to head south to check out the southern tip of the island, as this is often where the action is. We drive slowly along looking for birds as we go and pass fields with Lapwings and a surprising number of Skylarks. There are a very small number of Golden Plover, a Common Buzzard and at one spot a few Goldcrests, Yellowhammer and Chaffinches in the bushes.

We make a stop to scan some scattered bushes where Roy has seen Great Grey Shrike in the past and we soon realise there are loads of birds passing through. There are large numbers of Goldcrests and many seem remarkably tame passing us very close or landing in the thistle or bushes just feet away. More and more fly through pausing to feed before moving on and we also spot several Yellowhammers including at least one stunning male. There is a large flock of Jackdaws, a Raven flies through, we spot a distant Kestrel and our first Chiffchaffs. We also enjoy scope views of a very impressive male Fallow Deer with impressive antlers.

It has been drizzling a little but as we enjoy this lovely scene the rain stops and the sun comes out and, almost magically, raptors appear from the trees - the first being a big female Goshawk! Wow - what a bird and this cruises above the trees, circles up then gives chase to a Sparrowhawk that has only just come up. We spot at least another four Sparrowhawks and then another Goshawk as well as one bird which we can't make our minds up about.

Driving on down to the area just south of the woodland we pause to see if any further raptors appear. There is very little going on so we continue further south and stop to check some shallow water edges for waders but instead notice there are Goldcrests flying past the van and crossing the road, in the thistles, on the grass and flitting in the bushes. One looks like it is about to come into the van through the window and another actually flies into the side of the van but flies off again unharmed. We pass a flock of hundreds of Barnacle Geese, a small flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese and lots of ducks in the bay.

We park up and notice a large group of people stood close to the fence of the ringing station and we are somewhat disappointed to discover they have just been shown a Pallas's Leaf Warbler by the ringers - and they have just let it go! What a shame to have missed it in the hand, now we are going to have to find it in the trees. We have a look round and wow, there are Goldcrests absolutely everywhere. There must be hundreds of them here. How do find a Pallas's Warbler in amongst this lot.

We wander in the gardens and have a near miss when someone else spots the Pallas's Warbler briefly but, in all honestly, it is so delightful seeing all these

Goldcrests we are very happy just experiencing this astonishing scene. There seems to be little else amongst all the Goldcrests and after a while we decide perhaps we should have lunch and try again afterwards.

Lunch is excellent with quiche, cake, fruit and more and we enjoy this at the picnic tables surrounded by yet more Goldcrests. They are feeding in the bushes, on the grass, on the fence, in the nettles and thistles - a great opportunity to get some photos. There are a couple of Robins too and we enjoy some impressive Barnacle Goose shows as they all take flight from time to time perhaps disturbed by White-tailed Eagles that area around. A Brown Hare races by and there are Common Seals on the rocks.

After lunch we head back down towards the lighthouse and discover a group of birders watching and taking photos in by a couple of the larger trees and soon find out they have both the Pallas's Warbler and two Firecrest... amongst large numbers of Goldcrests of course. Over the next hour or so we are thrilled by the fabulous close up views we enjoy of these two truly delightful species - what a treat.

While here we discover that a Yellow-browed Warbler has also been seen in the southern part of the woodland not far away, but we take a pretty relaxed approach and walk back to the van checking the birds in the bay as we go. We find a large mix of ducks including Wigeon, Teal, Pintail, Shoveler, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander, Gadwall and Tufted Ducks. Some flocks of mergansers are clearly heading south out to sea. Flocks of Stock Doves are also heading out to sea on their migration here and high flocks of Chaffinches and Skylarks. There is a distant Grey Plover with a few Dunlin and a Treecreeper is in the bushes. The number of Cormorants here is crazy!! There must be thousands. We are surprised that before we even leave an enormous flock of Barnacle Geese fly into the bay and settle on the water as if going to roost - it feels early for that.

We finally get on our way and make a stop at the south end of the woodland where we walk round to the pool and tower. On the way we pass several birders who have not seen any warbler, so we are surprised to hear a calling Yellow-browed Warbler as we walk towards the tower. We head over to where it is to see if it comes nearer. It immediately flies across from the bushes - lands in front of us and then moves on again quickly and we are delighted but somewhat surprised that this doesn't seem to be the bird that is calling! It is now we realise it is in fact a recording! It is the ringers trying to catch it in the mist-nets and trying to coax it in, so we have been very lucky! There are more Goldcrests here of course and we hear but fail to see a Nuthatch.

