

Trip Report — Finland in Spring: Forests, Fowl, & Fur 2024

May 12-25, 2024 with Doug Gochfeld & local guide



Birds weren't the only animals we were on the hunt for during the tour. We also spent a couple of evenings at wildlife-viewing blinds in the wilderness. We stayed overnight in one, and that is when this magical Wolverine appeared. Watching it galumph around and do its thing – sloshing through water, climbing trees, turning over big pieces of stone with surprising ease – was one of the absolute highlights of the tour. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

This was our second running of Field Guides' newly revamped Finland tour. We covered Finland thoroughly, starting off in Helsinki at the south of the country, and heading nearly to the northernmost end of the country, near the border with Norway. We birded both west and east, even seeing some birds in the distance over remotest western Russia. While much of Finland is carpeted by spruce and pine forest, the different regions we stayed in each had its own character, and we ended up with a lovely diversity of birds, from migrants that were just passing through heading for more northern or western areas, to resident European breeders, and migrant breeders that had just arrived back from wintering grounds as far off as Africa. We also had a

couple of spectacular experiences at wildlife blinds (hides, to the Europeans), where there were interesting birds to look at, but at which the highlights were far and away a couple of mammal species: Wolverine and European Brown Bear.



Eurasian Dotterel is an iconic bird of northern Scandinavia. After searching around for a while for one, Eric found it far from where we had started our search, and it stuck around long enough for all of us to see it. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

We started out birding around Helsinki, where migrant shorebirds featured heavily, including some that would be scarce farther north along our route. Chief among these were gorgeous breeding-plumaged Spotted Redshank and Bar-tailed Godwit, and our birding here even yielded a bonus American "mega" in the form of a distant "American" Green-winged Teal - a subspecies that is perhaps unlikely to get split given its range overlap and free interbreeding in the Bering Sea, but that was a fun little bit of intercontinental spice. Our first real birding walk yielded a good introduction to the forest birds we would continue to see throughout our time in country, but also included in the avian yield was a lovely pair of Crested Tits, which would be our only ones of the tour. This day, which started on the western outskirts of Helsinki, saw us finishing up with a lovely boat trip on Lake Rantasalmi, which was highlighted by the exceptionally rare Saimaa Ringed Seal. Over the next day and a half of birding, we worked our way to the northeast, and we continued to see exciting species such as

Eurasian Wryneck, Red Crossbill, Eurasian Hobby, Long-tailed Tit, Black Woodpecker, Garganey, and a slight rarity: Black Kite. On our day near the Russian border, we enjoyed a spectacle of many tens of thousands of Barnacle Geese getting ready to head off to their Russian breeding grounds, with a few other low-density migrant goose species (Bean, Greater White-fronted, Pink-footed) mixed in. A special treat in the goose realm was a pair of mind-blowingly handsome Red-breasted Geese! This bird-rich area also provided Little Gulls migrating overhead, Short-eared Owls, White-tailed Eagles, a Thrush Nightingale, Merlin, a delightful flock of Ruffs, over a hundred Northern Lapwings, and a few locally scarce Greater Scaup.



Bears are pretty awesome. Fuzzy bear cubs standing on their hind legs? That's a whole 'nother level of awesome. Our evening in the bear-viewing blind north of Kussamo provided us with an excellent opportunity to enjoy a family (a large sow and two cute cubs) for an extended period of time. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

We then moved a little farther north to Lieksa. This was our jumping-off point for our first wildlife hide experience. We arrived at our comfortably accommodated building, latched the doors, and settled into our plush chairs to see what would happen. We watched some of the local birds, such as Green, Wood, and Common sandpipers and Common and Black-headed gulls, go about their springtime business, while we waited to see if anything furry would come in. We didn't have to wait nearly as long as we expected - well before nightfall, Linda suddenly came into the viewing room (from the

