Finland & Norway

Forests and Fjords

Wolverine & Brown Bear Extension



Western Capercaillie by Adam Riley

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 Ivalo, first heading 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, King Eider, Common Merganser, Glaucous Gull, Common and Brunnich's Guillemots (Common and Thick-billed Murres), Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, Bluethroat, Red-throated Pipit, Arctic Redpoll and Lapland Longspur.

Heading back south into Finland, 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, Black and

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers, Siberian Jay, Bohemian Waxwing, Siberian Tit (Grey-headed Chickadee), breeding Red-flanked Bluetail, Parrot Crossbill, and Little and Rustic Buntings. Moving on to Oulu, we will search for numerous breeding owls such as Great Grey, Ural, Northern Hawk, Boreal, Eurasian Pygmy and Short-eared Owls. 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.

Our Wolverine and Brown Bear Extension takes us to central Finland, offering great mammal watching and photographic opportunities from specially built hides. The carefully selected sites provide almost daily sightings of both Wolverine and Brown Bear, whilst Eurasian Lynx and Gray Wolf are occasional visitors.

Itinerary & Map

Forests and Fjords

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

Wolverine & Brown Bear Extension

Day 1	**Arrival in Oulu, transfer to Koli**
Day 2	**Koli to Lieksa**
Day 3	**Lieksa**
Day 4	**Lieksa to Viiksimo**
Day 5	**Viiksimo**
Day 6	**Viiksimo to Oulu & final departure**


Båtsfjord
Vardø
Tana
Ivalo
Kuusamo
Oulu
Viiksimo
Lieksa
Koli
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
Image Landsat / Copernicus
Image IBCAO
Google Earth

Birding sites in detail



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 towards Vardø (Norway). 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.

Shortly after crossing into Norway at Utsjoki, we will reach the incredible and justly famous Varanger Fjord.

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 for the rare King Eider and perhaps, if we are lucky, a lingering Steller's Eider, but this species is only a winter visitor 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.



King Eider by Forrest Rowland

Lying well north of 70 degrees, the 'Land of the Midnight Sun' is a truly Arctic experience. At this time of year,



Horned Grebe by Adam Riley

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 and (if we are lucky) King Eiders. 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.



Great Grey Owl by Adam Riley

Vardø to Båtsfjord. After leaving Vardø, we'll head further northwards to explore the mountainous terrain en route to Båtsfjord. 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



Hazel Grouse by Adam Riley

expect to find today include Temminck's Stint, Horned Lark, Ring Ouzel, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting. We will spend a night at the only inhabited village on the north-eastern part of the peninsula, Båtsfjord.

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 Ivalo (Finland). Retracing our steps through the tundra and the taiga, we shall make regular stops to break up the journey and enjoy further sightings of the many birds we have already seen. We also have a chance of finding Northern Hawk Owl, a species often seen perched atop a tree or pole, quietly surveying its surroundings.

Ivalo to Kuusamo. Continuing south through the untamed northern landscape blanketed with forests, bogs and expansive lakes and rivers, we will eventually reach Kuusamo, a small city close to the Russian border, crossing the Arctic Circle on our way south. As the various bogs and lakes thaw after winter, an irruption of insect life triggers the onset of a frenetic breeding season during the short Arctic summer. En route we can expect to find Wood, Green and Common Sandpipers, Common Snipe, Spotted Redshank replete in its all-black plumage, Common Greenshank and Whimbrel. We also have further 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. The late afternoon will be spent in the general Kuusamo area where we will look for Red-necked Grebe, Black-throated Loon and Little Gull, which nest on the lakeshore.



Three-toed Woodpecker by Adam Riley

Kuusamo area. We have a good amount of time to explore this wonderful area. Working our way through the extensive taiga forests, 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



Northern Hawk-Owl by David Hoddinott

Mistle Thrushes, Eurasian Siskin, Common 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. Another bird of particular interest here is the heuglini subspecies of Lesser Black-backed Gull, often considered a full species as Heuglin's Gull.

Kuusamo to Oulu. After some final birding in the Kuusamo area we will head south-westwards to Oulu, situated at the head of the vast Baltic Sea. In the afternoon we will explore areas close to Oulu for a wide selection of European species. Possibilities include 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, Common 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, which nest in May and June.

Oulu area. We will spend some of the day 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.

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.