We climb the tower where we get good views of Chiffchaff and a flock of Siskins. Out on the grassy flats are enormous numbers of Barnacle Geese – perhaps ten thousand!! There are a few Fallow Deer out there amongst the cattle. Roy spots a Peregrine on its way across the area and amazingly the entire Barnacle Goose flock reacts and takes to the air - what a spectacle. The Peregrine lands briefly before taking off and heading away gaining height and heading south.

It is time to head back to base but as we drive north again we are thrilled to find a Great Grey Shrike right by the road. What a gorgeous bird. We get out and enjoy some wonderful views before finally getting on our way, spotting a couple of Roe Deer as we head home. We have a break before gathering for a delicious evening meal and our first run through the checklist before heading to bed.

**Day 3:** We were a little surprised yesterday morning to see cranes roosting in the bay below the hotel and last night they returned there, so we decide to start the day with a pre-breakfast outing to see them leave the roost.

We gather at 6.50am and drive a little way to a spot where we can view the bay and we are pleased to see them all still there, apparently just waking up and doing their morning preen before their first flight of the day. As the light increases it is a beautiful scene... a small number of them even doing a tiny bit of 'dancing'. Barnacle Geese are also on the move and we are amazed to watch a White-tailed Eagle giving chase to a Hooded Crow - it is surprising just how agile it is for such a large bird. A second White-tailed Eagle also flies around chasing a crow and lands right behind the cranes on the rocks and we are surprised they don't seem that worried about it.

Soon the noise levels start to increase as the cranes start calling more, before leaving the roost. What a wonderful sound in the misty first light of dawn. Then the first birds start to lift. They don't all go together but instead in smaller flocks - and there must be birds hidden behind the bushes as a lot more birds fly out than we can initially see. Several hundred birds take flight in flocks up to a couple of hundred and surprisingly they go off in all directions. We assumed they would stick together but some land in a field in view of where we are and we enjoy some lovely scope views of them through the light mist. As well as the cranes we have several flocks of Barnacle Geese fly right over our heads too and just before we leave a couple of Curlew fly in.

After breakfast we make a start down towards Ottenby again, as today we have booked a visit to the bird ringing station. As we head south we make a stop to enjoy the Great Grey Shrike in the same bushes as yesterday - more wonderful views of this handsome!

We arrive at the bottom end of the island and check the shore for birds, finding the same mix of ducks as yesterday as well as plenty of Barnacle Geese and a small number of Brents. Out on the rocks Roy is pleased to pick out a Caspian Gull amongst the myriad Herring, Common and Black-headed Gulls. We also spot a tricky Red-necked Grebe that keeps diving and a brief Great Crested Grebe that is doing the same. Time passes very quickly and soon we head over to the ringing station, where we are met by Sarah and Gabriel, a guy from the ringing station who asks if he might take photos of us being shown round.

Sarah is excellent, telling us all about the ringing station and how long they have been ringing birds here. They have been maintaining a 'constant effort' ringing

method so that results can be compared and we amused to hear that in the spring there are two mist nets they never use as they weren't originally introduced until the autumn! She is soon interrupted when we spot a Merlin chasing small birds around over the water - a great sighting. She shows us the mist nets and we have a go at flushing birds through the Heligoland Trap - but sadly, since the ringers passed through here a few minutes earlier, there is nothing to flush. At the far end as we are chatting about how the trap works, we are pleased to see a flock of Bramblings drop into the trees and start eating the rowan berries.

As we look round, Sarah releases a Goldcrest from the mist net and finds it is one they rung earlier this morning - but it is a nice opportunity to see the lovely bright orange centre to the crest showing it is a male. It looks so incredibly tiny in the hand!

