

Trip Report — Finland in Spring: Forests, Fowl, & Fur 2025

May 14-27, 2025 with Jay VanderGaast & Local Guide Arto Keskinen



The appearance and behaviour of the Siberian Jay, a major target on this tour, are very reminiscent of our Canada Jays, and for good reason, as the two species are closely related. Participant Becky Hansen snapped this lovely portrait of one in the mountains near Kuusamo.

Spring migration is always a magical experience, but selling a spring tour outside of North America can be tricky, with so many North American birders reluctant to miss spring migration in their own patch. But for those folks that decided to venture further afield to experience this year's migration in Finland, the experience was just as magical and exciting! Timing a migration trip can be tricky too. Too early and the migration of Passerines may not really be in full swing, too late and the impressive flocks of geese may have dwindled to almost nothing. Too early and the nests of the various owls around Oulu may not yet have been tracked down, too late and the various

species of grouse may have wrapped up their lekking behavior and resorted to their secretive ways. It's pretty much impossible to be in Finland at the perfect time for everything in a two-week window of spring migration, but on the whole, I think we did pretty well, hitting a period of time when we got to experience some highlights of both early and later spring experiences. We might have been a bit early for some of the Passerine migrants, though it was starting to heat up, but it would have been tough to improve on the goose, owl, and grouse experiences we were treated to!



Spring in Finland can be decidedly cool, as evidenced by this flock of birders in winter plumage as they search for pygmy-owl near Oulu. You know it's not warm when even Jay VanderGaast is sporting long pants! Photo by participant Nancy Buck.

Things kicked off in Helsinki, where our initial afternoon to the west of the city was spent visiting our first of many *lintutorni*, or birdwatching tower. Here we enjoyed our first encounters with what would soon be familiar

species, birds like our first 800 Barnacle Geese, the impressive Whooper Swan (Finland's national bird), Common Crane, Ruff, Arctic Tern, White-tailed Eagle and many more. We also saw our only Common Swifts of the tour, along with the very local Citrine Wagtail, here at one of the few known breeding areas in Finland. That evening, at sunset (just before 10pm!) we enjoyed great looks at a chunky Eurasian Woodcock roding over the hotel clearing before retiring to our rooms for a restful night's sleep.

The following morning saw us continuing our birding in the Helsinki region, picking up our first Goldcrests, Fieldfares, and Eurasian Siskins on the hotel grounds before heading east for a visit to a wonderful wetland area on the city's outskirts. The wetlands themselves were alive with a variety of waterfowl, gulls and terns, while Western Marsh-Harriers coursed over the extensive reedbeds where Sedge Wrens were boldly singing from prominent positions and a Bearded Reedling gave a fleeting view before dropping out of sight. The adjacent woodlands were also ringing with the songs of newly-arrived Passerines, and we had fantastic looks at a family of Eurasian Treecreepers, an eye level Thrush Nightingale on a trailside song perch, several Eurasian Blackcaps, and one of the first Common Rosefinches, a brightly-plumaged male, to have turned up this spring.



Black Grouse, like this handsome male photographed by Becky Hansen, seemed to be in the height of their lekking period, and we saw them displaying at several sites, including on some small rocky islets in Lake Saimaa!

We then pushed on to the Finnish lake district in time for a sunset cruise on the enormous Lake Saimaa, home to the Saimaa Ringed Seal, one of the very few populations of freshwater seals in the entire world. Our delightful evening excursion was not only successful in finding several of these Endangered pinnipeds, as we also saw our first of many Arctic Loons, and somewhat surprisingly our first of many Black Grouse, several males of which were displaying on tiny, rocky islets near dusk! A pre-breakfast walk on the hotel grounds the next morning connected us with our first Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Redwings, and Eurasian Jays for the trip.

Continuing on to the university town of Joensuu, we made several stops along the way, scouring through some enormous flocks of Barnacle Geese, finding our first Greater White-fronted Geese in the process, and adding species like European Golden-Plover and Eurasian Curlews to our lists. There was also a bonus in the form of a striking male Pallid Harrier gliding low over

the open fields. From Joensuu, we headed east to the Russian border, to Lake Sääperi, where searching through some 25,000 Barnacle Geese netted us both Tundra and Taiga bean-geese, as well as Graylag Goose, though a phantom Red-breasted Goose failed to reappear after an initial sighting by Arto. Also here, we tallied some handsome Black-tailed Godwits, a small group of Long-tailed Duck, and our first looks at a flock of breeding-plumaged male Ruffs in every imaginable color combo!



