Finland & Norway

Forests and Fjords



Yellow-billed Loon by Paul Varney

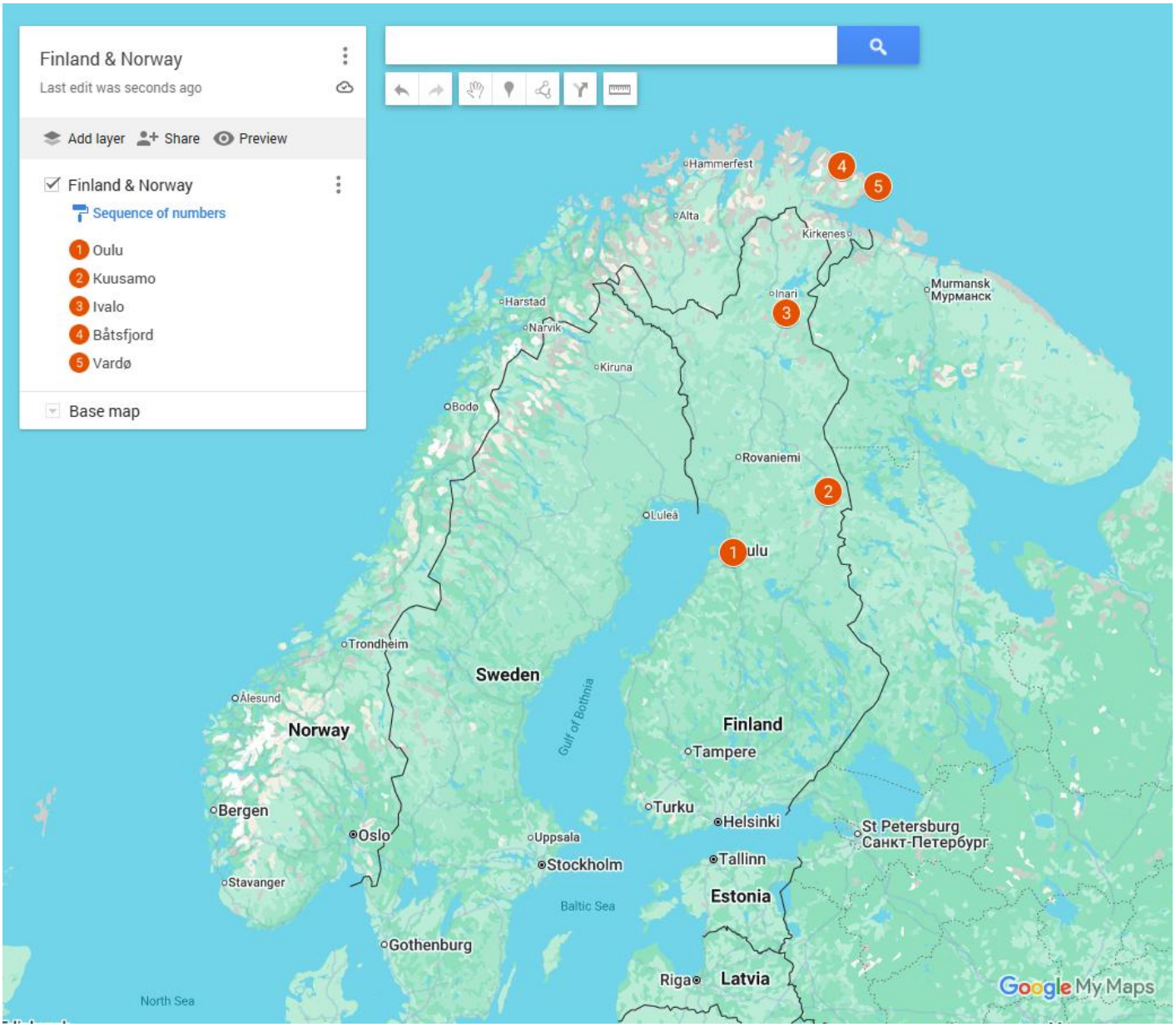
This cracking tour will take us through Siberian taiga forests of central Finland through to the northern coasts of Norway. We begin our birding in Oulu, where we will search for numerous breeding owls such as Great Grey, Ural, Northern Hawk, Boreal, Eurasian Pygmy and Short-eared Owls. Moving northeast, we will visit Kuusamo where we can expect a veritable feast of specialities, including Hazel Grouse, Western Capercaillie, Willow Ptarmigan, Red-necked Grebe, Little Gull, Eurasian Three-toed and Black Woodpeckers, Siberian Jay, Bohemian Waxwing, Siberian Tit (Grey-headed Chickadee), Red-flanked Bluetail, Parrot Crossbill, and Little and Rustic Buntings.

