

Holiday Highlights

Oland in Spring

24-31 May 2026

Guides: Jane and Roy Atkins

Guests: Jane Moore, Marilyn Davidson, Jonathan Kemp, Martin Robinson, Chris Barker, Joan Hunter, Charlotte and Michael Otero, Mollie Lufkin and Trevor Tipler, Liz and Keith Barton

Day 1: After a very early meet-up at the airport we get through security and after a bit of breakfast we are soon on our first flight to Stockholm. Here the new system of security involves us all having to give our fingerprints, but despite the delays we have plenty of time to enjoy something in the café before our second flight to Kalmar.

We are astonished by how easy it all is getting our bags and the hire vehicles and we are soon on our way. We take our time enjoying the drive to the hotel, travelling down the island. We spot our first few species such as Hooded Crow, Jackdaw and Wood Pigeon and there are Swifts and Swallows overhead. Then much more exciting – our first Montagu's Harrier – but frustratingly it disappears far too quickly... we'll have to find more!

Much further down the island we pass three or four Red Kites and are astonished to see the size of the Early Purple Orchids in a field close to the road – they look to be in perfect condition.

We arrive at GammalsbyGården Guest House, where we receive a warm welcome from Stephan and Susanne – and we have a bit of time to settle into our rooms. The weather is perfect, warm and sunny with a light breeze and we enjoy the Swifts cruising around above the guest house. Some of us gather outside in the sun with a drink before our evening meal.

And what an evening meal! As ever the food is truly delicious and we savour wonderful flavours, with everything cooked to perfection. Susanne is such a wonderful cook and Stephen matches her food with excellent wines for those who would like to follow his suggestions. After the meal we gather in the lounge to chat about the coming week and how we hope to enjoy a mix of birds and flowers, migrants and resident birds each day. As we head back to our rooms, we hear a Thrush Nightingale singing!

Day 2: A few people are out and about before breakfast spotting birds down at Gräsgårds Hamn and along the road – including a singing Lesser Whitethroat across the road and a Redstart. The Swifts and Swallows around the guest house are a joy! The weather is glorious – warm and sunny, but with a nice breeze as we head off towards the west side of the island. We are driving along the road when a Yellow Wagtail flies up from the road onto a barn roof. We enjoy fabulous views before

it is chased by another and then a third appears. They are the Blue-headed race. We pass Red Kites and then, as we head north, a Hobby flies across in front of Roy's van. We pass plenty of Skylarks, a few Common Gulls in a ploughed field, Common Buzzard and a Whitethroat.

We arrive at Bejershamn and around the car park we hear Willow Warbler and Thrush Nightingale, before we walk out towards the tower. There are plenty of Greylag Geese in the fields here and a few Barnacle Geese with them – and from the tower we spot a pair of Barnacle Geese with goslings! Astonishingly they breed here so far south. Before the tower we enjoy fabulous views of a Red-backed Shrike perching in the tops of the bushes. In a small pool of water in front of the tower we find Redshank, Avocets, Ringed Plover and a lovely breeding plumage Dunlin. Out on the water we spot a single male Wigeon, Shoveler, plenty of Shelduck, Gadwall and on a distant island loads more Avocets. We enjoy views of both Arctic and Little Terns flying around and fishing in the bay. A flock of around a hundred Brent Geese are heading north out over the sea – a lovely sight. There are plenty of Mute Swans too, and Cormorants.

Dropping down from the tower we talk to a local birder who has found a group of three Temminck's Stints – so we enjoy lovely views of these before we move on. A Brimstone Butterfly flies past as we head on walking round the bay. We enjoy lovely close views of White-Wagtail and more Yellow Wagtails.

We find Celery-leaved Buttercup in the reeds by the path and a couple of Small Copper butterflies. Also a Reed Bunting and we spot a Kestrel as it dives down and to catch something on the shore. Scanning the island there is a flock of Dunlin and no doubt other waders but they are too distant to identify. There are several Great White Egrets out there and we find a pair of Lesser Black-backed Gulls with the very black backs of the Scandinavian race known as Baltic Gull. Walking back, we discover a couple of patches of a yellow flowered vetch called Dragon's Teeth – a rare plant in the UK.

We walk back to the car park where we have lunch at the picnic tables and there is a great mix of bird songs around us: Thrush Nightingale, Garden Warbler, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and more. A Spotted Flycatcher flits around and Starlings and Great Tit visit nearby nest boxes. After lunch we take a walk down the road a short way and can hear a singing Icterine Warbler that refuses to show itself. We enjoy lovely views of Willow Warbler of the rather pale northern race. We also find a nest box where a female Collared Flycatcher comes in and vanishes inside – but despite putting in a lot of time the male doesn't appear.