Barnacle Geese were, by far, the most numerous species recorded on our tour, with about 80,000 of them reported on our eBird lists. Guide Jay VanderGaast captured this pair from the first lintutorni visited on the initial afternoon of birding.

A woodpecker en route to Lieksa the next day failed to net us the hoped-for White-backed Woodpecker, but offered up Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Wren, and Brambling instead, and a final stop closer to Lieksa gave us our first glimpses of some very furtive Hazel Grouse and a calling Common Cuckoo. Then it was off to the first of two wildlife viewing hides for the night. And our overnight adventure started off with a bang when the star mammal, a Wolverine, showed up about an hour into our vigil, poking around for meat

scraps for 15-20 minutes before vanishing in to the forest. Before the night was over, a pair of Brown Bears and a Gray Wolf also put in appearances, making for a most successful visit! After a rest at the hotel back in town, we hit the road for the long drive to Oulu, though we had enough time to stop in at one owl nest site, getting fine views of a Ural Owl peeking out of its nest box, with a roadside Black Woodpecker as a bonus along the way!

Our full day around Oulu was full indeed, kicking off with a Mistle Thrush on the trimmed green of a golf driving range on our way to the coast. At the coast, it was clear that there was a lot of migrational movement happening, so we spent time watching birds streaming by offshore, picking up our only Common Shelduck for the tour, along with Common Eiders, Common Scoter, a dark morph Parasitic Jaeger and many more birds before we turned our sites on owls once again. Next up was a visit to a nearby nest site for Great Gray Owl, and we enjoyed a super look at this magnificent bird peering down at us from a huge stick nest. A nearby Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker and some newly-arrived Wood Warblers were also greatly appreciated here. After a delicious hot lunch at a nearby nature reserve, we tracked down a huge Eurasian Eagle-Owl sitting out in the open in a pine plantation, with at least two fuzzy owlets on the ground below. We then moved on to find a trio of beautiful Eurasian Dotterels found by another birder a little earlier in the day, then finished up at a spot for Ortolan Bunting, which, sadly, didn't show for most of us, though a Short-eared Owl flapping moth-like over the adjacent farmland helped to soften the blow. The following morning, we visited another spot for nesting Eurasian Pygmy-Owl, getting treated to incredible views of this tiny owl sitting near the nest tree. Unfortunately we couldn't replicate our good fortune with a Boreal Owl later that day, though we could hear a young bird inside the nest cavity and glimpsed an adult flying by overhead, screeching.



This handsome Brown Bear seemed a little cowed by the many noisy gulls hanging about, but eventually settled down to enjoy some of the meat scraps hidden for it at a viewing hide near Kuusamo. Photo by Becky Hansen.

The Kuusamo area was up next, back near the Russian border. Here we visited the Kontainnen area for Siberian Jay, Willow Tit, and after some hard work, a Red-flanked Bluetail on our second visit. A stroll along one of the many lakes gave us incredible views of a singing male Bluethroat, and plenty of striking Little Gulls flying by. A stop at another lake produced some good scope views of a flock of distant Velvet Scoters, and some good luck and persistence finished with nice looks at one of only a couple of Rustic Buntings for the trip. And an evening visit to another wildlife hide here gave us another gorgeous Brown Bear, along with plenty of close looks at Common Snipe, Wood Sandpiper, Green-winged Teal, and plenty of gulls, including some Heuglin's type Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

The real highlight here, though, was the sunrise drive we took on our second morning. With sunrise at 3:00am here, it was an incredibly early start, but by

the time we returned to the hotel for breakfast, everyone was glad they'd gotten up for the outing. Our main goal was to find grouse, and in this regard, it was a complete success. Our tally for the drive included improved looks at a pair of Hazel Grouse, 9 female Western Capercaillie, and 30+ Black Grouse, including several on a lek with a Common Crane standing guard over the display area! There were plenty of other birds, as well, including some nice views of Whimbrel, a couple of Eurasian Woodcocks on the ground, and a pair of Bohemian Waxwings. Our final morning in the area produced our only male Western Capercaillie, strolling in display mode through a sparsely-treed bit of roadside taiga as well as our only Willow Ptarmigan sighting as a group.



Stunning sunset scenery over the water after our successful Ringed Seal search on Lake Saimaa.
Photo by Jay VanderGaast.

