

ITINERARY
FINLAND in SPRING:
Forests, Fowl, and Fur
May 14 - 27, 2025



*The Ruff is an intriguing shorebird that has many different plumages and variations. Males are larger and generally more colorful than females, and they engage in fascinating lekking behaviors that we will hope to witness.
Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

We include here information for those interested in the 2025 Field Guides Finland in Spring: Forests, Fowl, and Fur tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our website)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

Finland is a remarkable nation. A region of farmers, woodsmen, and Sámi reindeer herders for much of its unique history, Finland invested deeply in education after the Second World War. Four generations later, the country enjoys a standard of living ranked among the world's highest. Prosperity has brought world-class arts, cuisine, infrastructure, and tourist facilities—and, importantly, environmental protections that permit wildlife to thrive. These decisions make Finland a marvelous place for birding and wildlife travel: wilderness is everywhere, it seems, but so are the comforts of home.

The return of our Finland in Spring: Forests, Fowl, and Furs tour was inevitable: Finland's lakes, rivers, marshes, bogs, tundra fells, and vast stretches of taiga (boreal forest) are some of the most exciting birding areas in all Europe. Our new, shorter tour will undertake to see as many of Finland's nesting bird species and regular migrants as feasible. Birds abound in this landscape. Near the Russian border, Finland hosts nesting populations of birds that reach their western limits here: we'll seek out specialties like Terek, Wood, and Green sandpipers, Red-flanked Bluetail, Gray-headed Chickadee (Siberian Tit), Blyth's Reed Warbler, Rustic Bunting, Brambling, and if we get even luckier, locally difficult, or rare migrant, birds like Hawfinch, Jack Snipe, Broad-billed Sandpiper, and Pallid Harrier. In the uncountable lakes, marshes, and meadows of this lowland country, we'll look and listen for Arctic Loon, Taiga Bean-Goose, Garganey, Velvet Scoter, Smew, Little Gull, Eurasian Woodcock, Great Bittern, Corn Crake, Spotted Crake, Little Gull, Bearded Reedling, and Sedge Warbler. In forested habitats, handsome grouse—Hazel Grouse, Black Grouse, and the behemoth Western Capercaillie—abound, and we may have an opportunity to see the springtime displays of the latter two if conditions are right. Uncommon woodland birds like Black, White-backed, and Eurasian Three-toed woodpeckers, Eurasian (Spotted) Nutcracker, and Parrot Crossbill are also permanent residents. In more open habitats, Eurafrikan migrants will be returning: Red-breasted Flycatcher, Greenish Warbler, Ortolan Bunting, and many others. Farther north, as the taiga becomes patchy and gives way to tundra fells, subarctic breeders like Temminck's Stint, Eurasian Dotterel (a singular beauty), Little Bunting (with some luck), and Long-tailed Jaeger will be in play.



*We'll see the striking Eurasian Bullfinch and a number of other seed-eaters, such as Pine Grosbeak and Red Crossbill.
Photograph by participant Donna Pomeroy.*

Owls are a thrill to see anywhere, and Finland is home to at least 10 species. In woodlands from the southeastern part of the country to the far northern edge of taiga, we'll search in daylight and twilight hours for Great Gray Owl, Eurasian Pygmy-Owl, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Ural Owl, Tawny Owl, Boreal (Tengmalm's) Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Short-eared Owl, and possibly Long-eared Owl, if voles have been plentiful. We won't see all of these species unless it is a totally banner rodent year, but we're likely to see a few of them by the end of the tour. In recent years, rarer species such as Barred, Booted, and Lanceolated warblers have nested sporadically, and if there are territories near our route, we'll try to work them in. Naturally, we will enjoy more widespread but glorious birds such as Rough-legged Hawk, Great Gray Shrike, Eurasian Goshawk, Common Crane, Ruff (potentially in lek mode!), Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Eurasian Wryneck, White-throated Dipper, Bohemian Waxwing, Thrush Nightingale, Crested Tit, Reed Bunting, Eurasian Bullfinch, Common Rosefinch (if they have arrived), Red Crossbill, and Pine Grosbeak. Some of these species nest in North America, but the Eurasian subspecies could be recognized as full species in the future, as Great Gray Shrike and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker already have been. As on every tour during the height of migration, we'll keep our eyes wide open for scarcer fare like Heuglin's (Siberian) Gull, Lesser White-fronted or Red-breasted Goose, and Little Stint (and more!). Every bird we see should be in breeding plumage, and some will be displaying, courting, and nesting, which adds another dimension to the drama and pleasure.