Walking into the woods here we find some nice plants. Martin points out Fly Honeysuckle, a bush with small creamy coloured flowers and we also see Coralroot, Solomon's Seal, Herb Parris. We work hard and fail to see an Icterine Warbler! Singing loudly but so elusive... but we have more luck eventually getting views of a Collared Flycatcher. While we watch this a Black-spotted Longhorn Beetle flies in and lands on Jane M's head!

Walking back we pause in an open area to see if there are any Pasque Flower with any flowers still. We are pleased to find a few, although most have gone to seed but there is some Sticky Catchfly here and we get lovely views of a Glanville Fritillary.

It is astonishing how time flies, but we still have time to make a stop as we leave to check out a spot we know as 'Pasque-flower Corner'. Here we are keen to see Elder-flowered Orchid and in particular the yellow flowered form which is just gorgeous. There are perhaps five flowers of this colour here and plenty of the purple form – 'though they are going over rather. Martin spots a plant called Tower Mustard and we find a few Twayblades that are not far off flowering. There are few Common Blue Butterflies and on the other side of the road a few strange looking orchids which we eventually decide are just weird Early-purple Orchids. Also here are some rather lovely patches of Chalk Milkwort.

It is time to head for home and we drive back spotting things as we go – Red Kites, Common Buzzard and we stop to enjoy a gorgeous Montagu's Harrier and discover two Wheatears and a few beautiful Linnets. We are setting off but Jane's vehicle does something odd and she can't get going for a few moments – luckily for her minibus the couple of extra moments means they get to see Roe Deer, a lovely male Montagu's Harrier and a pair of Grey Partridges! One she catches Roy's vehicle up we spot another Roe Deer along the road and a superb female Marsh Harrier.

We have an hour's break before another delicious evening meal - then we run through the checklist for the first time and chat about tomorrow before heading to bed.

Day 3: After breakfast we gather outside to check out some Common Cranes that Trevor spotted from his room window. There are six in total, along with a large flock of Greylags in a cropped field and we are delighted with lovely views of them as they feed - such elegant birds. As we watch, a Marsh Harrier passes through quartering the ground as it goes and when we finally get going heading south we catch up with the same bird.

Martin spots a fly by Stock Dove. A little further on a pair of Grey Partridges cross the road and we get amazingly close views of them on the verge. We also stop to enjoy a couple of Brown Hares and discover a pair of Wheatears in the same field.

We make a stop at the church at Ås in the hope of finding a Common Rosefinch but with no luck, so we continue our way towards the south end of the island, pausing again when we spot our first White-tailed Eagle distantly above the trees. We stop to admire a small herd of Fallow Deer, before driving out past the woodland to see the scenery open out into the rather beautiful rocky coastal landscape. Here we drive slowly spotting more Wheatears and an extremely distant harrier that was either a Pallid (there has been one here recently) or a Montagu's. Along the shore and in the pools we find a nice selection of birds, including Ringed Plover, Red-breasted Merganser, Tufted Ducks and a distant White-tailed Eagle

on the rocks. Arctic Terns are nesting here, even right beside the road and it is a real treat to enjoy such close views of these super-elegant birds. A Little Tern is fishing and common birds include Greylags in large numbers and plenty of gulls.

Driving down to the end we scan the coast here too and find astonishing numbers of Goosanders. We find both Barnacle Geese and a Brent Goose amongst the Greylags. We enjoy fabulous views as the White-tailed Eagle flies down the line of rocks, upsetting many birds as it goes.

We head down to the café and enjoy a coffee while we scan the sea and nearby bushes and grasslands. There are many Grey Seals looking like the rocks they are hauled out on, another distant White-tailed Eagle frightens all the Greylags and we watch a Red-backed Shrike flitting around on the fence line. We also enjoy Swallows so close you could have reached out and touched them. We spot both House and Tree Sparrows here and out over the sea a line of migrating Brent Geese.

Where does the time vanish to! It is already approaching lunchtime and we decide to drive further north to have lunch at some picnic tables. As we leave, we check out the birds on the shore again and find a lovely group of Goosander ducklings looking super-cute! We see Linnets in the grass and behind us find two Lesser Whitethroats in the bushes.

When we then arrive at our lunch spot an Icterine Warbler is singing loudly. To our surprise it is showing very well and over the next few minutes it poses quite well in the trees, before flying to a hawthorn bush where at last it sings from right out on top! The sky above the trees is full of House Martins, Swallows and Swifts. A Cuckoo calls and then flies over, providing a great view.

