



OWLS OF FINLAND BIRDING TOUR

24–30 MAY 2027

24–30 MAY 2028



*While exploring the Finnish forests, we will search for the breathtaking **Great Grey Owl**.*

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Overview

Finland is a spectacular place for owls! Exploring the beautiful taiga forests of Finland in search of these mystical birds is the main focus of this Finland birding tour. However, this tour isn't just about the owls and we will also enjoy a great variety of other standout species while in Finland, with particular interest in several grouse species including **Western Capercaillie**, **Black Grouse**, and **Hazel Grouse**.

We plan to spend the first three days of the tour exploring the extensive forests around Oulu. The boreal forests here have a reputation as one of the best sites for breeding owls in Europe; as such, they will be the focus of the first leg of the tour. We will make use of experienced local guides in search of several sought-after owl species. As with all owls, no matter the species, any encounter with these charismatic birds will surely be memorable. Our success with owls on this tour depends heavily on the abundance of voles, which fluctuates between years. In years when voles are relatively scarce, owls tend to be more challenging to find. In contrast, good vole years dramatically increase the chance of finding our owl targets! It's, however, not all about owls in Oulu, and we'll look out for other exciting species, including **Black Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker**, **Wood Warbler**, and **Rustic Bunting**, to name a few.



***Boreal (Tengmalm's) Owl** is yet another of our owl targets on this Scandinavian birding tour.*

During our time around Oulu, we plan to visit Liminganlahti, a remarkable wetland area with abundant waterfowl and waders. Some of the species we may encounter here include **Spotted Redshank**, **Caspian Tern**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Garganey**, **Whooper Swan**, and **Common**

Crane. As a result of the abundance of birds here, the area is frequented by raptors like **White-tailed Eagle**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, and **Peregrine Falcon**. With some luck, we might see uncommon species such as **Broad-billed Sandpiper** and **Pallid Harrier**, the latter of which is considered one of Europe's rarest breeding species. As with the owls, the presence of the harriers is strongly dependent on the number of voles. Another major attraction here will be the presence of breeding-plumaged male **Ruffs** and we may be lucky enough to see some lekking groups; surely a sight to behold.

After our time in Oulu, we will make our way towards the Russian border and the town of Kuusamo. The drive will give us opportunities to explore the extensive lakes of Finland's interior, which may yield **Smew**, **Common Crane**, **Common** and **Velvet Scoters**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Common Goldeneye**, singing **Wood Sandpiper**, and stunning **Brambling**. Once in the Kuusamo area, we will search for eastern species, including **Red-flanked Bluetail**, **Rustic Bunting**, and **Little Bunting**. The subarctic taiga forests here are home to targets including **Grey-headed Chickadee** (Siberian Tit), **Siberian Jay**, and the scarce **Two-barred Crossbill**. Our focus here will be the grouse, and we stand a chance at connecting with lekking **Western Capercaillie** and **Black Grouse**, as well as **Hazel Grouse**.



*The **Northern Hawk-Owl** is one of the few solely diurnal owls on Earth. They are efficient hunters and can often be found along the roadside.*

This tour of Finland forms part of our amazing **Finland and Norway: Taiga and Tundra Adventure Tour**. If you would like to combine Europe's best owl species with the incredibly special species of the Arctic Circle, then why not join this tour. Additional species of interest on this tour include thousands of seabirds (such as **Thick-billed Murre** (Brünnich's Guillemot)), **White-**

tailed Eagle, King Eider, Steller's Eider, Long-tailed Jaeger, Black-throated Loon (Black-throated Diver), **Rock Ptarmigan, Willow Ptarmigan, Eurasian Dotterel, Temminck's Stint**, and much more!

Detailed Itinerary (7 days/6 nights)

Days 1–3. Arrival in Oulu, birding the Liminganlahti wetlands and the Oulu region

Welcome to Finland, affectionately known as the land of the midnight sun. Upon arrival in Oulu, you will be met by the Birding Ecotours tour leader and an expert local Finnish guide. We plan to take it easy on the first evening and enjoy the traditional Finnish cuisine at our comfortable hotel. We will discuss our plans for the trip and assist with anything that may be needed before the tour starts. For the first three days of the tour, we will bird the forests around Oulu, a city of approximately 200,000 inhabitants, surrounded by pristine forests. The long daylight hours mean we can maximize our birding time in this region, which boasts some of Finland's best birding. We'll spend our time birding the magical taiga forests, searching for iconic species in one of Europe's best regions for breeding owls. We will target several charismatic owls here during our first three days.