We reached the northern terminus of our travels well above the Arctic Circle at Ivalo, spending our time tracking down the handful of possible species we could still hope for here. Winter hadn't entirely lost its grip on the region, as we experienced on our long hike at Kiilopää, where we trekked through numerous patches of snow to track down our quarry, a snowy white male Rock Ptarmigan that performed a couple of display flights near the summit. Other highlights of the region included excellent looks at Taiga Bean-Goose and Smew, a fantastic sighting of a pair of Hazel Grouse strolling across the track and through the open woodland, a newly-arrived Little Bunting singing on the edge of a boggy clearing, and a couple of pairs of Gray-headed Chickadees shortly after a scrumptious lunch of salmon soup, a long-awaited Finnish specialty!

This was such a fun trip, full of spectacular birds, mammals, and scenery, and I couldn't have asked for a better group to share all the good times with! Thanks so much for joining me in Finland this spring. Happy birding, until we meet again!

Top 3 trip birds:

- 1: Western Capercaillie
- 2: Ruff (all those colorful males!)
- 3: Black Grouse



Having already enjoyed incredible views of both Wolverine and Brown Bear during our overnight in the hide near Lieksa, we were thrilled when this beautiful Gray Wolf turned up in the wee hours of the morning! Despite the low light levels, Becky Hansen somehow managed to snap this super photo of this magnificent animal!

Mammals seen on the tour:

Northern Red-backed Vole (*Clethrionomys rutilus*): one below the feeders at Kontainnen.

European Hare (*Lepus europaeus*): the large brown hare in the south.

Mountain Hare (*Lepus timidus*): the large frosty hare in the north, replacing European from about Joensuu north.

European Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*): a few scattered sightings, but most common around Kuusamo.

North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*): one in Lake Saimaa during the boat trip.

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*): one during the drive from Kuusamo to Ivalo.

Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*): a gorgeous one at the Lieksa viewing hide. A first in Finland for Arto!

Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*): two at the Lieksa hide, and a 2-year old at the Kuusamo hide.

Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*): a fantastic sighting early on at the Lieksa hide!

Ringed Seal (*Phoca hispida saimensis*): several hauled out on rocks during our boat trip, with one clearly showing the rings for which they're named.

Moose (*Alces alces*): Despite Moose crossing signs everywhere, our only one was seen by my van after we'd gotten separated en route to Oulu.

Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*): Lots in Lappland, though all were domestic animals belonging to the Sami herders.

Western Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*): some folks glimpsed one at dusk on our first evening, then we had nice views of one with the Taiga Bean Geese near Ivalo.