Walking into the trees after lunch we unsuccessfully try finding it. We can hear Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Willow Warbler and we find Spotted Flycatchers. Just a couple of people see the two kites fly above the canopy – it is a brief view, but it is enough to see they are Black Kites! A couple of us get brief views of Red-breasted Flycatcher and after a search some of us also see Wood Warbler for a few moments but, in honesty, the birds are not behaving very well. That is until a Nuthatch appears and he/she behaves perfectly – giving great views as it climbs up tree trunks and out onto branches.

We move on and try a spot where we know a Red-breasted Flycatcher is and when we arrive it shows instantly - in fact too quickly as not everyone has even arrived! It flits around providing a few more views before vanishing. We wait for a while but decide that we may return and try again another day for some of those who missed it. We get superb views of Great Spotted Woodpecker then, before we finally leave, we get a nice view of a male Collared Flycatcher. On the way back we pause to scan the grasslands. Martin brilliantly spots a Whinchat and we find a couple of Curlew.

We decide to finish the day at a Nature Reserve, where Spring Adonis is found. We arrive to see a hobby is racing around the tall conifers before perching in one of the trees – oh wow – what a bird!! We enjoy fantastic scope views before it takes flight and vanishes. The Reserve provides the goods with lovely Spring Adonis flowers in their full glory! There are lots of Spring Adonis plants and many in flower / bud with the special yellow flowers. We also find Small Pasque Flower, Hairy Buttercup, plenty of Cowslips, Bloody Cranesbill and Meadow Saxifrage. A Glanville Fritillary and some rather nice Harlequin Beetles add extra enjoyment and near the vans we see lovely views of Spotted Flycatchers. As we leave we enjoy amazing views of a superb male Marsh Harrier as we drive out – then we head for home, arriving back with an hour to settle in before we eat.

Day 4: After breakfast we have information that there are four Broad-billed Sandpipers at a bay on the west side of the island, so we decide to head straight there. We arrive to find lots of Common Seals on the rocks and enjoy a couple of immature White-tailed Eagles overhead. As we walk towards the bay, we can hear a singing Marsh Warbler! Amazingly it sidles up the reeds and shows well. It vanishes and reappears, so eventually we all get great views. What a fabulous song – with so much mimicry in it – we heard snippets of Goldfinch, Swallow, Blue Tit and Skylark and other sounds that might even be African birds!

We arrive to find no sign of Broad-billed Sandpipers, which apparently were flushed earlier – oh no! There are several Redshank, Ringed Plovers, a single Greenshank and plenty of Avocets, which we enjoy instead. Joan finds an amazing group of seven White-tailed Eagles – which soon becomes eight and with two or three others nearby it is quite a sight!! One appears to control a large piece of meat while the others appear to wait patiently for their turn.

Scanning further out we find lots of Shelduck, a few Gadwall, a single Wigeon, five Great White Egrets and a few Grey Herons. There are plenty of Arctic Terns fishing here too. Roy finds a small group of tiny waders on the muddy vanishing in and out of the ruts. One looks rather gingery and we identify it as a Little Stint, but the others are less richly coloured and look like tiny Common Sandpipers... so surely Temminck's Stints. We think there are perhaps three birds, but when they get disturbed a few moments later at least six fly out!

Once we feel we have seen everything of interest here we decide to move on and head to Station Linné, a local research station where they are doing all kinds of interesting research. They have books for sale and other items and they also sell tea and coffee! As we enjoy our drinks, a young man Jane and Roy spoke to last year arrives called Benjamin. He introduces us to Dr Morten Klint who is one of the lead researchers. We are delighted when he agrees to tell a little about the history of this place and talk about the research into insect DNA here. It is quite a story: the station opened in 1963, but when it was facing closure in 2008 four of the scientists bought it and set up an independent foundation so the research could continue. He enthusiastically tells us about his work with the widespread insect trapping across Sweden and the DNA characterisation for the species caught. The

importance of Station Linné internationally, especially as a bank of worldwide insect DNA samples, seems out of proportion to the size of this place and its location! Most of the work is about insects, but they also research the botany. It is all very interesting. We enjoy their stick-insects and bee house.

From here we head to one of the laybys where there are a windmill, lunch tables and toilets, so we munch our lunch. We are surprised to discover a Tree Pipit in the grass under a tree by the car park and a female Redstart comes into the tree too. We love the little cut out metal ants on one picnic table. Before we have eaten, a White-tailed Eagle flies over circling with a Red Kite and, as we are about to head onto the Reserve across the road, a stunning male Montagu's Harrier appears and puts on a wonderful display.