Mammals such as Gray Wolf, Eurasian Brown Bear, Eurasian Lynx, Wolverine, Raccoon Dog, and others haunt the habitats where we bird, and we'd be extraordinarily fortunate to see any of these while simply out birding. To increase our odds of an encounter substantially, we have scheduled several visits to special, well-equipped blinds (hides) used mostly by photographers who hope to encounter these special animals. Specifically, we will visit blinds near Lieksa for Wolverines (bears and wolves also possible) and near Oulanka National Park for Brown Bears. We also include a special outing by boat onto the freshwater lakes of Linnansaari National Park, where we will look for the rare Saimaa Ringed Seal. Truthfully, we'll take in everything we can: mammals, reptiles, butterflies, flowers. Why not?

Finland is a lovely country, and in its short 104-year history, it has accomplished great things. Even if the birding was not so spectacular, it is a country that merits a visit, to see what hard work and *sisu*—the Finnish word for grit—can accomplish in a short amount of time. You'll be delighted with our time in this friendly country.



*We'll visit a blind near Lieksa where we should be able to observe Wolverines, and possibly other predators.
Photograph by participant Richard Kaskan.*

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better-fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS:** Moderate amounts of walking on flat ground (up to 3 miles per day), some of it on paved roads, some on gravel or dirt roads, some on trails that could be soggy in spots. In the north, we will walk one or two uphill trails, and these may have obstacles such as fallen logs. These walks and others are optional.
- **PACE:** Early mornings (breakfasts between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m.), with birding sessions in the morning and afternoon. On three days, there will be significant stretches (4-5 hours) of travel time between birding areas.
- **WEATHER:** The weather can be quite varied, so we can expect temperature ranges from 40 to 75 degrees F, with wind that may make the temperature feel even colder. Snow is unlikely except above the Arctic Circle.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.

- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** We plan to make regular rest breaks, and many stops will have indoor restrooms; however, in remote areas, it will be necessary to make comfort stops in nature.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

About the Birding Areas



Finland is one of the great birding areas in Europe, and our aim on this tour is to provide abundant evidence of this claim! We have selected five regions well known for their rich avifaunas in various types of wetland, taiga (boreal forest), and tundra (fells). The timing of the tour aligns well with spring migration but also takes into consideration factors such as owl nesting phenology, lekking behavior of grouse, migrating and lekking Ruff flocks, and average arrival time of passerines to the nesting areas. As with all spring tours, both food availability and weather patterns will play a role in determining the pace of migration, the onset of breeding activities, and the timing of peak courtship displays, and so our itinerary mentions several species more than once, as we'll need to adjust our search strategies to the 2025 spring's pace of migration and nesting. Our partners in Finland like these dates well to showcase the riches of the country, for migrants, for nesting birds, and special mammals. While our intent is to see the greatest diversity of birds and wildlife, we should also have opportunities to observe many species on multiple occasions, to enjoy and "learn" them, photograph them, and to see some of their behaviors. During our visit, we'll experience most of the distinctive regions (districts) of Finland, described in the tour order below. These regions include all of the major habitat types in Finland, with the exception of the offshore waters and islands of the Baltic Sea (Åland Archipelago).

Uusimaa Region (Helsinki area)—Spring bird migration will be in full swing in the capital area, and we will sample woodlands and wetlands, marshes, and meadows during our brief stay here, hoping to see mostly those species we are unlikely to find farther north. Helsinki has

everything from first-rate museums to tiny ateliers offering wares of the finest craftsmanship. Waterside trails link many attractions. It is a remarkably birdy and beautiful city, especially in May.

South Savonia Region (Rantasalmi area)—In the heart of the Finnish Lake District, more than a quarter of South Savonia is covered by freshwater lakes and ponds—tens of thousands of them, in fact. This part of the country is often called "Lakeland," and Finns flock to this lightly populated area during summer (well after our tour) to hike, picnic, canoe, and explore the many uninhabited islands in the lakes. The country's largest lake, Saimaa, is here, and we'll venture onto it by boat to look for the Saimaa Ringed Seal, whose population is currently just over 400. May is the best time to see these rare freshwater seals, and we stand an excellent chance by heading out onto the lake with the locals. Ducks, shorebirds, Arctic Loons, grebes, and the uncommon Osprey are often about. A medieval castle nearby, Olavinlinna, is home to a famous opera festival, but we'll be a bit too early for the arias!