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



Ural Owl by David Hoddinott



White-tailed Eagle by Glen Valentine

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.

Oulu to Koli. We have a fairly long drive of 350km (4 ½ hours) to Koli. Depending on our arrival time, we may have time to visit the Ukko Visitor Centre and explore the surrounds of Koli. We may find commoner species such as Fieldfare, Eurasian Siskin and Red Crossbill, or get lucky with Black Woodpecker or Hazel Grouse.

Koli to Lieksa. We have some time this morning to bird the Koli area before heading to Lieksa, around an hour away.

Lieksa. We will dinner in our hotel in the early afternoon, before making our way to the Wolverine hide near Kontiovaara. After some welcoming coffee and a briefing, we'll move to the Wolverine hides for the night.



Wolverines by Jari Peltomaki



Brown Bear by Jari Peltomaki

Outdoor snacks are provided for the hide stay, and there are bunk beds, sleeping bags and pillows for those who wish to rest during the night.

The Wolverine is a solitary and scarce animal that somewhat resembles the Honey Badger, or a small bear with a long tail. In Europe, Wolverines occupy only the northern regions of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. There are between 270 and 300 Wolverines in Finland, with individuals crossing over the Russian border frequently. They have big territories and they can cover great distances each day, scavenging for anything edible. Voracious feeders, they can devour food quickly in big chunks – even their scientific name *Gulo* means glutton! Wolverines have a thick oily coat which is highly hydrophobic, making them resistant to frost.

Wolverine watching takes place during the light summer nights. By staying in comfortable hides overnight, you maximize the chances of seeing and photographing these beautiful animals. Wolverines can be seen all year round as they do not hibernate. However, we have timed our visit to optimise the length of light night to allow for the best visuals and photographic opportunities. Wolverine watching from comfortable log cabins and professional photography hides is an unforgettable experience within the animal's natural habitat. On occasion Brown Bear, Gray Wolf and Eurasian Lynx wander through.

We will depart the Wolverine Hide this morning and return to our hotel in Lieksa for breakfast and a rest. We'll have an early dinner again, before returning to the hide for a second night.

Lieksa to Viiksimo. We'll leave the Wolverine hide behind today and return to our hotel for breakfast and freshen up. Thereafter, we'll drive to Viiksimo, approximately 2 ½ hours away.

Viiksimo. We'll enjoy an early dinner at the Boreal Wildlife Centre in the mid-afternoon before heading over to the Brown Bear hides at around 16:00. The Brown bear hide is similar to the ones we've already experienced so far.

Brown Bears are the largest predators in Europe, feeding on nearly anything they can catch, from wild berries to fish and mammals. Males can weigh upwards of 300kg's (660lbs). Despite their large size, Brown Bears are agile, and males can travel hundreds of kilometers in a short period of



Viewing Hide by Erä-Eero

time whilst females and cubs stay on smaller territories.



Grey Wolf by David Hoddinott

Brown Bears are nocturnal, and like Wolverines - most active during light summer nights. Our stay in the comfortable hide designed for bear watching gives us excellent chances of spotting wild Brown Bears – sometimes just meters away from you! From spring to autumn, Brown Bears visit the viewing sites regularly and empty nights are very uncommon. Sometimes female Brown Bears will even bring their cubs to the hides.

We will depart the Brown Bear Hide and return to the Boreal Wildlife Centre for breakfast and a rest. After an early dinner, we'll return to the hide for our final night.

Viiksimo to Oulu. We'll depart the Brown Bear Hide for the final time today, return to the Boreal Wildlife Centre for breakfast. Thereafter we'll transfer to Oulu (approximately a 4 hour drive).

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. Excellent on the extension.
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 of the Forests and Fjords tour;
- All meals from lunch on day 1 to lunch on day 6 of the Wolverine & Brown Bear Extension;
- 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 18kg (40 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.
- Four nights on the extension are spent in specially built mammal watching hides. Outdoor snacks are provided for the hide stay. There are bunk beds, sleeping bags and pillows for those who wish to rest during the night. We will return to hotels in the morning for breakfast, showers, and a rest before returning to the hides in the early afternoon. There will be no birding/mammal watching during this time.

Arrival and Departure Details

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

The Wolverine & Brown Bear Extension will depart Oulu Airport at the end of the main tour and conclude at Oulu Airport in the early afternoon of day 6 after a transfer from Viiksimo.

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.