We cross the road and head out into a Reserve that is a floristically rich part of the Alvaret – a large limestone pavement area but unlike those in the UK without clints and Grykes. This area seems to be flat limestone under a thin layer of soil, coming to the surface here and there and in some areas with denser bushes. It makes for a fascinating habitat, with orchids and other flowers and within moments we are checking out orchids to work out which species they are.

We first see Early Purple and Green-winged Orchids, which look superficially very similar. The Early Purples seem to be amazingly varied in colour and stature! The Green-winged is easily identified: the sepals and petals form a hood over the middle of the flower with the outer ones have obvious strong dark green or bronze veins. We are soon taking lots of photos of the better plants and see the Military Orchids! This is a super-rare plant in the UK but seems to be astonishingly abundant here – and what a beautiful orchid it is with each individual flower having a pale pink hood (like a helmet) and the 'body' with a scatter of dark pink 'buttons' on the front of the soldiers tunic. The flower spikes look lovely in the sun.

We have not gone much further when we find the first Burnt-tip Orchids. What a delight they are – so small and pretty with pink and white spotted flowers and the darker red top to the whole flower spike. Then we start with other flowers, soon finding lovely yellow patches of Hoary Rockrose – here known as Öland Rockrose as this is an endemic subspecies. The other endemic is also here, Öland Wormwood, forming greyish cushions of leaves. We also find stunning bright pink Maiden Pink flowers and there are Shrubby Cinquefoil bushes everywhere, some adorned with lots of yellow flowers. We add Marsh Speedwell, English, Biting and Reflexed Stonecrops, Limestone Bedstraw, Mountain Everlasting, a few plants of Dropwort and plenty of Green Strawberry.

In a damp area we find some rather beautiful Fen Violets, another supremely rare plant in the UK and then as we check out what is in some of the enclosures we add Mountain Clover – a very handsome species. Inside the enclosures it is apparent that someone is doing research work on Elder-flowered Orchid and we have by now found both purple and a few yellow ones. We find Sticky Catchfly coming

into flower and as we start back towards the vehicles we discover a cluster of Alpine Catchfly flowers - they are very pretty!

We are very happy with our findings here, but decide we would like to fit in another couple of stops before heading for home, so we get on our way – pausing enroute at a tiny pond very close to the road. There was a Slavonian Grebe reported here yesterday and we pause to have a quick scan. There is a family of Coots and a few Sand Martins flying around, then suddenly there it is! We enjoy fantastic views through the scopes as it swims and preens not the least bit concerned by our presence not that far away.

Onward to Mörbylånga and the pools here, where we almost immediately find the Red-necked Grebe that breeds here. We enjoy great views of this beautiful bird from the track, then from the platform from where Jane picks out a well-hidden second bird on a nest. A Mute Swan proudly swims into view with both cygnets and goslings! How on earth has this come about? We can only surmise that a Greylag snook in and laid a couple of eggs while the nest was unattended. We can hear a Marsh Warbler singing and when we come down from the platform the amazing song of a Thrush Nightingale is astonishingly loud and very close. Some of us catch a couple of flight views as it flits back and forth and a small number of us manage to get onto it while it is singing but it remarkably difficult, quite astounding given it is so close to us. Walking round the pool we pass a singing Reed Warbler before arriving back at the vans and heading for home.

Day 5: We decide to start the day with a visit to Ottenbylund – pausing to enjoy a beautiful Marsh Harrier enroute. Once at the woodland we head straight for the area where the Red-breasted Flycatcher has been seen, in the hope that with it now being earlier in the day it will be singing, but we have no luck. However, a Collared Flycatcher starts to sing and soon we are all enjoying some fantastic views of this gorgeous bird. What a performer and at times we have full scope views.

As we start back we can hear a Wood Warbler singing, we get some excellent views very quickly and leave it in peace – a lovely bird. We also spot Nuthatch, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and hear both Garden Warbler and Blackcap. There is a nice male Red-backed Shrike in the car park and also Yellowhammers.

Heading back up the island we pass a female Marsh Harrier and pause to check out a Corn Bunting – a scarce species on the island that is gradually increasing in numbers. We pause to pick up the lunches from the guest house, then drive onwards to eat lunch in the garden of some friends of Roy and Jane's.