North Karelia Region (Joensuu area)—Although we'll stay overnight in the vibrant university town of Joensuu, North Karelia, which borders Russia in Finland's southeast, is largely a wilderness area. "If you're looking for the Finnish soul," one guidebook reads, "your search starts in Karelia." Most visitors come here for the skiing, whitewater rafting, or hiking, but we'll focus on the pristine wetlands that hold waterfowl, cranes, rails, and the magnificent Great Bittern. In adjacent woodlands, we will work on northern owls, Eurasian Nutcracker, and some of the less-common warblers and finches. North Karelia is also where we will spend the night in a specially constructed cabin-like blind near Lieksa, with the intent to see the elusive Wolverine and perhaps several other carnivores of this wild landscape.

North Ostrobothnia Region (Oulu area)—The shores of the Gulf of Bothnia near Oulu brim with birdlife in spring: waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors. Our focus will be two-fold: on woodland birds such as owls, grouse, and woodpeckers (essentially all of them nest in this area) and on waterbirds and shorebirds associated with the Gulf and the marshes along the edge, especially around Liminganlahti (Liminka Bay). The list of possible species there in May tops 235, but we'll concentrate mostly on birds we are unlikely to see elsewhere, such as Garganey, Terek Sandpiper, and White-tailed Eagle, as well as on reedbed-nesting or open-country passerines we might have missed in the south.



*Siberian Jay is the counterpart of the Canada Jay of North America. We'll see these subtle beauties in many places on our tour.
Photograph by participant Donna Pomeroy.*

Koillismaa Subregion (Kuusamo area)—The eastern portion of the North Ostrobothnia Region, Koillismaa seems far removed from the bustling tech-based economy in comparatively cosmopolitan Oulu, the regional capital. Here, aside from two small towns, wilderness is king, and the national parks of Oulanka and Hossa are two of Europe's crown jewels. A million tourists visit here each year, but most come for cross-country skiing, Nordic skiing, and ski-jumping, so we'll miss the crowds, though we'll surely see other birders out and about. Koillismaa's forests offer not just a wealth of grouse, owls, woodpeckers, and northern finches but also species that reach their easternmost outposts in Europe here, such as Red-flanked Bluetail and Jack Snipe. Our first chances for Siberian Jay, Gray-headed Chickadee, and Little Bunting are here, and we'll also make a strong effort to see Eurasian Brown Bears from a special viewing hide one evening.

Finnish Lapland Region (Ivalo area)—Covering more than 30% of Finland's territory, Lapland has less than 3% of the nation's population, and it is here, above the Arctic Circle, that we'll see the taiga (boreal forest) gradually give way to marshy muskeg and tundra fells. Species like Gray-headed Chickadee get more likely as we go north, and predators such as Rough-legged Hawk, Great Gray Shrike, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon form part of this area's attraction. We'll relish every bird we see here; the list hopefully also includes Brambling, Eurasian Bullfinch, Pine Grosbeak, and Common Redpoll (we might have to visit bird feeders to round out the list!). A few Eurasian Dotterels should be newly arrived from

wintering areas, and we'll prioritize searching for this beautiful bird, in the process perhaps also seeing such northerners as Rock Ptarmigan or Long-tailed Jaeger. The reindeer-herding culture of this region is every bit as fascinating as the birdlife, and we may have an opportunity to duck into Siida (Museum of the Culture of the Sami People) one afternoon to learn more. The sojourn in Lapland should make a fine conclusion to our time in Finland.



*Northern Hawk Owl breeds in the boreal forests of Finland; this is one of about 10 owl species that we will watch for on the tour.
Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

Itinerary for Finland in Spring: Forests, Fowl, and Fur

Day 1, Wed, May 14. Currently, the recommended flight is from JFK on Finnair #16/AA #8986 which departs at 10:55 p.m. on May 14 and arrives in Helsinki on May 15 at 2:00 p.m. (subject to change.)