The **Eurasian Pygmy Owl** is, as the name suggests, our smallest owl target on this trip. This diminutive owl is a ferocious diurnal predator which is often seen hunting around bird feeders in the area. Another smaller owl species here, the **Boreal** (Tengmalm's) **Owl**, is far less conspicuous and best located when nesting. Away from the forests, we may encounter **Short-eared Owl**, an inhabitant of plains and marshes. This species is, however, often quite challenging to connect with, and luck is required.

On the opposite end of the size spectrum, we have the bulky **Ural Owl** and **Great Grey Owl**. Their large size, however, makes them no more straightforward to find, but we stand a good chance of connecting with both species, thanks to the knowledge of our expert local guides. We will dedicate many hours to finding these two iconic species. While birding here, we have an outside chance of seeing **Eurasian Eagle-Owl**; however, due to their tendency to be disturbed at breeding sites, we will need to locate roosting birds – no easy task! The owls will be our primary focus, but the forests here are home to several other avian delights. We will keep an eye out for taiga forest specials such as **Black Woodpecker, Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker**, and perhaps **Eurasian Goshawk** as we explore the forest trails.

June is a delightful time of the year in the forests, with good numbers of passerines including **Bohemian Waxwing, European Crested Tit, Great Grey Shrike, Common Rosefinch, Fieldfare, Tree Pipit, Brambling, Red Crossbill, Eurasian Siskin, and Yellowhammer**. The forests around Oulu can be tricky to bird, but our efforts are usually rewarded with views of sought-after species.



*The tiny **Eurasian Pygmy Owl** is a fearsome predator. Its small size does not hinder it from being an effective hunter in the dense Finnish forests.*



*The massive **Ural Owl** will hopefully be another highlight of our time around Oulu.*

While in Oulu, we will dedicate some time to birding the wetlands of Liminganlahti. This extensive wetland system plays host to a variety of waterfowl and waders, including **Eurasian Curlew**,

Common Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Ruff, Caspian Tern, Black-tailed Godwit, Northern Shoveler, Red-breasted Merganser, and Garganey. Large numbers of young **Whooper Swans** and **Common Cranes** congregate here during the summer months. The abundance of birds attracts raptors, including **White-tailed Eagle** and **Western Marsh Harrier**, and we should connect with **Peregrine Falcon**, a common visitor to the nearby bog. **Terek Sandpiper** and **Pallid Harrier** are scarce breeding birds in the area, and we will be sure to keep an eye open for them both.

Other forest birding opportunities could yield **Wood Warbler, Thrush Nightingale** and **Blyth's Reed Warbler**, and if luck is on our side, **Corn Crake** and **Marsh Warbler**. All of the previously mentioned species have incredible songs, and we're sure to have a good time picking up many species by call.

Overnight (three nights): Finlandia Hotel Airport Oulu, Kempele, Finland

Days 4–6. Birding the Kuusamo region

Before our busy time in the Oulu area comes to an end, we may have time to target **Ortolan Bunting** and other farmland species. We will then make our way to the scenic northern regions of Finland and the town of Kuusamo, close to the Russian border. The journey takes us through breathtaking landscapes featuring pristine forests, picturesque lakes and untamed rivers. We will make a number of stops at productive wetlands and lakes to do some birding. Species seen en route to Kuusamo may include **Smew** (easily one of the world's most stunning ducks), **Taiga Bean Goose, Velvet Scoter, Common Scoter, Common Crane, Osprey, Eurasian Whimbrel, Green Sandpiper, Common Goldeneye, Wood Sandpiper**, and **Little Gull**, among others.

Closer to Kuusamo, the landscapes become interspersed with large sections of taiga forests – the preferred habitat of several exciting species, such as **Willow Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Brambling, Bohemian Waxwing**, and **Eurasian Siskin**.

After arriving in Kuusamo, we plan to explore the excellent habitats near the town. One of the major drawcards of this area is the opportunity to see grouse at their lekking sites. We will target three grouse species in the area: **Black Grouse, Western Capercaillie**, and **Hazel Grouse**, although the latter won't be seen lekking. For all these grouse, an early morning start is essential, and we will try to be on-site at 03:30 am – before it starts to warm up! While enjoying the grouse, other distractions might include species with restricted ranges in Europe, like **Red-flanked Bluetail, Rustic Bunting, Little Bunting**, and **Grey-headed Chickadee** (Siberian Tit). These are all wonderful species and a massive bonus while birding this area.