bunk room) excitedly saying "There's a Wolverine." We got excited, and sure enough, moments later, a Wolverine galumphed around the corner of the building and into our view. We had the amazing privilege of watching this amazing animal go about its business, overturning rocks and climbing trees, as it looked for food. This was a major highlight natural history experience, and it made the trip for several folks (maybe everybody!). After 30 minutes or so, during which time the Wolverine came and went a couple of times but was mostly in view in front of us, the Wolverine disappeared stage right, and within a short time a Brown Bear followed in the same direction, entering stage left, and then spending time hunting around for its share of food. This bear left, and after a couple of hours, was supplanted by a Mama bear and a couple of older cubs. Watching these all at our leisure, without any fear that we were disturbing the bears, nor in danger ourselves, put a capper on what was already a super special experience. Most folks dozed off for a few hours, and those who were vigilant overnight did see another bear come in after midnight. We watched for more as the sun rose, and though there were no more mammal sightings, we did have some exceptionally close Eurasian Bullfinches, a Eurasian Pied Flycatcher, and the continuing companionship of the confiding pair of White Wagtails that had been building a nest somewhere on the outside of the building.



Terek Sandpipers have gotten difficult to find in Finland, with only a couple of known breeding birds left in the country. We really lucked out when we found one of them, and got to watch its up-and-down roller coaster display flight all around us for a couple of minutes – what a cool bird! Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

In the afterglow of this fulfilling experience, we set off to the west and made the long cross-country journey to Oulu (seeing a fast-moving European Honey-buzzard, our only one of the tour, en route). Our couple of days in the west provided another great set of birds and habitats along the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia. In the forests and fields, we saw Great Gray Owl, Eurasian Pygmy-Owl, Gray-headed Woodpecker, Ortolan Bunting, and along the shores we encountered Eurasian Wryneck, Terek Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Woodcock, Sedge Warbler, White-tailed Eagles, and a nice bunch of migrant Common Swifts, newly arrived from Africa. After our couple of days here, we continued north, this time zagging eastward as we went. Our stay in Kuusamo was our longest of the tour, at three nights, and we packed in a bunch of fun birds during that time. The grouse dial got turned up, and we started semi-regularly encountering Black Grouse and Western Capercaille along the roadsides and saw our first Willow Ptarmigans. We also had a bit of eastern flavor with Red-flanked Bluetail and Rustic Bunting, and the northern flair also began to show itself with Bohemian Waxwings, Bramblings, and more of breeders like Smew, Little Gull, and Taiga Bean Goose. Other highlights in this neck of the woods were White-throated Dipper, Siberian Jay, and Velvet and Common scoters. The birds, however, were perhaps once more outshined by a hide experience. This time, we drove out to the east, into more wilderness, and spent a few evening hours at a bear blind. Indeed, it was spectacular for Eurasian Brown Bear, with a huge sow and two adorable, somewhat nervous cubs. The gull flock (4 species), breeding plumage Ruffs, and the antics of the Common Ravens were a delightful way to pass the time when the bears were out of sight and while waiting for other animals, and we left to head home very satisfied. On the way out, we even found a really cool Black Grouse lek, with over a dozen males strutting their stuff in a nearby field – what a capper to an exceptional evening!



Owls are one of the avian attractions of Scandinavia, and we found four species, including three at nests. This Eurasian Pygmy-Owl, which sat serenely, but also vigilantly, watching us from a moss-covered pine branch, was our first of the tour. It might have been our most memorable, though the Northern Hawk Owl and Great Gray Owl nests were also great! Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Once again in the afterglow of a great wildlife experience, it was time to head north to our final destination of the tour, Ivalo. We crossed the Arctic Circle in late morning, then saw our second Black Kite of the tour, and by mid-afternoon had reached our first taste of tundra. Our itinerary today gave us the time needed to hike up onto a hill with a barren top, and after some walking around in the Arctic microhabitat, with a good view of spruce and pine forest stretching out in all directions, we eventually found our guarry – a pair of Rock Ptarmigan! At the top were also a knockout pair of close European Golden-Plovers, and on the way down we also bumped into another pair of Willow Ptarmigan for good measure. As we approached Ivalo, we had time for one more stop – giving us our first real crack at Eurasian Dotterel. Just as were about to leave, after walking all around in search of this tundra hill denizen, Eric found one in a stretch of field that we hadn't yet gone to. We hustled back to the vans, zipped down to where he was, and got some nice views before this stunning male walked behind a rise and out of sight. It was a knockout start to the final chapter of the trip, with perhaps the most-wanted bird of the tour achieved right away. Our day and a half around Ivalo was a great way to end the trip, with some of the highlights being pointblank views of Pine Grosbeak right outside our restaurant window, Eurasian Goshawk (a youngster being forcefully escorted across the highway by a Common Raven), Red Fox, Moose, and an exceptionally cooperative territorial Hazel Grouse "singing" its head off. The two highlights in the farthest north though, from a bird perspective, were pairs of Siberian Tit (Gray-headed Chickadee) and Northern Hawk Owl at their respective nests. The Hawk Owls in particularly left indelible memories for us, as we got to watch some food transfers at the nest cavity and hear other interaction calls that we don't get to hear from birds on the wintering grounds, where American birders most regularly see them.