Dawn and Bjorn don't live very far away from the guest house and they have two pairs of Montagu's Harrier nesting in the fields behind their house. We arrive to find they have set up a lovely seating area in and around a big greenhouse in their garden – and have brought a traditional chocolate Swedish cake called Kladdkaka, which translates as "Sticky Cake" – as well as strawberries and cream and coffee and tea. What a treat to just sit in the sunshine and enjoy these treats as well as our lunch

and from time to time enjoy fabulous sightings of Montagu's Harrier. Dawn and Bjorn chat away answering questions about the island and their lives here and more. We get some astonishing views of the harriers, including a couple of food passes and at times three harriers are in view at the same time. A female Redstart is in their garden too and a singing Icterine Warbler.

Not surprisingly we find we have been here a long time but eventually drag ourselves away and head north – pausing as we pass Hulterstad for fabulous views of Black-tailed Godwits in the wet grasslands here. They show very well and there are Lapwings and a Redshank here too. On the other side of the road, we find a nice selection of flowers including Yellow Oxytropis, Hoary and Common Rockrose, Öland Wormwood, several delightful Burnt-tip Orchids and 'gone over' Pasque Flowers.

Our final stop of the day at Graborg Castle proves excellent. The ruins here are interesting – effectively a ring of rocks but with a complete archway where the entrance would have been. Some of the group go here, first finding Wheatears on the rocks and walls. The rest go directly to the wildflower meadow which proves to be fabulous this year. There are Military Orchids all over the meadow, including a few especially large and impressive ones. We are then delighted to find quite a lot of Fly Orchids and Twayblades in full flower. A Fragrant Orchid is just about coming out and there are two enormous Greater Butterfly Orchids in tight bud still. We find three or four Early Marsh Orchids of the *pulchella* subspecies with plain leaves and a rich purple flower. We are also pleased to find a few Crested Cow-wheat flowers, a large-flowered form of Yellow Rattle, a few flowers of Birdseye Primrose and patches of Viper's Grass.

We head for home and after a break, meet for another amazing meal. We go over the checklist and chat about tomorrow, then those who wish to head out again gather to go in search of Nightjars! We have a spot to try and we arrive just after the sun sets with a beautiful sky and much calmer winds. We arrive to find large patches of a blue flower called Globularia plus Nottingham Catchfly and White-flowered Swallowwort.

We spot and hear Woodcock roding over the trees and once right over our heads, but really it is the incredible birdsong that is astonishing – we seem to be surrounded by singing Blackbirds and exceptionally loud Thrush Nightingales - so many! A Cuckoo is calling and the scene really is fabulous as the light fades. Then suddenly, at around 10.10pm, the first Nightjar starts churring. It is a wonderful sound and we stand transfixed, before suddenly there they are flying towards us! Two birds chasing each other go right past us, round over the car park and back past us again - wow! We are thrilled – it is a better view than we actually expected. Gradually the light fades and the Blackbirds go quiet and just the Thrush Nightingales still singing – joined now and then by the Nightjars again. By 10.30pm it is getting pretty dark and we decide to enjoy a final churring before heading for home - it has been fabulous.

Day 6: The day starts with a lovely rendition of Happy Birthday for Jane A who's birthday is today - and a lovely card that everyone has signed, even Dawn and Bjorn! We head straight down to the Fågelstation (Bird Observatory but it is a much better word!) after breakfast stopping for nothing on the way as we have a deadline to be there by 9.30am for our ringing demonstration. We meet Ellen who is our guide, who does a lovely job of explaining how the observatory has been doing constant effort ringing for the longest of any bird observatory in the world. They use mist nets for part of this and she demonstrates how they work with a fluffy toy mallard called Quack! He flies into the mist net and is deftly removed and placed into a bag for ringing. Next he blunders into the Heligoland trap and after a few efforts he gets himself trapped in the box at the end, where he again is taken out for ringing. We then marvel at how bizarre birds can be when Ellen shows us the wader catching cages. Why on earth any wader worth its salt would push its way into one of these and trap itself we cannot fathom – but apparently, they do! At least when Lobsters go into lobster pots there is food inside!

We then go to watch the ringing process and as we arrive they are just about to release a Barred Warbler! Wow – we are so lucky with our timing. It is great to see this scarce bird, but we are amazed but how few bars it has. We think it is an immature bird as the eye is not very pale either. They have put a call out to nearby birders and quite a queue has built up by the fence hoping for a chance to see one in the hand. We get to watch them ringing and releasing a number of birds after that and all of them warblers – a pair of Blackcaps, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat. There is also a Chiffchaff and a Reed Warbler.