We head over to the ringing room where they demonstrate how they actually ring the birds and what measurements they take of wings and weight and even the amount of body fat. This means they can sex them, age them and even gain an idea of what condition they are in. They are catching large numbers of Goldcrests at the moment and we are amazed to hear they rang over 730 birds yesterday, of which over 670 were Goldcrests! We see more Goldcrests in the hand, as well as both Robin and Wren. It is interesting to hear how much detail they need to know about each specific species - aging the Wren for example includes counting the number of bars on the longest primary feather!

It has been a really interesting time here and so lovely to see the birds in the hand and some of us even get to let the birds go after they are ringed. Then we head back outside and while we have been here a Shorelark has been found just beyond the car park, so we are very happy to be able to walk such a short distance for such a fabulous bird. We spend a while here just enjoying this beauty, before heading for lunch in the van looking out to the bay and all the birds. As we eat, Roy scans the bay and finds a few new species... Greenshank, Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone.

We decide to try next for a Dusky Warbler that has been found just up the road and arrive to find a group of birders here looking at it in the bushes. Sadly, as we arrive it flies from an easy to view spot into a dense group of bushes and for the next few minutes we are in truth rather shocked by how some people walk straight into the bushes and effectively flush it. They seem very keen to either see or photograph the bird and we feel uncomfortable by how this is going as the bird is pushed further and further into the bushes, so rather than add to the problem, we decide to just walk away and go somewhere else.

This proves a good decision when we find a small flock of Tundra Bean Geese along the road! They are quite close, so we tentatively get out and set up the scopes to enjoy some excellent views. They soon take flight and we realise they have been made nervous by a circling Red Kite... then after they land they are flushed next by a White-tailed Eagle. They settle again and we enjoy more great views before they are flushed by yet another White-tailed Eagle - poor geese!

There seem to be Barnacle Geese all over the island just now and we see a large flock fly over and in the fields are Skylarks galore, White Wagtails plus Goldfinches, Linnets and Chaffinches. There are also at least seven Roe Deer here and a Sparrowhawk appears as we drive away.

We drive on and decide to take a walk down beside the Kings Wall, down to the coast. Initially it seems a little quiet, but it becomes more birdy as we get to the bushes nearer the sea. Here we find countless Yellowhammers. They seem to be everywhere!! There are lots more Skylarks, Tree Sparrows, Blue and Great Tits and several Greenfinches. We also spot yet more White-tailed Eagles flushing yet more Barnacle Geese! Another Merlin appears and heads off into the distance.

Down at the coast we scan the shore, soon finding some new waders, two Ruff and a small group of Bar-tailed Godwits. There are Grey Plover and a huge flock of Barnacle Geese down the coast disturbed by another White-tailed Eagle that lands on the rocks on the shoreline. Another, this time an immature eagle, flies almost over our head and down the shore and it seems the geese perhaps feel safer on the sea, as they create a big raft out on the water. A small flock of Brent Geese fly by and a few velvet Scoters and as yet another White-tailed Eagle flies by we realise there is a Black-throated Diver flying by in the background.

The light is starting to fade and the clouds are getting thicker as we walk back. At the van the rain is just starting, so we decide that it might be best to call it a day and we arrive back at base around 5.30pm... with the chance of a nice break before our evening meal and yet again Susanne excels herself with a truly delicious meal.

**Day 4:** We wake to thick fog and rain, so we enjoy a leisurely breakfast before we finally get going towards the west coast. But first we are aware that Jane M was not with us when we saw the cranes the other day so we decide to see if we can find some for her. Travelling north first, Roy has barely said the words, "I was thinking we should try and find some cranes for Jane" - when a flock flies across the road in front of the vehicle.

We spot more and more flying from where we saw them in the field yesterday, so we take the track down towards the coast again and soon find a flock feeding here. They look great feeding here, but a lot are looking nervous and very upright and soon take flight passing by as they head off.

We turn back and then head across the island, where we stop at the supermarket before driving down to the harbour. There was a report of a Black Redstart here a few days ago and though it feels like a long shot we decide to have a look. We can't resist a look out to sea and we spot a few Tufted Ducks, lots of Goldeneye, a few Red-breasted Mergansers and we are pleased to see a flock of Scaup fly by.

We also spot a couple of Redpoll fly over, plus Greenfinches and then Chris says she has spotted a couple of small birds beside one of the buildings. Watching the spot for a few moments we realise there are in fact four birds flitting around and

wow... four Black Redstarts!! Now that is a real surprise and we feel astonished that not only have we found a bird we had very poor directions for, but then there are also four of them!