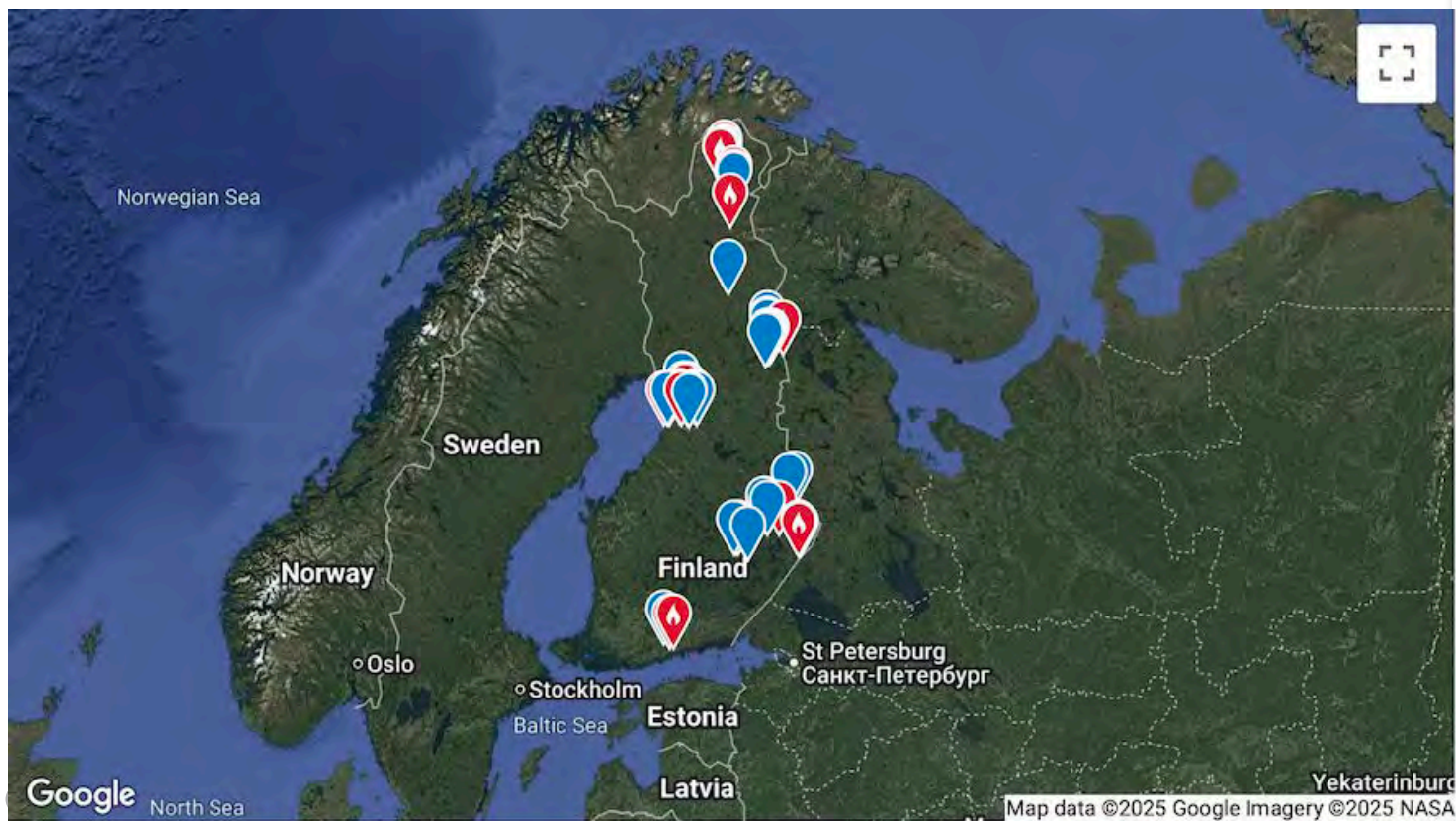
You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/372371>

Jay

Finland 2025

15 – 27 May 2025 (13 days) Link-only



 Finland | Russia [Subregions](#)

 Jay VanderGaast



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

 156

Species Observed

 65

Checklists
























 30




























Species with Photos

























LIFERS  14  21 























Species Observed

























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11	Graylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	  4
15	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	  5
8	Taiga Bean-Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>  	  2  3
2	Tundra Bean-Goose	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>	  1
79,351	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	  2  12
22	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i> *	  4
4	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	  1
166	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	  1  22
1	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	  1
















4	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	▶  3
12	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	▶  6
2	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	▶  1
58	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i> 	▶  1  11
90	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  14
16	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	▶  1  4
85	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  14
99	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	▶  10
4	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	▶  2
3	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	▶  1
9	Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i> 	▶  2
200	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	▶  1
5	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	▶  1
128	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	▶  19
15	Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i> 	▶  3  6
81	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	▶  7
21	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	▶  2
8	Hazel Grouse	<i>Tetrastes bonasia</i> 	▶  4
2	Willow Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	▶  2
1	Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus muta</i>	▶  1

10	Western Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>	✓	▶  2
35	Black Grouse	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>	✓ 	▶  2  2
2	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		▶  2
34	Common Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		▶  9
9	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		▶  9
10	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		▶  1
1	Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		▶  1
3	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		▶  2
44	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		▶  14
3	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		▶  2
38	European Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		▶  2  8
3	Eurasian Dotterel	<i>Eudromias morinellus</i>		▶  1
4	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		▶  1
2	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Thinornis dubius</i>		▶  1
141	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		▶  13
4	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		▶  3
32	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		▶  12
6	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		▶  2
4	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		▶  3
11	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		▶  11











1	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	▶  1
6	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	▶  3
2	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	▶  2
121	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	▶  20
10	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	▶  4
8	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	▶  6
187	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	▶  1  13
4	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	▶  1
42	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	▶  3
1	Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	▶  1
47	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	▶  1  10
253	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	▶  22
65	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	▶  17
103	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	▶  8
6	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	▶  2
16	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	▶  4
8	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	▶  3
31	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	▶  6
35	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	▶  10
11	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	▶  8