Day 2, Thu, May 15. Arrival in Helsinki; to Espoo. For those arriving at Helsinki's international airport today on the recommended New York flight, your guide(s) will meet you in the **Arrivals Hall, just outside baggage claim and customs** (your guide will have a **FINNATURE sign** and wear a binocular!). It will take a little time for everyone to clear customs. Once gathered, we'll pull out binoculars and transfer about 20 km to a birding spot called Laajalahti (Broad Bay), where there is a raised structure for studying waterbirds. We'll proceed a short distance (25 km) to our lodging in verdant Espoo, Finland's second largest city on the edge of Nuuksio National Park. (The park takes its name from the Sámi word *njukča*, meaning "swan," Finland's national bird—and we're likely to see a few here, along with the beautiful Barnacle Goose.) We'll take dinner at the hotel, and then if anyone has stamina remaining, we may make an after-dinner excursion to look for several birds that sing into the evening— including Thrush Nightingale, and Eurasian Woodcock. Night in Espoo.

If you choose to arrive ahead of the tour to explore the city or if your flight arrival is earlier than the recommended group flight above, please be sure to inform the office of your travel arrangements and make your way back to the airport to meet the group by 2:00 p.m. on May 15th (Day 2). If you arrive a day or more early— consider staying at the Scandic Helsinki Airport: <https://www.scandichotels.com> (You would book your own reservation.) It can be reached very easily on foot from the terminal. There are good and fast train connections from this area to Helsinki city center. Joining the rest of the group would be easy by staying close to the airport.

Day 3, Fri, May 16. Birding the capital area; to Rantasalmi. Helsinki, on the Gulf of Finland, is well placed to receive northward-migrating raptors and passerines, and a fine variety of birds nest in the woodlands and wetlands that abound in the area. A pre-breakfast walk will probably encounter some of the more common birds of the national park woodlands. We'll listen and look for Great, Eurasian Blue, and Willow tits, Great Spotted and Gray-headed woodpeckers, European Robin, Song Thrush, Eurasian Blackbird, European Greenfinch, Eurasian Linnet, and returning migrants such as European Pied Flycatcher, Common Redstart, Eurasian Blackcap, and Lesser Whitethroat. After breakfast, we'll make rounds of mudflats, lakes, and reedbeds, in search of waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, and hopefully a few newly arrived migrants. Depending on water levels and the progress of migration, we could well amass a respectable list of waterbirds this morning. We expect a fine diversity of land birds as well, among them potentially Hooded Crow, White Wagtail, Fieldfare, Great Reed Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Icterine Warbler, and perhaps also Hawfinch and Bearded Reedling. Surprises like European Honey-buzzard are to be hoped for in spring, and we'll listen for word of any rarities found by local birders. After lunch, we'll drive to Rantasalmi, where we will settle into the Hotel Järvisydän to prepare for an outing by boat onto the lake, and through Linnansaari National Park. The lake is home to the very rare freshwater Saimaa Ringed Seal, and in addition to this headliner, we'll watch for pairs of Arctic Loons (the lovely purple-throated nominate subspecies), tree-nesting Osprey, and other waterbirds, including Baltic Gull, and if we are lucky, perhaps even a migrant Little Gull or two. Night in Rantasalmi.



*The Arctic Loon breeds in many Finnish lakes, and we should have good looks at these beautiful birds.
Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

Day 4, Sat, May 17. To Joensuu. After breakfast, we'll head toward the North Karelia region of eastern Finland, arriving after lunch at Joensuu, a small city founded by Czar Nicholas I. We'll lodge at the Original Sokos Hotel Kimmel, right on the Pielisjoki River (Joensuu means "river mouth" in Finnish). From Joensuu, we'll make forays into the beautiful countryside this afternoon and the next day. On the Russian border, Värtsilä Valley near Tohmajärvi is marvelous: waterbirds such as Eurasian Bittern, Spotted Crake, and Water Rail nest here, as do Eurasian Woodcock, Eurasian Hobby, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Mistle Thrush, Thrush Nightingale, Common Grasshopper-Warbler, and Blyth's Reed Warbler, though some are just arriving, and if it is a late spring, the warblers may not be in yet. By this time in the tour, we will start fine-tuning our searches for species we have not yet encountered, balancing visits between different habitats to see as much species diversity as our time permits, and watching for uncommon and unpredictable birds such as Pink-footed Goose, Red-breasted Flycatcher, and Red-backed Shrike. Night in Joensuu.