In addition to the abovementioned range-restricted European species, we hope to add true forest specials like **Siberian Jay, Parrot Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak**, and **Black Woodpecker**. At the same time, grassland patches within the forests may yield **Rough-legged Buzzard** and **Common Rosefinch**.

We won't forget about the owls though, and one of our other big targets around Kuusamo is the impressive **Northern Hawk-Owl** – a species often seen on roadside wires and fence posts as it scans for prey. Luckily, this is one of the world's few solely diurnal owl species, making it easier to find than other owl targets on this tour. Wetlands and lakes around Kuusamo should provide us with species not seen near Oulu, like **Red-necked Grebe, Spotted Redshank**, and perhaps **Jack**

Snipe. The forests close to town will give us additional chances at **Northern Hawk-Owl**, plus **Western Capercaillie**, **Black Grouse**, and **Hazel Grouse**.



*Lekking **Western Capercaillie** will hopefully be a tour highlight.*



*The striking **Black Grouse** may be seen in forest clearings near Kuusamo.*

The pristine forests of the Oulanka National Park area, the westernmost limit of the taiga or boreal coniferous forest zone, will undoubtedly be a unique experience. In addition to the typical Finnish scenery, the lichenous pine forests in Oulanka's river valley offer a variety of northern, southern and eastern species. Our primary target in the area will be the stunning **Red-flanked Bluetail**, a species we will search for by walking up Valtavaara Hill, where the birds are usually vocal. The general area will give us another shot at the often-challenging **Hazel Grouse** and **Siberian Jay**, in addition to **Golden Eagle**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Red-necked Grebe**, **Little Gull**, **European Pied Flycatcher**, and **Common Redstart**. It's not all birds here, and we may even encounter large mammals like (European) **Brown Bear** or **Moose** (called Elk in Europe!).

Overnight (three nights): Holiday Club Kuusamon, Tropicke, Finland



*We will search for **Siberian Jay** in tall conifer forests around Kuusamo.*

Day 7. Departure from Kuusamo, or cross into the Arctic Circle to continue with longer tour

Today we fly out from Kuusamo (or we can organize a road transfer back to Oulu), alternatively you can continue with our longer tour into the tundra of Norway.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes must use a different guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.

Tour Details

Duration:	7 days
Group size:	4–12
Dates:	24–30 May 2027 24–30 May 2028
Start:	Oulu Airport, Oulu, Finland
End:	Kuusamo Airport, Finland
Prices:	€ 5,358 per person sharing – based on 4–12 participants (2027) € 5,679 per person sharing – based on 4–12 participants (2028)

Single supplements: € 519 (2027)
€ 550 (2028)

In the event of fewer than eight participants signing up to the tour there will be the option of a surcharge to guarantee departure. The amount of the surcharge will depend on how many participants are signed up to the tour and will occur if all participants agree.

Price includes:

All accommodation (Day 1 until Day 7 as described above, or similar)
Meals (from dinner on day 1 until breakfast on Day 7)
Drinking water – please bring a refillable water bottle
Expert tour leader
Local bird and wildlife guide fees
Birdwatching site entrance fees and travel permits
All ground transport and tolls/taxes while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Expenditures due to flight cancellations/delays or other causes beyond our control (force majeure)
Visa fees if visa required
Departure tax
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))

Useful information

Throughout the duration of this tour, you will be driven by your guide in a comfortable vehicle. Some of the target species on the tour require walking and hiking; if you wish, longer hikes may be available at some sites. Occasionally, these hikes will be on steep, slippery, and uneven terrain, so it is advisable to ensure that you are reasonably fit for this tour.

As Scandinavia is particularly expensive and the costs involved with this tour are large, we choose to run this tour with a slightly larger group to keep costs down for everyone involved. Thankfully, the habitats we bird in on this tour suit larger groups. As such, the overall tour experience is not reduced with a larger group.

The weather can be unpredictable, with day temperatures varying from 25°C to -8°C, depending on wind strength and direction. Nocturnal temperatures are usually cold, and due to the lengthy days (the sun may not set at all), many of our birding sessions will take place either early in the morning or late in the evening.

Insects can often be a nuisance in forested areas, and it is highly advisable to bring enough insect repellent. It may be easy to forget, but the UV index can be high at these latitudes, so sunblock is recommended.