Well pleased with ourselves, we decide with the rain still coming down we will grab the chance to visit an old friend of Roy's from previous visits who lives not far away and has offered us coffee and freshly baked shortbread! We spend a delightful hour or more just chilling out and chatting and laughing with Dawn and her husband Bjorn, plus various cats and dogs - a lovely way to spend a bit of soggy time outside and learn a bit more about life here.

By the time we leave, the rain has stopped and we can hear lots of cranes calling and geese too, so we walk a tiny distance up the road and scan the fields. Here we find at least three hundred Common Cranes in the fields and hundreds of White-fronted Geese, with plenty of Tundra Bean Geese amongst them. They are in a tall field of cut corn and you can mainly just see their heads which looks quite amusing - and, as we watch, more and more geese are arriving too and we suspect these birds are coming straight in off the sea and dropping into these fields. In the background more and more geese fill the sky coming in - it is quite a sight! Also, there is a White-tailed Eagle perched in the treetops and in the foreground a bird perched in the tree tops we assume is a Yellowhammer. We give it a cursory check and realise there is no yellow anywhere! It appears to be a Corn Bunting, which seems very surprising here and Roy has doubts but what else can it be - a Yellowhammer with no yellow what-so-ever? It also has that dark spot in the centre of the chest. We take photos to check later, then later hear that a flock of Corn Buntings has been seen today not far from here which makes us feel more confident - but where have they come from? There shouldn't be any north of here at all.

We finally drag ourselves away and stop again a little way along the road to enjoy more views of closer cranes - just wonderful birds. We drive to our next destination where we are hoping to find Black Woodpecker. We have lunch at the car park looking out at the Alvar habitat - flat limestone covered in Shrubby Cinquefoil and no doubt awash with orchids in the summer. There is a plant of Spiked Speedwell still in flower. We then walk down into the trees but is very quiet indeed and the only bird we find for a long time is a Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jane hears tapping. We try for Black Woodpecker but all to no avail. In fact, we see nothing else either!

We walk out a bit further but still find nothing, so we give up and start back towards the van. Almost back we finally find a few birds at last, with Blue and Great Tit, a few Chiffchaffs and several Goldcrests but nothing different.

With the heavy clouds it is getting dark early, so we drive round some of the lanes between here and the coast in the hope of finding more geese and with a lot of luck an Elk perhaps... this is the best area for them... but we have no luck on that front. We drop down to the coast at one spot where we find Nottingham Catchfly - a very rare plant in the UK and on the shore are a few ducks and a couple of Common Seals.

We finally head for home and we're amazed that we are not further away - back home in just fifteen minutes! Another amazing evening meal with incredibly delicious mushroom soup and smoked salmon for main and pina colada made from frozen pineapple and coconut ice-cream for dessert - delicious!

**Day 5:** It is raining again as we gather for breakfast, so we take our time and get going about 9.15am, starting with a quick look for Corn Buntings where they were seen yesterday. We have no luck though we do find some spilt grain from a silo that was presumably attracting them - but all we find is sparrows.

We now head up to Seby Badet, where we get out to try a quick sea-watch. The weather is not ideal and there is rain in the air and a cool wind - and the birds seem rather distant. A flock of Velvet Scoters fly by and there are regular small flocks of ducks passing, such as Wigeon and Teal with a single Pintail. A couple of small groups of Brent Geese fly by and there are a few Red-breasted Mergansers and Goldeneye. Julia picks up a small flock of Long-tailed Ducks and a single Red-throated Diver passes but they are all rather distant. A White-tailed Eagle flies straight out to sea which seems odd, but soon we see it chasing a Herring Gull and wonder if it is playing at being an Arctic Skua! A small group of Shoveler almost pass overhead but the weather is finally beating us and just as we decide to call it a day we spot a single Black-throated Diver flies by.