We had a really excellent, red-letter trip to this Scandinavian gem. The food and travel were good and easy, the hotels good, and the nature experiences truly phenomenal. I'd be remiss not to thank Arto Keskinen, our excellent Finnature local guide for working extra hard to make this trip such a success. And on behalf of myself and Arto, I thank you each and every one of you for sharing this voyage with us, with such good humor and spirits. It was a true delight, and I can't wait to see you all in the field again – until next time, Nähdään!

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: https://ebird.org/tripreport/261648

Douglas Gochfeld

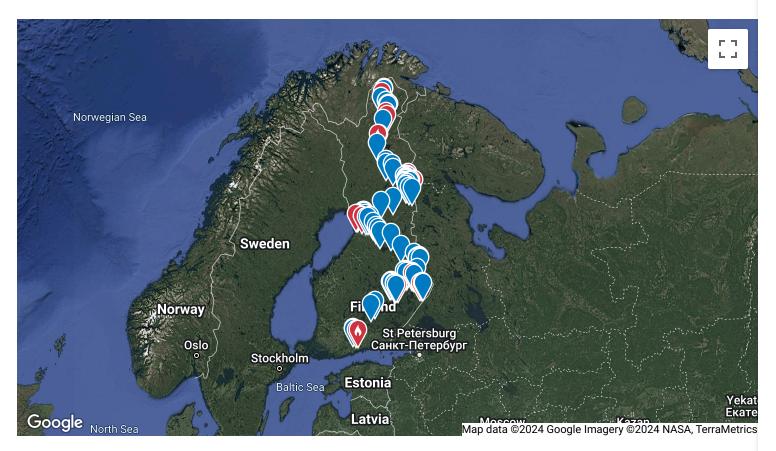




Field Guides Birding Tours -- FINLAND, 2024 (with Doug Gochfeld)



13 - 25 May 2024 (13 days) Link-only





Doug Gochfeld



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional...

¬170

Species Observed

125

Checklists

102

Species with Photos

Show all details

LIFERS **②** 14 **○** 22 **②**

Species Observed

37 Graylag Goose Anser anser

7 Greater White-fronted Goose Anser albifrons

▶ № 2 ■ 5

14 Taiga Bean-Goose Anser fabalis ② ②

2 Pink-footed Goose Anser brachyrhynchus ► ► 4 ■ 2

79,314 Barnacle Goose Branta leucopsis ▶ **2** 18

19 Canada Goose Branta canadensis *

129 Mute Swan Cygnus olor ▶ **1**3

187 Whooper Swan Cygnus cygnus ▶ **2 1**33

5	Common Shelduck Tadorna tadorna	▶ 🗖 2
5	Garganey Spatula querquedula	▶ 🐧 3
29	Northern Shoveler Spatula clypeata	▶ 🗊 10
24	Gadwall Mareca strepera	▶ 四 1 1 7
147	Eurasian Wigeon Mareca penelope	▶ 🗷 5 👖 19
137	Mallard Anas platyrhynchos	▶ 🗊 26
15	Northern Pintail Anas acuta	▶ 💌 1 🔒 5
104	Green-winged Teal Anas crecca	▶ 🔼 1 🗐 25
386	Tufted Duck Aythya fuligula	▶ 🔼 1 🗐 25
8	Greater Scaup Aythya marila	▶ 💌 1 🚺 2
65	Velvet Scoter Melanitta fusca O	▶ 🗷 5 🗻 5
12	Common Scoter Melanitta nigra	▶ 🗖 4
9	Long-tailed Duck Clangula hyemalis	→ 📶 1
422	Common Goldeneye Bucephala clangula	▶ 🛂 4 🗐 33
23	Smew Mergellus albellus •	▶ ▲ 4 🔒 8
74	Common Merganser Mergus merganser	▶ 🛂 4 🗐 20
13	Red-breasted Merganser Mergus serrator	▶ 🗖 4
8	Hazel Grouse Tetrastes bonasia 🗸 🖸	▶ ▲ 4 📑 4
6	Willow Ptarmigan Lagopus lagopus	▶ ▲ 6 📑 3
2	Rock Ptarmigan Lagopus muta	▶ 💌 10 📑 1