Afterwards we check the bay for birds. There are huge numbers of Greylags, a few Barnacle Geese, a flock of Dunlin and Knot and couple of Bar-tailed Godwits, plus many of the same species as yesterday. Then we go for a cuppa and Jane spots a Stonechat from behind the café -a great Öland tick! We also hear news of a Red-necked Phalarope at the bay we were at the other day, so we decide to go for it! We arrive to hear the bird has already flown away as have a few other waders that were here earlier – we have been a little unlucky it seems with waders on this trip. However, we are delighted when Roy finds a breeding plumage Ruff! It is a gorgeous bird with full rusty coloured ruff of feathers and black cap. There are many birds here we have seen previously, but Martin brilliantly spots a couple of very distant Little Gulls.

We finally head back, having enjoyed what we have seen here, then decide to try for Barred Warbler. Arriving at the site we realise this is more of a long shot than we thought as the wind has really picked up and this is not going to help. We spend a while hoping our sheltered side of the bushes may see some action, but just get a couple of very brief glimpses and finally give up. There are a few nice plants here including Burnt-tip, Green-winged and Early Purple orchids, Öland Rockrose, Öland Wormwood, Green Strawberry and Shrubby Cinquefoil. We also get brief views of a Marsh Harrier.

We head to Gräsgårds Hamn and almost immediately find a female Black Redstart - a nice surprise. We also see Wheatear and a female Red-backed Shrike. Michael spots two Common Sandpipers and Martin once again amazes us by spotting a couple of very distant Sandwich Terns amongst the Arctic Terns. There are Little Terns and lots of Shoveler and it's lovely to watch Swallows gathering mud and straw for their nests.

We drive round to Sebybadet, where we initially enjoy the meadow finding several lovely Early Marsh Orchids, Adder's Tongue, not-yet-open Butterfly orchid sp, Butterwort, Yellow Oxytropis, possible Burnet Saxifrage, Birdseye Primrose and more Early Purple and Green-winged Orchids. On the beach we find lovely flock of Dulin and Jane picks out a 'portlandica' Arctic Tern as it flies by – effectively an immature from last year in a plumage we rarely see because they are usually in the southern hemisphere for a year and so don't return in this plumage.

Back at the guest house we enjoy another delicious meal – but before we get dessert this time someone appears with a guitar! It is a friend of Jane and Roy's from last year when they stayed here – Knut and his wife Maria! They had heard the singing of Happy Birthday this morning so came round to serenade Jane with a wonderful rendition of 'When I'm 64' What a wonderful moment. He plays it well and everyone joins in with the chorus and Jane is delighted... what a wonderful thing to do. Then we enjoy a fabulous birthday cake with strawberries all round it what a treat!

Day 7: Our first port of call today is back at Ås Church where we are hoping to see Common Rosefinch, but we have no luck so instead we decide to try a nearby area on the coast. We drop down to the coastal track and as we go along we find lots of seals on the rocks out off the beach and we're surprised to find a Common Tern perched on one of the rocks. It seems to be struggling to swallow a fish but after a few minutes it finally goes down. A little further on we find a pair of Shelduck females with over 20 tiny cute little ducklings – they are so ridiculously cute! There are lots of Common Seals on the rocks, then at the far end as we get out of the bus there is a Common Rosefinch singing! After spending some time we have still not managed to find the bird, although we have found a Green Woodpecker and other species such as Willow Warbler and Yellowhammer. We decide to walk a bit further and quickly find another singing rosefinch -and this time there it is singing in full view. The only disappointing thing is that it is not a full adult male in red plumage despite the fact it is singing – this is an immature bird, so it looks like a brown female. It flies before everyone sees it and shortly, we relocate it - or another – but this too is brown.

We enjoy coffee and snacks in the sun while enjoying the sunshine, the view (and even a paddle) before we leave. On the way back we stop to enjoy the young Shelducks again and then head to a woodland in the middle of the island.

Here as we walk along the track into the trees, we find Marsh Tit and a singing Icterine Warbler, then further into the forest there is a singing Robin – amazingly

our first of the trip. We add Coal Tit here, including a bird nesting in a hole in one of the walls of an old settlement. A Redstart is singing although we can't find it. We enjoy lunch at the picnic tables by the car park here and just over the wall the Alvaret is covered in Öland Rockrose and Öland Wormwood, plus a few Early Purple Orchids and other plants we are already familiar with. There is a huge amount of Shrubby Cinquefoil here. As we drive out, after we have eaten lunch, we spot one Wheatear after another along the walls as well as several Whitethroats.