We also scan back down the coast towards Grasgards Hamn and there is a very large flock of Dunlin and lots of the usual ducks and Jane spots a single Greylag Goose! It is odd to see one on its own like that - and this is our first! We decide to drive back to Grasgards Hamn to see if the waders are any closer from there and as we drive a covey of Grey Partridges crosses the road in front of the van! How lovely to see what has become a rare sight in the UK these days. Back at Grasgards Hamn we find nothing new but there are two White-tailed Eagles sat out on the rocks.

As we drive further north a Sparrowhawk flies across in front of us and we start seeing more and more geese and Common Cranes. There is a massive flock of Barnacle Geese with a few White-fronted and Tundra Bean Geese in amongst them, with even more Bean Geese in the next field. More are flying in even as we watch.

In our hotel there are some wonderful paintings on the walls and we have learned that the artist lives in a village on the way and Susanne telephoned to see if he would be happy to have visitors. So, we make a stop and what a lovely man - so welcoming and chatty and friendly. His artwork is just stunning and we enjoy looking round his studio and most people end up buying some of his large postcards while being kind of tempted by some of the prints.

At first we think the rain has stopped as we leave, but as we drive away it starts up again and as we drive north we decide to head for a coffee instead of birding in the pouring rain. We have been told of a rather traditional café with a shop too,

ideal for presents for people back home looking after the cat. We enjoy coffee here and a look round before heading for lunch. We drop down to the local harbour and park on the grass with a nice view out to sea and enjoy lunch in the vehicle. We are somewhat surprised at how little is passing by - a few Brent Geese, Wigeon and a White-tailed Eagle but little else. After lunch – well I am not sure I want to admit to what happens next but I can't even blame anyone else... as I try to turn the vehicle to leave – we get stuck in a sandy rut in the grass... and the vehicle really digs in in seconds! It is very quickly obvious we can't do much without help or at least spades and Jane and Roy go in search of people who might help. Jane finds a lovely lady called Olsa and initially she provides spades but then comes down herself to see how we are doing and tells us she will go get a friend of hers who has a tractor. We're not sure what we would have done without her as it is not all that long before the tractor arrives and in seconds he has us attached to and pulls us out no problem at all. Hooray! Olsa is super kind and invites us back to her house for coffee and cheese and crackers and olives and such like - how can we refuse!

The next hour or so is just lovely - sitting in her lovely house snacking and chatting with this friendly lady who is full of interest. It really feels like a ridiculous stroke of luck and we all agree that it has turned out remarkably well.

Driving back we enjoy some wonderful views of Common Cranes flying across the road and right over our heads, so we stop and just enjoy them - wave after wave - windows down so we can hear them calling. What a fabulous finish to the day.

But the day is not quite over even after we have enjoyed another superb evening meal as, at around 11pm Roy pokes his head out to check the skies. His Aurora alert says there should be one right now and wow!! Streaks of pink and green arch down and radiate across the sky - so we dash round the rooms of those who said they would like to be woken if such an event occurred and soon a lucky few are gathered outside watching this amazing spectacle – now that really is a fabulous finish to the day!

**Day 6:** We wake to glorious sunshine and geese!! Geese everywhere - flying south in small flocks - vanishing to the south - appearing from the north - the skies are full of them and it is quite a sight. Also, there are Skylarks galore, finches, the garden has Blue Tits, Great Tits and Goldcrests. It is just astonishing what a difference a change in wind direction and a bit of sunshine makes, even in a strong westerly wind!

We are itching to get out and after breakfast we get on our way, heading to the south so we might witness this amazing migration of birds. We drive down the Ottenby via Gronhogen so we can have a quick look for a Moose that was reported earlier but it always felt a long shot. Instead we are delighted to find a lovely flock of Golden Plovers and pause to enjoy close views. As we drive on we spot Merlin and Sparrowhawk - so perhaps a few raptors are on the move as well today? We also find masses of geese - thousands of them! The fields at the far end before we turn off to Ottenby are astonishing with perhaps ten thousand geese or more

- mainly White-fronted but also thousands of Barnacle Geese and perhaps hundreds of Tundra Bean Geese.

As we drive towards the lighthouse there are geese in the air above the trees and flying south in flocks... skein after skein - and there are finches, Skylarks, Wood Pigeons and Stock Doves all heading south too.