24	Western Capercaillie Tetrao urogallus 🔮 🖸	▶ 🗷 4 🗻 14
45	Black Grouse Lyrurus tetrix 🗸 🖸	▶ 🗷 8 🗻 10
1	Ring-necked Pheasant Phasianus colchicus *	▶ 🛍 1
2	Red-necked Grebe Podiceps grisegena	▶ 🗖 2
49	Great Crested Grebe Podiceps cristatus	▶ 1 7
31	Rock Pigeon Columba livia *	▶ 🛍 4
4	Stock Dove Columba oenas 🖸	▶ 🔼 1 🚺 2
74	Common Wood-Pigeon Columba palumbus	▶ 🗊 20
17	Common Cuckoo Cuculus canorus	▶ 📶 11
122	Common Swift Apus apus	▶ 💌 1 🗻 4
2	Eurasian Moorhen Gallinula chloropus	▶ 🛍 1
4	Eurasian Coot Fulica atra	▶ ⋒ 1
35	Common Crane Grus grus	▶ 🗷 2 🚺 19
13	Eurasian Oystercatcher Haematopus ostralegus	▶ 1 6
1	Black-bellied Plover Pluvialis squatarola	▶ 🛍 1
336	European Golden-Plover Pluvialis apricaria O	▶ 🗷 8 🗻 13
1	Eurasian Dotterel Eudromias morinellus 🗸 🖸	▶ 🕰 2 🗐 1
58	Common Ringed Plover Charadrius hiaticula	▶ 1 6
10	Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius	▶ 🗖 2
297	Northern Lapwing Vanellus vanellus	▶ ■9 🛘 24

6	Whimbrel Numenius phaeopus	▶ 2 15
65	Eurasian Curlew Numenius arquata	▶ 🔼 1 🚺 22
17	Bar-tailed Godwit Limosa Iapponica	→ 📶 1
12	Black-tailed Godwit Limosa limosa	▶⊠1 1 6
3	Eurasian Woodcock Scolopax rusticola	▶ 1 2 1 3
35	Common Snipe Gallinago gallinago	▶ 🛂 4 🗻 14
1	Terek Sandpiper Xenus cinereus	▶ 🗷 8 🗐 1
38	Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos	▶ 🛂 4 🗻 17
13	Green Sandpiper Tringa ochropus	→ 四1 副 11
213	Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola	▶ 1 30
58	Common Redshank Tringa totanus	▶ 四 1 1 7
23	Spotted Redshank Tringa erythropus	▶ 🗖 2
21	Common Greenshank Tringa nebularia	▶ 🛂 4 🚺 12
352	Ruff Calidris pugnax	▶ 🔼 23 🚺 17
38	Temminck's Stint Calidris temminckii	▶ 23 👖 7
98	Dunlin Calidris alpina	▶ 🗊 4
59	Little Gull Hydrocoloeus minutus	▶ 🛂 7 🚺 12
1217	Black-headed Gull Chroicocephalus ridibundus	▶ 🔼 1 🗻 30
381	Common Gull Larus canus	▶ 1 26
268	Herring Gull Larus argentatus	▶ 246 🗐 9