Day 5, Sun, May 18. Joensuu area. We will be up early to visit forested habitats of the region, ears, and eyes open for, in addition to the above listed birds from Day 4, Rook, Western Jackdaw, Greenish Warbler, Tree Pipit, Eurasian Treecreeper, White-backed and Lesser Spotted woodpeckers, and owls: depending on recent intel, we may start our searches for Eurasian Pygmy-Owl and Great Gray, Ural, Boreal owls, all of which nest in this little-birded region. We'll also watch for Eurasian Moose (called "Elk" in the Old World) and the unusual Raccoon Dog. Night in Joensuu.

Day 6, Mon, May 19. To Lieksa. Overnight in the Wolverine watching hide. From Joensuu, we'll travel to Lieksa, making a birding stop or two depending on what we have seen and have yet to see. We may visit the beautiful Koli National Park, and enjoy Ukko-Koli and the Ukko Visitor Center, or we may decide on a different birding stop. After an early afternoon lunch at a hotel where we will also have overnight rooms (for anyone not wanting the exciting overnight in the blind/hide), we'll make our way to a Wolverine watching site set in the remote wilderness near Lieksa. We will spend the night in a comfortable viewing cabin and hope to encounter this engaging animal. Eurasian Brown Bear, and even Gray Wolf, sometimes appear here, as do twilight-active birds such as Eurasian Woodcock. Night in the wilderness of Lieksa.

Day 7, Tue, May 20. To Oulu. After breakfast and perhaps a short rest back in the town of Lieksa, we'll drive west, all the way across Finland, to Oulu on the Gulf of Bothnia, passing through the picturesque Kainuu district en route. We should have time to do some birding en route and will hope to start on some of the birds characteristic of this region, before getting settled at the hotel. We may even have an option of a short after-dinner walk to see waterbirds on the grounds (weather and energy permitting). Night in Oulu.



*Eurasian Curlews and many other shorebirds will be seen in the wetlands near Oulu.
Photograph by participant Donna Pomeroy.*

Day 8, Wed, May 21. Oulu. Around the bay at Oulu, raptors dot the landscape: White-tailed Eagles, Eurasian Marsh-Harriers, and Northern (Hen) Harriers patrol the gulf shoreline, and Pallid Harrier occasionally nests in the area (Montagu's Harrier is rare too). Terek Sandpipers, though declining in the area, still have a territory or two around the harbor, so we'll be vigilant for them, and to the south, we'll visit Liminganlahti (Liminka Bay), an internationally important wetland reserve where Whooper Swan, Graylag Goose, Garganey, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Common and Red-breasted mergansers, Velvet Scoter, Horned Grebe, and Common Crane are often present, and likely migrant shorebirds include Spotted Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Common Ringed Plover, and Ruff—all in stunning breeding plumages. Little, Common, Arctic, and Caspian terns forage and gather along the gulf shorelines, and in the reedbeds, Sedge Warblers sing lustily. Open-country species such as Eurasian Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Whinchat, Ortolan Bunting, and Yellowhammer round out the birding, and late,

lingering, or vagrant birds might also turn up in this dynamic migratory corridor, so we'll remember to watch for migrants as well as nesting species, keeping Black-bellied Plover, Red Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, and Broad-billed Sandpiper especially in mind. The area around Oulu is also known for its healthy populations of breeding owls. Their numbers fluctuate, depending on prey abundance, but in most years, Eurasian Pygmy-Owl and the larger Great Gray, Boreal, Ural, and Short-eared owls are present in the vicinity. Eurasian Eagle-Owls also nest but are notoriously shy birds here. Most of these owl species also nest farther north, so we won't be discouraged if we don't experience a rare "royal flush" of owls during our first week! Eurasian Three-toed and Black woodpeckers and the always fascinating Eurasian Wrynecks inhabit the same woodlands, and we might also encounter a Western Capercaillie, Black Grouse, or even Hazel Grouse here. Ortolan Buntings are another enticement to enjoy a full day afield. Night in Oulu.

Day 9, Thu, May 22. To Kuusamo. After fine birding days around Oulu, we'll drive eastward this morning to Kuusamo, birding along the way and watching especially for Little Gull and Smew before checking in to the Hotel Scandic Rukahovi. An exciting birding destination, Kuusamo is also renowned for its lovely landscapes. Both boreal and eastern species breed in this region, and we will look for Siberian Jay, Gray-headed Chickadee, Red and Parrot crossbills, and Black and Eurasian Three-toed woodpeckers in the expansive taiga. These vast forests are also excellent grouse habitat, and an evening grouse drive will search for Willow Ptarmigan, Black Grouse, Western Capercaillie, and the even more elusive Hazel Grouse. Night in Kuusamo.