Then it is northwards to cross the border into Norway, birding the scenically superb, bird-rich Varanger Peninsula. At such a northerly latitude, this really is the 'Land of the Midnight Sun'. Amongst the numerous specialities we can expect to see are such sought-after species as Rock Ptarmigan, Red-throated, Black-throated and Yellow-billed Loons, Common Merganser, Glaucous Gull, Common and Brünnich's Guillemots (Common and Thick-billed Murres), Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, Bluethroat, Red-throated Pipit, Arctic Redpoll and Lapland Longspur.

Comfortable accommodation and long summer days, surrounded by spectacular landscapes and birds, ensures that Lapland and the Arctic Circle are one of Europe's classic birding destinations.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrive in Oulu (Finland)**
Day 2	**Oulu area & Liminka Bay**
Day 3	**Oulu to Kuusamo**
Days 4 & 5	**Kuusamo**
Day 6	**Kuusamo to Ivalo**
Day 7	**Ivalo to Båtsfjord (Norway)**
Day 8	**Båtsfjord**
Day 9	**Båtsfjord to Vardø**
Days 10 & 11	**Vardø and Hamningberg area**
Day 12	**Vardø to Ivalo**
Day 13	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail

Oulu area. We will spend some time in the coniferous forests of the Oulu area, where we have a good chance of spotting Black Grouse, Lesser Spotted, Black and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers, and Eurasian Crested Tit, plus the chance to see some truly magnificent owls, namely Great Grey, Ural and Northern Hawk-Owls.



Ural Owl by David Hoddinott

Nearby sites have a wide selection of European species such as Greylag Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Great Crested Grebe, Western Marsh Harrier, Northern Lapwing, Common Redshank, Common Tern, Western Jackdaw, Rook, Eurasian Blue Tit, Sedge and Garden Warblers, Lesser Whitethroat, European Pied Flycatcher, Whinchat, European Greenfinch, Eurasian Siskin, Redpoll, Common Rosefinch, Yellowhammer and Common Reed Bunting. We will also search for some shy and elusive Finnish owl species, including Eurasian Pygmy and Boreal Owls.

Liminka Bay. Situated around 25km (16 miles) south of Oulu, this is a great location for waterfowl and shorebirds, and targets include Garganey, Little Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Spotted Redshank, Common Greenshank, Ruff and Caspian Tern.



Ruff by Paul Varney

Eurasian Bittern can regularly be heard at this site but is difficult to see. Numerous migratory birds also come to rest here, while hundreds of young Common Cranes and Whooper Swans spend the summer here. If we are lucky and the wind is in the north, we may witness a fantastic spectacle when hundreds – if not thousands – of waders can be seen. There are several observation towers providing ideal vantage points to view the waterbirds, as well as White-tailed Eagle, and Hen and Western Marsh Harriers; even Pallid Harrier is sometimes seen in this area. The latter is a rare breeding species in Finland and we would require a healthy dose of luck to see it. Altogether, about 170 bird species occur in the Liminka Bay area. During our visit a delicious lunch will be served at the Liminka Bay Visitor Centre. Other birds in the Oulu area that we

have a chance of seeing are Horned Grebe, Common Kestrel, Terek Sandpiper, Little Tern, Wood Warbler and Ortolan Bunting.

Kuusamo area. Kuusamo is a small city close to the Russian border. As the various bogs and lakes in the area thaw after winter, an irruption of insect life triggers the onset of a frenetic breeding season during the short Arctic summer. Here we can expect to find Wood, Green and Common Sandpipers, Common Snipe, Spotted Redshank replete in its all-black plumage, Common Greenshank and Eurasian Whimbrel. We also have chances to look for the elusive Broad-billed Sandpiper. Other species associated with the bogs, wetlands and edge habitat include Taiga Bean Goose, Smew, Common Crane, Merlin, the *thunbergi* subspecies of Western Yellow Wagtail (known as Grey-headed Wagtail) and Common Reed Bunting. We'll also look for Red-necked Grebe, Black-throated Loon and Little Gull, which nest on the lakeshore.