3	Great Black-backed Gull Larus marinus	▶ 🖪 3
16	Lesser Black-backed Gull Larus fuscus	▶ 247 🖥 5
3	Caspian Tern Hydroprogne caspia	▶ 🗖 2
35	Arctic Tern Sterna paradisaea	▶ 1 6
34	Common Tern Sterna hirundo	▶ 🗷 2 👖 8
3	Red-throated Loon Gavia stellata	▶ 🗷 3 🚺 2
51	Arctic Loon Gavia arctica	▶ 🗷 3 🗐 12
343	Great Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo	▶ 1 13
3	Great Bittern Botaurus stellaris	▶
1	Great Egret Ardea alba	▶ ₪ 1
27	Gray Heron Ardea cinerea	▶ 1 2
4	Osprey Pandion haliaetus	▶ 🗷 4 👖 3
1	European Honey-buzzard Pernis apivorus	▶ ■ 1
8	Western Marsh Harrier Circus aeruginosus	▶ 🗖 7
3	Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus	▶ 💌 1 📑 3
2	Eurasian Sparrowhawk Accipiter nisus	▶ 12
1	Eurasian Goshawk Accipiter gentilis	▶ 🗷 5 🗐 1
2	Black Kite Milvus migrans	▶ 2 12
23	White-tailed Eagle Haliaeetus albicilla	▶ 24 🗐 9
5	Rough-legged Hawk Buteo lagopus	▶ 1 13

3	Common Buzzard Buteo buteo	▶ 🗖 2
5	Northern Hawk Owl Surnia ulula Sensitive	▶ 2 7 📑 3
1	Eurasian Pygmy-Owl Glaucidium passerinum 🗸 🖸	▶ 🗷 3 🗻 1
1	Great Gray Owl Strix nebulosa Sensitive	▶ 🖾 4 🗻 1
3	Short-eared Owl Asio flammeus	▶ 24 12
2	Eurasian Wryneck Jynx torquilla	▶■1 ▮2
14	Great Spotted Woodpecker Dendrocopos major	▶ 四1 ■11
2	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Dryobates minor	▶ 🔼 2 🜓 2
1	Gray-headed Woodpecker Picus canus	▶ 🖪 4 🗐 1
1	Black Woodpecker Dryocopus martius	▶ ⋒ 1
7	Eurasian Kestrel Falco tinnunculus	▶ ■1 1 7
1	Merlin Falco columbarius	▶ 🗷 3 🗐 1
1	Eurasian Hobby Falco subbuteo	▶ ⋒ 1
6	Siberian Jay Perisoreus infaustus 🗸 🖸	▶ 🔼 2 🜓 2
1	Eurasian Jay Garrulus glandarius	▶ ⋒ 1
34	Eurasian Magpie Pica pica	▶ 🛍 21
333	Eurasian Jackdaw Corvus monedula	▶ 🗷 3 🗐 17
7	Rook Corvus frugilegus	▶ 🗖 2
197	Hooded Crow Corvus cornix	▶ 🔼 2 🗍 33
76	Common Raven Corvus corax	▶ 24 🚺 15

1	Coal Tit Periparus ater	▶ ⋒ 1
2	Crested Tit Lophophanes cristatus ♥ •	▶ ፫ 1 1 1
4	Willow Tit Poecile montanus 🔮 🖸	▶ 💌 3 🗻 4
5	Gray-headed Chickadee Poecile cinctus ♥ •	▶ 🛂 4 🗻 3
20	Eurasian Blue Tit Cyanistes caeruleus	▶ ⋒ 10
48	Great Tit Parus major	▶ 1 21
17	Eurasian Skylark Alauda arvensis	▶ 🖪 8
6	Sedge Warbler Acrocephalus schoenobaenus	▶ 25 🗐 5
22	Bank Swallow Riparia riparia	▶ 💌 3 🗻 3
78	Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica	▶ ≥ 2 1 18
39	Western House-Martin Delichon urbicum	▶ 🖪 8
5	Wood Warbler Phylloscopus sibilatrix	▶ 1 3
102	Willow Warbler Phylloscopus trochilus	▶ △ 5 1 35
10	Common Chiffchaff Phylloscopus collybita	▶ 2 1 1 8
1	Long-tailed Tit Aegithalos caudatus 🗸 🖸	▶ 🛂 4 🗻 1
3	Eurasian Blackcap Sylvia atricapilla	▶ 🗖 2
6	Lesser Whitethroat Curruca curruca	▶ 1 5
5	Greater Whitethroat Curruca communis	▶ 🗊 4
9	Goldcrest Regulus regulus •	▶ 1 2 1 5
3	Eurasian Treecreeper Certhia familiaris	▶ 🗖 2