Day 10, Fri, May 23. Kuusamo. Red-flanked Bluetail is likely to be a bird we seek today, here at the extreme western edge of its range on the forested slopes of Valtavaara or Iivaara. Searching for this species **likely involves one or two steep uphill climbs**, one of few such walks on this tour. We'll also keep an eye skyward for Golden Eagle, Merlin, and Rough-legged Hawk, all of which breed here. Taiga Bean-Goose, Velvet Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Spotted Redshank, Green and Wood sandpipers, and a few Jack Snipe nest in the mosaic of lakes, bogs, and meadows, and the woods and edges, we may find Bohemian Waxwing, Gray Wagtail, White-throated Dipper, Rustic and Little buntings, Goldcrest, Brambling, Common Rosefinch, Eurasian Bullfinch, and Eurasian Siskin. Night in Kuusamo.



Finland is on the western end of the breeding range for the attractive Rustic Bunting. They can be found in swampy forests, where they find many of the insects that are an important food source. Photograph by guide Eric Hynes.

Day 11, Sat, May 24. Kuusamo. Our schedule today will be flexible, tailored to find the species that have eluded us thus far. In most years, Northern Hawk Owl and Boreal Owl breed in the Kuusamo area, and we'll likely still be looking for an owl, a grouse, or even two. Time permitting, we'll also check the town landfill for gulls; Heuglin's or Siberian Gull (*Larus fuscus heuglini*), treated as a distinct species by some authors, is sometimes present here. We might be able to work in a visit to beautiful Oulanka National Park, famed for its virgin old-growth forest, and in the evening, we'll hope to see Eurasian Brown Bears from spacious and comfortable blinds set up for bear viewing. Night in Kuusamo.

Day 12, Sun, May 25. To Ivalo. Today, we'll head north, crossing the Arctic Circle, and making birding stops along the way. In the far north of Finland, the short nights do not get very dark, and the coniferous forests give way to landscapes dominated by Mountain Birch and dotted with bogs, whose edges hold nesting Whimbrel, Spotted Redshank, and Ruff along with the more common Wood Sandpiper. Reed Bunting, Brambling, Western Yellow Wagtail (Gray-headed, subspecies *thunbergi*). Northern Wheatear, and the stunning Bluethroat breed in this stretch as well. This day involves a fair bit of driving, which we'll break with birding and lunch, and possibly a whistle stop in Pyhä-Luosto National Park, to arrive in the late afternoon at Ivalo, in time for dinner at the hotel. Night in Ivalo.

Day 13, Mon, May 26. After breakfast, we'll drive toward the northernmost part of mainland Europe. We'll still be in range of two special (and often shy) Finnish birds—Siberian Jay and Gray-headed Chickadee—and of the erratic and retiring Pine Grosbeak, which can often be found north of the hotel. Great Gray Shrike, Peregrine Falcon, and Rough-legged Hawk sometimes hunt near town as well. As the landscape opens, we'll be looking for the glorious Eurasian Dotterel, European Golden-Plover, Long-tailed Jaeger, Common Redpoll, Eurasian Siskin, and perhaps Rock Ptarmigan or Hoary Redpoll. If we run into groups of Ruff, we'll stop to watch the males, to see if they live up to their old scientific name, *Philomachus pugnax*, "battle-loving fighter." If the spring has been late in arriving to the north, as sometimes happens, we might see flocks of staging geese, which we'll check for Tundra Bean-Goose and perhaps rarer species. Night in Ivalo.

Day 14, Tue May 27. We will be up early to enjoy another fantastic Scandinavian breakfast, and depending on our flight time, we may even be able to fit in a birding excursion before heading to the Ivalo airport. Today's flight currently leaves Ivalo at 12:45 p.m. (*Finnair #612; subject to change*), and we'll fly as a group to Helsinki. In Helsinki, we'll collect our bags, hug (if that's an option!), and then prepare for our international flights. **The recommended return flight departs May 27th on Finnair #15/AA #8985 which departs Helsinki at 5:20 p.m.(subject to change).**

About Your Guide

Jay VanderGaast was introduced to birding by his father, and his obsession with birds was evident by age seven when he memorized the plates in Peterson's eastern field guide. He went on to earn a B.S. in biology at university and briefly contemplated a career in research, but two years on the mosquito-infested arctic tundra watching ptarmigan do little other than occasionally getting eaten by Gyrfalcons soon put an end to that plan! Instead, he strapped on a backpack and a pair of bins and began roaming the world in search of birds.

