

Eider ducks and the Aurora Borealis in Varanger

This tour concentrates on the wintering birds of Northern Norway and along the border with Russia. Even in early April, daytime temperatures can be low. We have exceptional opportunities to watch and observe many familiar and uncommon European bird species that winter in and around the Varanger Fjord, which includes various owls, ducks and High Arctic species.

Please note you should arrive in Oslo on April 2nd as the flight to Kirkenes is early on the 3rd.

Day 1: Fly to the mining town of Kirkenes in extreme northern Norway. On arrival we drive towards the taiga forest in the Pasvik valley, where our base is at Svanvik for two nights. The vegetation of Pasvik is dominated by pine and birch forests.

Day 2: We birdwatch along the border with Russia and in the Pasvik National Park. Some of the species we look for include Western Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Pine Grosbeak, Siberian Jay, Siberian and Willow Tits, Arctic Redpoll and the northern race of Eurasian Bullfinch which often forms small flocks. Birds of prey include Merlin and White-tailed Eagle. We also have a good chance of seeing Northern Hawk-Owl, Short-eared Owl and, if it is a good rodent year, Great Grey Owl.



Pine Grosbeak Photo: Anders Mæland

Dates

Saturday April 3rd – Friday April 9th
2021

Leaders: Anders Mæland

Group Size: 7

Birds: 60-90

Resident species of interest include Great Spotted, Lesser Spotted and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers and Bohemian Waxwing.

Day 3: Drive towards the Varanger Peninsula. As we cross the Tana Valley with its rocky outcrops we should keep an eye out for Rough-legged Buzzard, Golden Eagle and Northern Hawk-Owl, which are a distinct possibility along the road. Stunted willows attract flocks of Arctic Redpolls. At the highest elevations of our journey the road edges and any exposed rocks may have Willow and Rock Ptarmigan, both of which will be in their white winter plumage. Eventually we approach Batsfjord, which will be our base for the next two nights.

Day 4: Today is spent birding around Batsfjord and Berlevåg. The landscape and scenery are quite dramatic with snowfields, frozen lakes and Arctic tundra. The fishing port of Batsfjord has Steller's, King and Common Eiders at close range along with Long-tailed Duck and Common Merganser. In the afternoon we drive slowly towards the isolated settlement of Berlevåg. This can be a productive area in late winter for Merlin, Gyrfalcon and Rough-legged



Steller's Eider Photo: Anders Mæland

Buzzard. The harbour at Berlevåg often holds large numbers of gulls which may include Glaucous, Iceland and the northern races of Herring. In recent years both Ivory and Ross's Gulls have put in an appearance. Shorebirds present include Purple Sandpiper.

Day 5: Today we drive back over the mountains towards the spectacular Varanger Fjord, a huge indented sea loch where White-tailed Eagles are particularly numerous. Stops along the shore at Nesseby, Varangerbotn and Vestre Jacobselv allow good vantage points for viewing into the fjord and we should find White-billed and Red-throated Divers, Common and Velvet Scoters, Black Guillemot and the three eider species. Transfer to Vadsø for two nights.

Day 6: This morning we visit the fishing port at Vardø for a trip to the fantastic seabird cliffs at Hornøya. It is a short boat trip from the harbour to the cliffs where Common and Brünnich's Guillemots, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, Black-legged

Kittiwake and European Shag all breed. Later in the day we make visits to Svartnes and Kiberg harbours in search of anything we may have missed earlier in the tour.

Day 7: Return to Kirkenes for our flights south to Oslo and on to London, with arrival later the same day.

Prices

Ground Price: £1,795
 Single room: £160
 Deposit: £200
 *Air Fare: £510

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation, meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature. Night in Oslo and meals on the 2nd.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*