We head east for a coffee at a delightful coffee shop at Gårdby, where we sit out on the grass in the sunshine. We are delighted when a beautiful male Redstart appears in the tree beside us. The shop here is interesting with a good selection. Then we head across the island to a spot where Lady's Slipper Orchid grows. As we walk into the wood we pass some flowering plants of Lily of the Valley, as well as Marsh Hawksbeard and several early Purple Orchids. We arrive at the fenced off area where we soon find leaves of the famous orchid, but sadly it is not looking like it is going to flower this year. There are plenty of Common Twayblade in flower and we also spot a frog! It is a lovely buffy colour with a pointed snout and very dark eye-mask and Roy suspects it is an Agile Frog. To check we have to catch it! That proves fun but eventually Roy manages to get hold of it and by putting the leg out in front of it we can check whether the ankle comes beyond its snout – which it does confirming the identification. It is a very smart looking frog. Heading back to the road we pass a Common Spotted Orchid – a nice find.

Our final port of call is Ismantorps Borg and as we walk in we are delighted to spot Birds-nest Orchids! We really were not expecting these, so they are a real bonus. Once by the Borg (castle) we find lots of Military Orchids and another new orchid – the rather attractive Sword-leaved Helleborine. Martin and Roy manage to find Fly Orchid and a couple of early Marsh Orchids too but, sadly, not the other form that Roy has seen here in the past. Inside the borg is it is possible to make out the nine entrances and the amazing layout of the buildings inside. Amongst the ruins are both Wild Liquorice and Angular Solomons Seal.

Time really has run out on us now and we realise we had better get on our way. Back at the car park we find Marilyn has been watching a smart male Collared Flycatcher. As we drive home we pause at the roadside to enjoy the rather gorgeous Snowdrop Anemone, which is a wild flower in Öland and then we head for home as fast we dare drive as we are late!

After yet another superb evening meal we give Susanne and Stephan a card to thank them so much for the remarkable hospitality and superb food – they are a special couple for sure.

Then we head through for coffee and a run through the checklist and the final roundup. Firstly, we go round the group asking for their species of the trip, allowing two species – then, when we realise that everyone has chosen birds, we also add that they have to include a flower as they have been such a large part of the trip.

It very quickly becomes apparent that Montagu's Harrier is going to be the runaway winner as one person after another chooses this species as their top bird. In the end ten votes beat any other species by miles – with the beautiful male Ruff and the Collared Flycatcher coming in next with three votes each. After that over ten bird species get a mention, varying from Red-necked Grebe to Swift to the various ducklings to Nightjar and one person even chose the group! – saying how lovely we had all been... aww! There was also a runaway winning flower – with Burnt-tip Orchid gaining seven votes. Snowdrop Anemone scored two, Fen Violet one, Spring Adonis one and two more orchids getting a mention – Fly and Military.

There was also a nice mix of places, with everything from Ottenby to the lovely wildflower meadow at Graborg, the woodland we visited on the last morning at Ventinge and understandably the dining room gets a mention. But it is Dawn and Bjorn's garden that amazingly wins the favourite place with five votes –it has to be said that it was very special there.

The time at their house also scored well in the Magic Moments but there were many others with some being quite personal. For example, one was the time spent before breakfast enjoying the birdsong and wonderful peaceful feel of the island. Ruff in breeding plumage was another and for one person it was a Swallow flying into their room through the window and perching inside! Knut singing 'When I'm 64' even got a mention, but it was the Nightjar moment that got more mentions than anything else from five people. We all agree it has been a really enjoyable trip, with lots more things that could also have been mentioned too and there are very kind words and a lovely card and wee gifts given to Roy and Jane for leading the trip and making it so enjoyable.

Day 8: We have a bit of time to enjoy some birding before heading to the airport, so after saying our fond farewells to Susanna and Stephan we get on our way. We head to the bay where we started on our first day on the island and finish the trip how we started, by missing a Broad-billed Sandpiper by half an hour again!! What a shame but there is plenty to see and we love seeing some tiny baby Avocets – so cute with their tiny turned up bills. There are many of the same birds we've seen already such as Barnacle Geese and large numbers of Greylags, plenty of Ringed Plover and Redshank and a single Temminck's Stint showing very well indeed. We decide to walk round the bay a little way to see if we can find the sandpiper and soon find a lovely flock of breeding plumage Dunlin. We have great views of Yellow Wagtails and there are White Wagtails on the beach.

At the furthest point we are amazed to find three new birds for the trip! A Meadow Pipit is song-flighting (how have we managed to avoid them all week!) and out in the bay we are delighted to find a male Pintail. Also out there are Shoveler, Gadwall and plenty of Shelducks, as well as about a dozen Great White Egrets. The third new bird for the trip is found by Jean, it is Little Ringed Plover tucked into the corner of one of the small-flooded birds in the field with Redshank and Lapwings. As we start walking back a Swallowtail Butterfly flies through!