His travels eventually led him to Costa Rica, where he stumbled into a job as a birding guide at Rancho Naturalista Lodge. Amazed that he was actually getting paid to watch birds, he jealously guarded his position there for six years. His career with Field Guides coincided with the dawn of the new millennium (if you believe that began in 2000!), and since then he has guided more than 100 tours on several continents.

When he's not on tour, Jay's native habitat is his home near Montreal.

*"Jay VanderGaast was a delight to travel with...incredible at finding the birds and extremely helpful in getting us on the birds—which was much appreciated!he made the trip an exceptional experience which I will remember for the rest of my life."
L.K., Costa Rica*

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Jay's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

Financial Information

FEE: \$7675 from Helsinki (Includes internal flight from Ivalo to Helsinki on May 27th.)

DEPOSIT: \$775 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: November 15, 2024

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$875

LIMIT: 11

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Nicole Cannon. Nicole will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her! Her direct phone line is 512-900-7792 or you can email her at ncannon@fieldguides.com.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Accommodations are all comfortable and modern on this tour. In the daily itinerary above, we have named each lodging specifically, so that participants will be able to explore them online more fully. It is possible that some of the lodging arrangements could change, but in that case, we will use a lodging of similar quality. ****Note**** In Finland, it is not customary to have king/queen beds, or even double beds, in hotel rooms. Instead, the majority of hotels have twin (single) beds that are situated close to each other. Upon request, these beds can be pushed together to create more of a larger "full/king" bed feel. Please advise your tour manager, Nicole, if you want this to be done in your room.

DOCUMENTS: US citizens will need a passport valid for six months beyond the date of their return to enter Finland. No visa is required for US, Canadian, Australian, or EU citizens. Finland is a full member of the EU. No vaccinations are required.

Starting in the first half of 2025 (no specific date provided by the EU), travelers from visa-exempt countries will be required to have a travel authorization (ETIAS) to enter most European countries (including Finland). For more information, please go to the following link: https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en

If you are not a US citizen, please check with the consulates nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution, it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit. Please make a copy to take with you in the event yours is lost or stolen. Please keep it separate from your actual passport!

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Please meet your guide and other participants at 2:00 p.m. in the Arrivals Hall of the international airport in Helsinki on **May 15th** (for a small bite to eat and afternoon birding). **Currently, the recommended flight on May 14th is on Finnair #16/AA #8986 which departs from JFK at 10:55 p.m. and arrives in Helsinki on May 15th at 2:00 p.m.** We will dine as a group, get acquainted, and go over plans for the coming days. *If you choose to arrive ahead of the tour to explore the city or if your flight arrival is earlier than the recommended group flight above, **please be sure to inform us of your travel arrangements** and make your way back to the airport to meet the group by 2:00 p.m. on May 15th (Day 2).*

On May 27th, our domestic group flight, Finnair #612, is scheduled to depart Ivalo at 12:45 p.m. and arrive in Helsinki at 2:55 p.m. (subject to change). We recommend you depart Helsinki on **Finnair #15/AA #8985 at 5:20 p.m. (subject to change).** (*Note: We suggest booking your international flights through Finnair to ensure a smooth transition of your luggage from the internal flight, Ivalo to Helsinki, to your international flight on May 27th*) *Considering the number of flight delays these days, you may want to stay at a Helsinki airport hotel on May 27th to avoid the possibility of missing your connection and fly home on May 28th instead.*)

Field Guides is a full-service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to assist with ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager before purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. **Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is **\$7675** for one person in double occupancy from Helsinki. It includes all lodging from Day 2 through Day 13, all meals from lunch on Day 2 through breakfast (or lunch depending on flight schedules) on Day 14, all ground transportation (unless you're arriving early which you would need to make your own way to the Hotel Nuuksio in Espoo), the internal flight from Ivalo to Helsinki on May 27th, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Helsinki, airport taxes, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is **\$875**. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$775** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due **180 days** prior to departure, or **by November 15, 2024**. **We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.**

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and full payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs outside of our cancellation policy as published in the itinerary (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health

costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive information from us regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii. We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

NCP 7/2020

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