7	Eurasian Wren Troglodytes troglodytes	▶
2	White-throated Dipper Cinclus cinclus	▶ 🗷 2 🗐 1
8	European Starling Sturnus vulgaris	▶ 🗊 4
12	Mistle Thrush Turdus viscivorus 🗸 🖸	▶⊠1 1 6
13	Song Thrush Turdus philomelos	▶ 🗊 10
66	Redwing Turdus iliacus	▶ 🗖 28
32	Eurasian Blackbird Turdus merula	→ m 11
174	Fieldfare Turdus pilaris	▶ 🔼 2 🗍 32
3	Spotted Flycatcher Muscicapa striata	▶ 1 13
8	European Robin Erithacus rubecula	▶ 🗊 5
3	Thrush Nightingale Luscinia luscinia	▶ 2 13
1	Bluethroat Luscinia svecica	▶ 🗷 2 🗐 1
3	Red-flanked Bluetail Tarsiger cyanurus	→ ፫ ፯
34	European Pied Flycatcher Ficedula hypoleuca	▶ 1 22
12	Common Redstart Phoenicurus phoenicurus	▶ 1 9
8	Whinchat Saxicola rubetra	▶ 🗊 8
8	Northern Wheatear Oenanthe oenanthe	▶ 1 6
21	Bohemian Waxwing Bombycilla garrulus	▶ 2 16
4	Dunnock Prunella modularis	▶ 🗊 4
20	House Sparrow Passer domesticus	▶ 💌 1 🗐 7

13	Eurasian Tree Sparrow Passer montanus	▶ 🗖 5
2	Gray Wagtail Motacilla cinerea	▶ 🔼 2 🚺 1
95	Western Yellow Wagtail Motacilla flava	▶ 1 7 1 23
120	White Wagtail Motacilla alba	▶ 1 34
12	Meadow Pipit Anthus pratensis	▶ 🗷 2 🗻 4
9	Tree Pipit Anthus trivialis	▶ 🗖 7
1	Red-throated Pipit Anthus cervinus	→ 📶 1
182	Common Chaffinch Fringilla coelebs	▶ 🖪 45
77	Brambling Fringilla montifringilla	≥ ≥ 2 1 18
4	Pine Grosbeak Pinicola enucleator	▶ 🗷 2 🗐 1
14	Eurasian Bullfinch Pyrrhula pyrrhula	▶ 🗷 4 🗻 6
32	European Greenfinch Chloris chloris	1 0
10	Eurasian Linnet Linaria cannabina	≥ ≥ 1 1 2
9	Common Redpoll Acanthis flammea	▶ 1 6
7	Red Crossbill Loxia curvirostra	▶ 25 📑 3
4	European Goldfinch Carduelis carduelis	▶ 🗖 4
23	Eurasian Siskin Spinus spinus	▶ 🚮 10
24	Yellowhammer Emberiza citrinella	▶ 🗷 3 👖 12
2	Ortolan Bunting Emberiza hortulana	▶ 💌 2 🗐 1
45	Reed Bunting Emberiza schoeniclus	▶ 🗷 6 🗻 18

4 Rustic Bunting Emberiza rustica ▶ 🔼 5 🗻 4 ADDITIONAL TAXA **14** Taiga/Tundra Bean-Goose *Anser fabalis/serrirostris* ▶ ■ 12 ■ 7 2 Anser sp. Anser sp. ▶ ■ 1 **400** goose sp. Anatidae (goose sp.) ▶ ■ 1 **5** duck sp. Anatidae (duck sp.) ▶ 12 small plover sp. Charadrius/Anarhynchus sp. 21 ▶ 12 peep sp. Calidris sp. (peep sp.) ▶ ■ 1 71 Larus sp. Larus sp. ▶ 17 83 gull sp. Larinae sp. ▶ 16 78 Common/Arctic Tern Sterna hirundo/paradisaea ▶ ■ 10 1 loon sp. Gavia sp. ▶ 🗐 🛚 2 woodpecker sp. Picidae sp. ▶ 12 **85** swallow sp. *Hirundinidae sp.* ▶ 12 4 Phylloscopus sp. Phylloscopus sp. ▶ 12 1 pipit sp. Anthus sp. ▶ ■ 1 2 Parrot/Red Crossbill Loxia pytyopsittacus/curvirostra ▶ 12 6 finch sp. Fringillidae sp. ▶ 🗐 🛚