

Birding diary from Slettnes in May 2008

Participants (from Sweden): Aron Andersson, David Andersson, Niklas Holmström, Hampus Lejon, Kristoffer Nilsson and Alain Verneau (France).

9th May 2008

About 14:15 Kristoffer, Alain and myself arrived to Kiruna airport in good spirit. Sunny and clear blue sky. We picked up our rental car, visited a supermarket (as food is expensive in Norway) and had a quick dinner. We hit the road about 16:00 in very nice weather and Alain behind the wheel. We did stops now and then and had longer ones in the Sami villages Kautokeino and Karasjok. At Lakselv it started to rain and when we arrived at Ifjord for the last distance to Gamvik it started to snow in strong wind. At the high plateau of Nordkyn peninsula we was trapped in a snow storm and for more than a hour Alain had to drive in 20 km per hour. We, finally, and very exhausted, arrived to Gamvik at 04:00. Twelve hours after we left Kiruna. Alain did a heroic work as a driver! We emptied the car at our rented house in Gamvik and then drove to Slettnes lighthouse to pick up Aron Andersson, which had arrived to Mehamn with the boat Hurtigrutten on Friday evening at 19:45. A kind man in Mehamn drove Aron all the way to the Slettnes lighthouse. So, Aron was able to count the seabird migration at the lighthouse from 21:00 (Friday) to 04:00 (when we picked him up). He had a very nice time with migrating Pomarine Skuas (383), Arctic Skuas (290) and White-billed Divers (73). We all fell asleep early in the morning. Some exhausted and one very happy!



Photo from the high plateau of Nordkyn peninsula. Sometimes it was totally white! Photo: Niklas Holmström.

10th May 2008

Some of us woke up at 10:30 and decided to get up and go to the lighthouse, even though it was strong wind and heavy snow coming and going, but sunshine in the next time! We saw, for example, several White-billed Divers, a nice Long-tailed Skua, two Iceland Gulls and about 350 King Eider's.



Part of Gamvik from our house in late morning. Heavy snow in strong westerly wind! Photo: Niklas Holmström.

While Alain and Niklas was seawatching at the lighthouse Kristoffer and Aron woke up softly. And about 14:30 the Swedish birders David Andersson and Hampus Lejon arrived (flight from Sweden all the way to Mehamn and taxi to Gamvik). All six gathered in a nice house with a view towards the sea (in the evening we saw a pair of White-billed Divers through the kitchen window!)



We all enjoyed a dinner, the fire and a whisky during the snowstorm outside. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

About 18:30 we (Alain, Niklas, Aron, David and Hampus) took the car to Slettnes lighthouse for a seawatch-check. It was storm, but we found shelter and the scenario was great! We saw several Glaucous Gulls, Bonxies, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and a few White-billed Divers. But, imagine, it was storm from W-NW and incredible dramatic views of sea and light. Even a rainbow did appear.



Stormy evening at Slettnes on 10th. Hampus Lejon (left) and David Andersson (right). Photo: Niklas Holmström.

11th May 2008

Sightings worthy to mention:

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*: About 20 roosting at sea off the lighthouse.

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*: One 2 cal year bird off Gamvik harbour (Hampus and Aron)

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*: Three off Gamvik harbour (Hampus and Aron)

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: A single roosting at sea off the lighthouse.

European Shag *Phalacrocorax arcticus*: At least 60 birds in a dense roosting flock.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: About 400 birds (females and 2 cal males in majority).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: At least 7 birds in the area.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*: One seen from the lighthouse.

Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus*: One excellent sighting of an adult bird "hanging" in the wind over our heads at the lighthouse!

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: 1 pair seen together at the lighthouse.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: Three birds in Gamvik harbour.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*: A single in Gamvik.

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*: One pair breeding (as in 2007) at the Nature reserve and we saw when they chased a White-tailed Eagle out of their breeding territory.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*: One singing at the Nature reserve (David)

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: One 2 cal male at the lighthouse. The northernmost record in the world?