We arrive at the lighthouse where it is very windy indeed, but beautiful. There's not much in the garden, just a few Goldcrest and Robins and the wind is howling through the gaps between the garden and the trees, so we head over to a spot where you can stand behind the café. Here it is much more sheltered and even warm in the sunshine and almost instantly we find a Firecrest. What a lovely surprise to find this bird amongst the Goldcrests, Great Tits and Robins.

Looking north the sky is still full of geese but also other birds too. Flocks of Siskins, Goldfinches, Skylarks and surprising numbers of Reeds Buntings. We see Greenfinches, Chaffinches, Bramblings and get astonishing views of a Merlin, slowed down as it passes by the wind. A Peregrine flies across the grassland to the north and we spot several Sparrowhawks - including one that almost seems to hang in the air above us. There is another Merlin, several Yellowhammers and the never-ending goose show goes on. It is simply astounding to watch the sky so full of birds - with geese heading out in flock after flock out to sea and vanishing off to the south. It feels quite moving!

We get good views of a White-tailed Eagle with more distant birds over the woodlands and more Sparrowhawks fly through. Amongst the thousands of White-fronted Geese we also spot occasional smaller flocks of Bean and Barnacle Geese too in smaller numbers. Ducks are also passing over the sea, especially Wigeon but also Teal and occasional small group of Pintail and Shoveler. Even Black headed Gulls seem to be migrating south.

We are tucked out of the wind here and the sun is warm and it is all very pleasant as we birdwatch and enjoy refillable cups of coffee from the café... we feel like we have found the best spot on the island - just perfect! Some of us also decide to go up the lighthouse and at 12 noon we are let in the door and head up the 196 steps to the top.

The view from here is terrific looking straight up the island and seeing all the pools and rocky islands laid out below us. Geese are at eye level now, or almost so and look wonderful through binoculars. We can see many more to the north still and the lines never stop coming. We also scan the birds down below and Jane A finds a few Eiders sat on the shore – amazingly our first of the trip, which is crazy. There are all the usual ducks, thousands of Cormorants, plenty gulls and a few Common Seals hauled on the rocks. We find a Great Crested Grebe and another White-tailed Eagle and spot our first rather distant Rough-legged Buzzards.

We head back down to join the others and the Firecrest returns, allowing more wonderful close views. It feels like lunch time, so we drive north to some picnic tables near the woodland and watch out for raptors as we eat. This works well as we spot Rough-legged Buzzard, more Sparrowhawks and a Peregrine.

After lunch we walk through the wood which seems very quiet. There is a roving flock of Goldcrests but with apparently nothing in amongst them. Stood beside a clearing we give it a bit of time to see if anything crosses over the gap and we're amazed to see something like six Rough-legged Buzzards and a Hen Harrier pass by. These are great view of the buzzards and one is even mobbed by a Sparrowhawk.

Apart from these things the forest is quiet, though we spot a couple of Fallow Deer as we walk on towards the tower. From the tower, with a view across wide grasslands to the coast, there are hundreds if not thousands of Wigeon in the bay, with smaller numbers of Teal, Shoveler and Pintail and a hundred or more Mute Swans. A large flock of Barnacle Geese in the thousands is out there too and still skeins of White-fronted Geese are heading south. We see a distant flock of Knot, some distant Dunlin, several Curlew, Grey Plover and at least four White-tailed Eagles.

Walking back to the car park we pass a few Fallow Deer then back at the vehicle we decide to head back to Gronhogen - utterly astonished to find there are still thousands of geese in the fields we saw them in this morning... how can there still be any geese left! (we later discover that there was a count of over 95,000 White-fronted Geese flying past the lighthouse today - and with the rest seen in the fields we have surely seen over 100,000 White-fronted Geese - and that is before you include the thousands of Barnacle and Bean Geese - and three Greylags!).

Back at Gronhogen we check out a pool where a Kingfisher has been reported recently, a real rarity on Oland. We check the bushes on the shore and within moments there it is flying along the shoreline and landing in the willows and we are soon enjoying great scope views. We head for home feeling well pleased with ourselves - what a day! Migration at its best.

**Day 7:** We start today by heading across to the west side and work our way north... stopping at windmills on the way for the lovely photos they offer. There are also interesting grave fields – as they call them - that look almost like small standing stones. Some of the graves are mounds – some with taller stones and one is a set of stones in the outline of a boat! Sometimes the windmills seem to be in groups of three and we make a stop at one cluster that include one you can go inside.