15	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	▶  5
71	Arctic Loon	<i>Gavia arctica</i> ✓	▶  8
104	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	▶  4
2	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  2
7	Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	▶  3
6	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  2
2	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	▶  2
5	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	▶  4
1	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	▶  1
1	Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i> ✓	▶  1
6	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	▶  4
1	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	▶  1
3	Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	▶  1
1	Eurasian Pygmy-Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i> ✓ 📷	▶  4  1
1	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i> Sensitive ✓ 📷	▶  2  1
1	Great Gray Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i> Sensitive	▶  1  1
1	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	▶  1
2	Boreal Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>	▶  1
1	Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i> ✓	▶  1
16	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i> 📷	▶  1  14

2	Black Woodpecker <i>Dryocopus martius</i> 📷	▶ 📷 2 📊 2
1	Eurasian Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	▶ 📊 1
7	Siberian Jay <i>Perisoreus infaustus</i> ✓ 📷	▶ 📷 2 📊 3
3	Eurasian Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	▶ 📊 2
20	Eurasian Magpie <i>Pica pica</i>	▶ 📊 16
56	Eurasian Jackdaw <i>Coloeus monedula</i>	▶ 📊 8
4	Rook <i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	▶ 📊 1
70	Hooded Crow <i>Corvus cornix</i>	▶ 📊 24
34	Common Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>	▶ 📊 9
6	Coal Tit <i>Parus ater</i>	▶ 📊 4
3	Willow Tit <i>Poecile montanus</i> 📷	▶ 📷 1 📊 2
4	Gray-headed Chickadee <i>Poecile cinctus</i> ✓	▶ 📊 2
20	Eurasian Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	▶ 📊 12
24	Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>	▶ 📊 15
6	Eurasian Skylark <i>Alauda arvensis</i>	▶ 📊 5
1	Bearded Reedling <i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	▶ 📊 1
7	Sedge Warbler <i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	▶ 📊 2
5	Bank Swallow <i>Riparia riparia</i>	▶ 📊 2
36	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶ 📊 9
16	Western House-Martin <i>Delichon urbicum</i>	▶ 📊 3

2	Wood Warbler <i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i> ✓	▶  1
81	Willow Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> 📷	▶  2  37
11	Common Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	▶  8
4	Eurasian Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	▶  3
5	Lesser Whitethroat <i>Curruca curruca</i>	▶  4
4	Greater Whitethroat <i>Curruca communis</i> 📷	▶  1  3
9	Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>	▶  8
8	Eurasian Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i>	▶  2
2	Eurasian Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> 📷	▶  3  2
6	European Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	▶  2
3	Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	▶  3  3
5	Song Thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i>	▶  5
38	Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i> 📷	▶  4  15
13	Eurasian Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>	▶  6
84	Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i> 📷	▶  2  19
2	Spotted Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa striata</i>	▶  2
8	European Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	▶  7
1	Thrush Nightingale <i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	▶  1
2	Bluethroat <i>Luscinia svecica</i>	▶  4  2
2	Red-flanked Bluetail <i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>	▶  1

26	European Pied Flycatcher <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i> 📷	▶ 📷 1 📊 20
7	Common Redstart <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	▶ 📊 6
8	Whinchat <i>Saxicola rubetra</i> 📷	▶ 📷 2 📊 5
7	Northern Wheatear <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	▶ 📊 3
4	Bohemian Waxwing <i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>	▶ 📊 2
2	Dunnoek <i>Prunella modularis</i>	▶ 📊 2
11	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	▶ 📊 2
10	Eurasian Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i>	▶ 📊 4
2	Gray Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	▶ 📊 1
24	Western Yellow Wagtail <i>Motacilla flava</i>	▶ 📊 8
1	Citrine Wagtail <i>Motacilla citreola</i>	▶ 📊 1
32	White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i>	▶ 📊 20
8	Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i>	▶ 📊 5
10	Tree Pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	▶ 📊 9
71	Common Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	▶ 📊 27
46	Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	▶ 📷 2 📊 15
2	Common Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i> 📷	▶ 📷 1 📊 1
13	Eurasian Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> 📷	▶ 📷 1 📊 6
7	European Greenfinch <i>Chloris chloris</i>	▶ 📊 5
1	Eurasian Linnet <i>Linaria cannabina</i>	▶ 📊 1

13	Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	▶  6
2	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	▶  1
105	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i> 	▶  1  20
13	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	▶  9
22	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	▶  12
3	Little Bunting	<i>Emberiza pusilla</i>	▶  2
2	Rustic Bunting	<i>Emberiza rustica</i> 	▶  2