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: One in Gamvik. Very rare in Finnmark.
Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: One singing in Gamvik (David).
Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*: One male at the Nature reserve.
Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: At least 200 birds in total (also seen around the house!)

Otter *Lutra lutra*: One in Gamvik harbour (Aron and Hampus).
Stoat *Mustela erminea*: One at the lighthouse.
Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*: About 15 on the little islet off Slettnes lighthouse.



The lovely adult Gyrfalcon, which was seen at the lighthouse today! Photos: Aron Andersson, Sweden.



A nice and huge Otter in Gamvik harbour eating some delicious seafood. Video still: Hampus Lejon.

12th May 2008

Sightings worthy to mention:

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*: About 20 roosting at sea off the lighthouse and a beautiful displaying pair, which was video filmed by David! The pair was also heard in their lovely dancelike display! At least five 2 cal birds were seen roosting.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: About 200 birds (females and 2 cal males in majority).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: At least three birds in the area.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: A single in Gamvik harbour.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: Two in Gamvik.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*: 35 in Gamvik harbour and several at the lighthouse.

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*: The breeding pair seen at several times.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*: Two at the Nature reserve and one overflying at the lighthouse.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: One 2 cal male still present at the lighthouse. The second record for the area. The previous one was seen in Gamvik May 2002.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: One seen and singing in Gamvik.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: One still present in Gamvik.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: Several seen and heard.

Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*: One male at the Nature reserve.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: At least 300 birds in total.

Otter *Lutra lutra*: One in Gamvik harbour (Kristoffer).

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*: About three off Slettnes lighthouse.



Four o'clock in the morning. Very cold, if you ask Aron and David, which was at the lighthouse from 2 am. In total it was a great day with lots of passing seabirds and nice weather. Photo: Niklas Holmström



Brünnich's Guillemot in Gamvik harbour, still with white winter-plumaged throat. Photo: Kristoffer Nilsson, Sweden.
The 2 cal year male Black Redstart was still present at the lighthouse today. Video still: Hampus Lejon, Sweden.

The afternoon and evening at the lighthouse was very nice, concerning seabird migration and excellent weather and light conditions. Everyone was triggered to the edge seeing thousands of auks passing close in very nice light. Within six hours 21 690 Puffins towards west was counted! Also the local birder Roy Erling Wrånes came by for a chat and a seawatch session.

13th May 2008

Sightings worthy to mention:

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*: About 15 roosting at sea off the lighthouse.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: About 200 birds (females and 2 cal males in majority).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: At least two birds in the area, of which one was very close!

Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*: Several sightings of an adult bird.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: A single seen at the lighthouse.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*: Several at the lighthouse.

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*: The breeding pair seen at several times.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*: A single at the harbour of Gamvik.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: One still present in Gamvik.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: Several seen and heard.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: At least 300 birds in total.

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*: About 15 on the little islet off Slettnes lighthouse.



Male Lapland Bunting and a Horned Lark at the Nature reserve. Video stills: Hampus Lejon

14th May 2008

Sightings worthy to mention:

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*: About 10 roosting at sea off the lighthouse (two 2 cal year).

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: About 100 birds (females and 2 cal males in majority).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: At least three birds, of which one caught a Fulmar at sea!

Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus*: One male seen several times at the lighthouse.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: A single seen at the lighthouse.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*: Several at the lighthouse.

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*: The breeding pair seen at several times.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*: One pair at the Nature reserve.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: One 2 cal male still present at the lighthouse.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: One seen at the Nature reserve.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: One still present in Gamvik.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: Several seen and heard.

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*: Two at the lighthouse.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: At least 300 birds in total.

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*: About 15 on the little islet off Slettnes lighthouse.



Niklas held an evening lecture/slideshow about seawatching in Senegal (and a second one about the Macaronesian islands) for the people in Gamvik. Right photo: The Rook in Gamvik. Photos: Kristoffer Nilsson.