There is not a lot of room inside them but you can see the grinding stone and where the ground 'flour' would pour down a chute. And on the outside a large 'arm' that was used to turn the entire windmill to face into the wind. A few Yellowhammers are here and we become aware of the sound of Common Cranes

and spot a large flock of them in the fields down below us... they look wonderful through the scope.

We continue on our way and eventually arrive at Beijeshamn, where we walk round to the tower. It is a great view from the tower up towards the bridge and across to the mainland with a large bay full of birds right in front of us. There are hundreds of ducks of the usual species and also our first Whooper Swans amongst lots of Mutes. A White-tailed Eagle is perched on a distant island and there are plenty of Greylags here too.

Scanning further out we find a few Brent Geese then much to Roy's surprise, suddenly in his scope view, there is a Red-breasted Goose!! Wow - this is an excellent find and though annual here, passing through in very small numbers, it is still a big rarity and Roy just can't believe it. He puts the news out on the app and within minutes the first person has arrived asking if it still here. It is then not long before more people are approaching. It has caused quite a stir, with people apparently setting off now from Ottenby and soon there is quite a mini-twitch occurring.

Meanwhile, having had a good look at the goose we continue scanning to see what else we can find and we're pleased when Jane A finds a group of three Spotted Redshank. We find out first Canada Geese too - which is not quite so exciting. We take a walk round towards the point where we find a large flock of Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Golden Plovers, Grey Plover and bar-tailed Godwits as well as more ducks and geese, then suddenly everything starts taking flight as a Goshawk flies in low over the mud. There seem to be a few Reed Buntings and Blue Tits in the reed bed.

We walk back to the van where we have lunch at a picnic table, spotting a superb continental race Nuthatch with that pale chest. The weather is amazing – blue skies and sunshine with a light breeze, but lovely to be out in. We take a walk through the woodlands hoping for Black Woodpecker, but we have no luck. Just Great Spotted Woodpecker again and another Nuthatch.

From here we decide to drive a bit further north into a new habitat. Here we find some mixed conifer and broadleaf woodland - the perfect habitat for Nutcracker. We pause at a spot where we have seen them on previous trips. A calling bird flies away instead of towards us and we glimpse it over the trees, damn, that wasn't the idea! Driving further on we spot what may well have been two more.

Heading across the island we make our next stop at the famous 'Birders Shop' - a lovely place with all things wildlife available to buy. There are binoculars and scope, books, knick-knacks and toys and all sorts and we spend a happy time wandering round and buying stuff. There is also a tv screen with the latest news from the website and Roy checks this out – discovering that a Hume's Warbler has been found as Gråsgård's Hamn!! We started the week by missing the same species in the same place - and we feel it would be great to finish the week by righting that

wrong before we go home. We race down the island, soon arriving at the harbour and finding just a couple of guys staring forlornly into the trees. There do seem to be a few birds here though and for some time we feel quite optimistic as we spot several Chiffchaffs, Goldcrests and Blue and Great Tits – but soon the light starts to fade and our optimism fades with it. Seems the holiday is instead perfectly balanced – missing Hume's Warbler here as the first things and last thing we do.

After another amazing evening meal we present Susanne and Stephan with a card to express our gratitude for a fabulous week of delicious food and great service. They really have been great. Then it is time for the checklist and our traditional round up in which people get to choose a species or two of the trip, a favourite place and a 'magic moment'. This can be a lovely way of remembering the holiday and today is no exception as people re-live the special moments we have enjoyed together.

First of all come the species. Goshawk and Pallas's Warbler both get a mention, with White-fronted Goose getting two after that enormous movement south. Common Cranes have been a real feature of the holiday this time, gaining them three votes and the astonishing views of Merlin gains it three votes too. The winner, with four votes, is Firecrest. We enjoyed such wonderful close views of this little gem of a bird it is perhaps not surprising.

Place of the trip is won hands down by Ottenby – the entire area at the southern tip of the island is so lovely it is not surprising. One person specifically mentioned the top of the lighthouse with its amazing views and one other the spot where we watched White-fronted Geese and Cranes coming into the fields as they arrived on the island.