Northern Hawk-Owl by David Hoddinott

We'll also work our way through the extensive taiga forests where we can expect to encounter a feast of Eurasian specialities, including Red-flanked Bluetail, Brambling, Red and Parrot Crossbills, Pine Grosbeak, Siberian Jay, Siberian Tit (Grey-headed Chickadee) and Bohemian Waxwing. More widespread species that we might find include European Robin, Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Common Redstart, Willow Tit, Song and Mistle Thrushes, Eurasian Siskin, Redpoll and Eurasian Bullfinch. Other sought-after species that we will target in these forests are Black and Hazel Grouse, Willow Ptarmigan, Western Capercaillie, Eurasian Three-toed and Black Woodpeckers, and both Rustic and Little Buntings, which nest in the boggy areas of the forests, often close to lakes and rivers. White-throated Dipper occurs on some of the rivers winding through the forest.



Siberian Jay by Adam Riley

Ivalo. Located on the banks of the Ivalo River in Lapland, Ivalo is a very useful base to begin our tour of northern Finland. Our initial exploration of the forests and wetlands around town should turn up Taiga Bean Goose, Whooper Swan, Tufted Duck, Common Goldeneye, Smew, Common Crane, Ruff, Common Snipe, Hooded Crow, Northern Raven, Bohemian Waxwing, Great Tit, Willow Warbler, Fieldfare, Redwing, European Pied Flycatcher, Western Yellow Wagtail, Tree Pipit, Brambling, Red Crossbill and, if we are lucky, Little Bunting.

Ivalo to Båtsfjord. Our drive will initially pass through a veritable mosaic of taiga forest and

bogs. We will make regular birding stops to observe the spectacle of lekking Ruff and enjoy displaying and breeding Eurasian Whimbrel, European Golden Plover and Temminck's Stint. In the boggier areas, we will search for Broad-billed Sandpiper, Jack Snipe and Red-necked Phalarope. In the taiga forest we have chances of finding some of the tour's major target species today in the form of Siberian Jay, Grey-headed Chickadee (Siberian Tit) and the reclusive Pine Grosbeak.

Båtsfjord. Here in the northern part of Varanger we will search the bays and fjords for rare ducks and gulls, and we will return to the highland fells to search for the elusive Rock Ptarmigan and the stunning Eurasian Dotterel, as well as other specialities of this inhospitable terrain. We also have an outside chance of coming across the immaculate, but very nomadic, Snowy Owl, but it is impossible to predict in advance where these owls may or may not pitch up.

Båtsfjord to Vardø. We leave the mountainous terrain behind as we head to Vardø, and the incredible and justly famous Varanger Fjord. Today we may find a Golden Eagle soaring over the high cliffs, and we have a very slim chance of finding the magnificent Gyrfalcon. Other species of interest that we can expect to find today include Temminck's Stint, Horned Lark, Ring Ouzel, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting.



Great Grey Owl by Adam Riley

Varanger Fjord. We shall spend our time birding the Varanger Fjord shores en route to Vardø, situated on the far east of the peninsula, making our first stop at the innermost part of Varanger Fjord, near the town of Varangerbotn. We can expect a bevy of new and exciting species. The shoreline will be abuzz with large concentrations of waders and, depending on the climatic conditions, we might see our first Little Stints and Red-necked Phalaropes on migration to their breeding grounds. We continue moving eastwards along the coast road, making further stops to search through flocks of Common Eiders and Common Scoters – perhaps finding a lingering King or Steller's Eider, but both species are only reliable winter visitors to Varanger these days. We will also look out for the stunningly plumaged Yellow-billed Loon (White-billed Diver) and can also expect to find a number of White-tailed Eagles perched near the road and Rough-legged Buzzards overhead.