Time is flying and we need to have lunch before we leave so we commandeer a picnic table and enjoy a delicious lunch before we head for the airport. We drop of the lunch stuff at a friend of Susanne's place, then pause for petrol on the way and arrive at the airport to discover it is not even open yet! We are amused by the small airport mentality as they don't even open the doors until two hours before the flight. Then it is a flight to Stockholm and on to Heathrow, where it is hugs all round before saying goodbye. It has been a lovely trip with such a lovely group – many thanks to all for the pleasure of your company and all the laughs.

BIRDS

Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Canada Goose
Barnacle Goose
Brent Goose
Shelduck
Mallard
Gadwall
Pintail
Shoveler
Wigeon
Tufted Duck
Common Eider
Goosander
Red-breasted Merganser
Grey Partridge
Pheasant
Slavonian Grebe
Red-necked Grebe
Cormorant
Grey Heron
Great Egret
Little Egret
White-tailed Eagle
Red Kite
Black Kite
Marsh Harrier
Montagu's Harrier
Common Buzzard
Kestrel
Hobby
Coot
Moorhen
Common Crane
Avocet
Oystercatcher
Lapwing
Golden Plover
Ringed Plover
Little Ringed Plover
Knot
Dunlin
Little Stint
Temminck's Stint
Common Sandpiper
Redshank
Greenshank
Black-tailed Godwit
Bar-tailed Godwit
Curlew
Woodcock

Ruff
Black-headed Gull
Little Gull
Common Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Little Tern
Sandwich Tern
Common Tern
Arctic Tern
Feral Pigeon
Stock Dove
Wood Pigeon
Collared Dove
Tawny Owl (h)
Cuckoo
Nightjar
Common Swift
Green Woodpecker
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Skylark
Swallow
Sand Martin
House Martin
Meadow Pipit
Tree Pipit
White Wagtail
Yellow Wagtail
Robin
Thrush Nightingale
Redstart
Black Redstart
Northern Wheatear
Whinchat
Stonechat
Song Thrush
Blackbird
Barred Warbler
Garden Warbler
Blackcap
Whitethroat
Lesser Whitethroat
Reed Warbler
Marsh Warbler
Icterine Warbler
Willow Warbler
Chiffchaff
Wood Warbler
Wren (h)
Spotted Flycatcher

Red-breasted Flycatcher
Collared Flycatcher
Great Tit
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Marsh Tit
Nuthatch
Red-backed Shrike
Magpie
Jackdaw
Rook
Hooded Crow
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Chaffinch
Linnet
Goldfinch
Greenfinch
Common Rosefinch
Reed Bunting
Yellowhammer
Corn Bunting

MAMMALS

Roe Deer
Fallow Deer
Brown Hare
Grey Seal
Common Seal

OTHER

Agile Frog

BUTTERFLIES

Painted Lady
Peacock
Brimstone
Small White
Green-veined White
Orange-Tip
Glanville Fritillary
Holly Bue
Common Blue
Small Blue
Small Copper
Wall Brown
Dingy Skipper
Swallowtail

ORCHIDS

Early Purple Orchid
Green-winged Orchid
Elder-flowered Orchid
Early Marsh Orchid
Common Spotted Orchid
Common Fragrant Orchid
Military Orchid
Burnt-tip Orchid
Fly Orchid
Birds-nest Orchid
Sword-leaved Helleborine
Greater Butterfly Orchid (in bud)
Lady's Slipper Orchid (no flowers)

OTHER FLOWERS (in no particular order!)

Solomon's Seal
Herb Paris
Lily-of-the-Valley
May Lily
Coralroot
Sticky Catchfly Alpine Catchfly
Spring Adonis
Hoary Cinquefoil
Chalk Milkwort
Pasque flower
Small Pasqueflower
Dragon's Teeth
Tower Mustard
Celery-leaved Buttercup
Goldilocks Buttercup
Fly Honeysuckle
Chickweed Wintergreen
Bloody Cranesbill
Woad
Dropwort
Fen Violet
Öland (Hoary) Rockrose
Common Rockrose
Öland Wormwood
Birdseye Primrose
Mountain Everlasting
Vipers-grass
Mountain Clover
Yellow Oxytropis
Common Butterwort
Meadow Saxifrage
Crested Cow-wheat
Shrubby Cinquefoil
Marsh Valerian
Wild Chives
Reflexed Stonecrop
Globularia
Nottingham Catchfly
Maiden Pink
Wild Liquorice
Angular Solomon's Seal
Snowdrop Anemone
Marsh Hawksbeard
Yellow Rattle
Hepatica
Berberis
Adder's-tongue