Magic moments are often more personal and for two people it was the lovely moment when they released a bird after it had been ringed. Goldcrests also get a mention as they passed through in such amazing numbers. One person mentioned the delight of being invited into people's homes for tea and snacks... it was just so friendly. The Aurora gets a mention, but the theme of geese and cranes is a recurring one whether finding the Red-breasted Goose or even Roy's happiness at finding it – but much more so the wonderful sight and sound both as they arrived on the island. Three people mention the moving sight as flock after flock of White-fronted Geese passed overhead and headed out to sea. There was something truly remarkable about the sight of them disappearing out to sea and vanishing into the distance apparently well capable and knowing what they are doing with such certainty. To see such numbers and at eye level from the lighthouse and see them doing this for the entire day was truly remarkable indeed.

Thanks to all for making it such a fun trip too - with lots of laughs and a buzz of chat all the time - it has been a great week.

**Day 8:** We need to drive a very long way this morning to get to Copenhagen, so we decide to have an early breakfast and get on our way by 8am. The weather is not nice

as we drive and in some ways that is better than leaving in perfect weather. We make a stop on the way at a café at a Nature Reserve and enjoy a coffee here surrounded in their Visitor Centre by stuffed animals both real and toy ones! It is amazing to see the enormous size difference between a female and male Goshawk and also Sparrowhawk too. Also seeing the slimness of a Honey Buzzards head compared to a Common Buzzard is interesting too.

We arrive at the airport well ahead of time and enjoy our lunch watching the traffic go by, before dropping off the vehicle and heading onto the airport for our flight back home.

## BIRDS

Mute Swan  
Whooper Swan  
White-fronted Goose  
Tundra Bean Goose  
Greylag Goose C  
Canada Goose  
Barnacle Goose  
Brent Goose  
Red-breasted Goose  
Shelduck  
Mallard  
Gadwall  
Pintail  
Shoveler  
Wigeon  
Teal  
Tufted Duck  
Common Eider  
Common Scoter  
Velvet Scoter  
Long-tailed Duck  
Goldeneye  
Goosander  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Grey Partridge  
Pheasant  
Red-throated Diver  
Black-throated Diver  
Little Grebe  
Great Crested Grebe  
Cormorant  
Grey Heron  
White Stork  
White-tailed Eagle  
Red Kite  
Hen Harrier  
Common Buzzard  
Rough-legged Buzzard  
Sparrowhawk  
Goshawk  
Kestrel  
Peregrine  
Merlin

Coot  
Common Crane  
Ringed Plover  
Grey Plover  
Golden Plover  
Lapwing  
Ruff  
Knot  
Sanderling  
Dunlin  
Greenshank  
Bar-tailed Godwit  
Curlew  
Common Snipe  
Black-headed Gull  
Common Gull  
Herring Gull  
Caspian Gull  
Great Black-backed Gull  
Feral Pigeon  
Stock Dove  
Woodpigeon  
Collared Dove  
Kingfisher  
Great Spotted Woodpecker  
Skylark  
Shorelark  
Swallow  
Rock Pipit  
Meadow Pipit  
White Wagtail  
Robin  
Black Redstart  
Song Thrush  
Redwing  
Mistle Thrush  
Blackbird  
Chiffchaff  
Yellow-browed Warbler  
Pallas's Warbler  
Goldcrest  
Firecrest  
Wren  
Great Tit

Blue Tit  
Marsh Tit  
Nuthatch  
Treecreeper  
Great Grey Shrike  
Magpie  
Jay  
Nutcracker  
Jackdaw  
Rook  
Hooded Crow  
Raven  
Starling  
House Sparrow  
Tree Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Brambling  
Linnet  
Goldfinch  
Greenfinch  
Siskin  
Reed Bunting  
Yellowhammer

## MAMMALS

Roe Deer  
Fallow Deer  
Brown Hare  
Common Seal

## INSECTS

Peacock  
Migrant Hawker  
Great Green Bushcricket

## FLOWERS

Nottingham Catchfly  
Spiked Speedwell  
Shrubby Cinquefoil  
Solomon's Seal  
Lily-of-the-Valley  
Chicory