Horned Grebe by Paul Varney



Atlantic Puffin by Paul Varney

Lying well north of 70 degrees, the 'Land of the Midnight Sun' is a truly Arctic experience. At this time of year, we can expect variable weather from warm and sunny conditions along the protected coastal areas to truly frigid conditions should the wind be blowing in off the Barents Sea. We will divide our time birding the shallow bays, intertidal mudflats, sea cliffs and tundra bogs. We have a plethora of highlights and incredible photographic opportunities to look forward to. Certainly, one of the major attractions here is the opportunity to see some of the world's wader species in their finest breeding plumage rather than their dull grey wintering dress. The host of resplendent species we can expect to have close-up views of include Common Ringed Plover, Red Knot, Temminck's and Little Stints, Red-necked Phalarope, Sanderling, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, Purple Sandpiper, Ruff, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Bar-tailed Godwit and Common Redshank. Inland bogs and moors hold good numbers of European Golden Plovers and attractive Long-tailed Skuas (Jaegers). Wildfowl are both common and numerous, and include Greater Scaup, Common Shelduck, the exquisite Long-tailed Duck, both Common and Velvet Scoters, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers and Common Eider. The shallow pools and bays should turn up most of the world's loons (divers) including Red-throated, Black-throated and Yellow-billed Loons.

Time spent on the north-easterly headlands near the abandoned fishing village of Hamningberg are likely to be rather cold, but rewarding with Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) and rarely Pomarine Skua (Jaeger) harassing both Arctic Terns and Black-legged Kittiwakes alike. Further out to sea we should find Great Cormorant, Northern Fulmar, Northern Gannet and various species of auks. Should sea conditions allow, we will take a short boat ride to Hornøya Island, not far from Vardø. Glaucous Gull is a regular sight in the harbour, while the steep cliffs of Hornøya host a huge seabird colony, allowing for excellent views of European Shag, Black-legged Kittiwake, both Common and Brünnich's Guillemots (Common and Thick-billed Murres), Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill and Black Guillemot. Aside from all the wildfowl, waders and seabirds, we should also find a smattering of passerines such as Bluethroat, Lapland Longspur, Eurasian Rock, Meadow and Red-throated Pipits, Twite and Arctic Redpoll.



Western Capercaillie by Adam Riley

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels.
Birding Ease		Moderate to undemanding. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Reasonably easy. Most walks on flat ground, paved/gravel roads. A few longer hikes on rougher ground with short inclines (optional). Some boggy areas.
Vehicles / Roads		Good quality sealed roads & unsealed dirt roads. Some long drives broken up with birding stops.
Photography		Good to very good.
Annoyances		Very long days with some very early mornings. Weather is variable, shifting quickly from mild to cold, or very cold due to wind chill. Small biting insects can be numerous under the right weather conditions.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- All lodgings;
- Ground and boat transportation as noted in the itinerary;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (**including bottled water** and mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (18 lb) for hand luggage.
- This tour does spend quite a lot of time birding on foot. Many of the walks are gentle in nature, through forests, lowlands, and coast. None of the walks are particularly demanding. All walks, however, are optional.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a generally high standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of are very comfortable. There is no camping on this trip.

Seasonal Timing & Weather Variability

This tour is scheduled to coincide with what has historically been the most productive period for birding in the region. However, weather patterns, including temperature, rainfall, snow cover, wind strength and wind direction, as well as broader environmental factors such as food availability, can significantly influence migration timing, breeding activity and bird distribution from year to year. In some seasons, key events such as migration peaks, breeding cycles or post-breeding dispersal may occur earlier or later than average, and the duration of these peak periods can be surprisingly brief. At migration bottlenecks in particular, prevailing wind conditions can have a major impact on the volume and diversity of birds moving through an area on any given day. While our itinerary is designed around long-term historical patterns and offers excellent birding prospects, no fixed-date tour can guarantee that it will coincide precisely with the absolute peak of every seasonal phenomenon. Guests whose primary objective is to experience a specific migration event or seasonal spectacle at its peak may wish to consider a Tailor-made Tour, where travel dates and locations can be adjusted closer to departure in response to prevailing conditions.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour will depart from Finland's Oulu Airport (IATA: OUL) on day 1 and conclude at Finland's Ivalo Airport (IATA: IVL) after breakfast on day 13.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Ivalo Airport (IATA: IVL) and Oulu Airport (IATA: OUL) are well connected to Helsinki International Airport (IATA: HEL), the main international port of entry into Finland for these tours.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.