15th May 2008

Sightings worthy to mention:

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*: About 10 roosting at sea off the lighthouse (two 2 cal year and one possible 3 rd cal year, with all-dark head and neck).

European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*: About 100 birds on a islet off the harbour.

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*: One overflying the harbour towards the mountain.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: About 100 birds (females and 2 cal males in majority and one adult male).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: At least 4-5 birds (also seen from the kitchen window)!

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: A single in the harbour.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*: About 200 birds at the lighthouse.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*: A single at the lighthouse and in the harbour.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Two in the harbour.

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*: The breeding pair seen at several times.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*: One pair at the Nature reserve.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*: One at the lighthouse and one at the harbour.

Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*: One flying over our house.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: One 2 cal male still at the lighthouse and was singing.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: Several seen and heard.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: At least 100 birds in total.

Orca (Killer Whale) *Orcinus orca*: 18-20 animals divided on several groups. They were seen for more than an hour. Several males with huge dorsal fins! Seen breaching and playing. A great time at the lighthouse, sunny and only calm winds from northeast.

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*: Three on the little islet off Slettnes lighthouse.

Stoat *Mustela erminea*: One at the lighthouse.



Six very happy birders after having seen several groups of Killer Whales (in total about 20 animals!) for more than an hour. A few seen breaching and playing. From left: Hampus, Aron, Kristoffer (standing), Alain, Niklas and David. Photo: A Norwegian birder.

16th May 2008

Sightings worthy to mention:

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*: At least 10 roosting at sea off the lighthouse.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: About 100 birds (females and 2nd cal males in majority and one 3rd cal male).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: At least 4-5 birds.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*: About 100 birds at the lighthouse.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: A single at the lighthouse.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*: One pale adult in the harbour, then flying north.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: A few at the lighthouse.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*: One pair at the Nature reserve.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*: One at the lighthouse.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: Several seen and heard.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: At least 200 birds in total.

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*: About 20 on the little islet off Slettnes lighthouse.

This afternoon four birders (Bosse & Elisabeth Larsson, Roger Karlsson och Lennart Andersson) from Finspång in Sweden arrived.



One of three Pomarine Skuas in a flock passing very close to the lighthouse in the afternoon!
Photo: Aron Andersson, Sweden.

17th May 2008

A very nice day, even though it was snowing all night. At 11:40 we arrived to the lighthouse. Very strong wind from north-east, a roaring sea and lovely light conditions! A total of 158 Pomarine Skuas passed towards east, of which several flocks came very close to the light house (and Los Fotos Odos). The closest at a range of about 20 metres. Until this evening we have counted 960 Pomarine Skuas in total!

At three o'clock in the afternoon we were invited by Kåre & Bølga Grip for a dinner (on Norway's national day). And what a dinner! It was like a Christmas table with delicious food. All the eight of us plus the dogs (Dennis and Kero) had a nice time. We also were handed a gift in form of a nice T-shirt by the Gamvik community. At 18:15 we headed to the lighthouse again seeing more lovely Poms!

Sightings worthy to mention:

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*: At least 5 roosting at sea off the lighthouse.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: About 110 birds (females and 2nd cal males in majority and one 3rd cal male).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: At least 4-5 birds.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: A single at the lighthouse by the birders from Finspång.

Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus*: One seen over our house in Gamvik.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*: About 50 birds at the lighthouse.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: Eight birds in the harbour, of which two colour ringed..

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Five in the harbour.

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*: The breeding pair seen at several times.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*: One at the lighthouse.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: One still present in Gamvik.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: Several seen and heard.

Lapland Bunting *Calciarius lapponicus*: One male at the Nature reserve.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: At least 200 birds in total.

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*: Several seen off Slettnes lighthouse.



An Arctic Skua in top and four lovely Poms above. No further words needed.
 Photos (at Los Fotos Odos, Slettnes): Aron Andersson, Sweden.

18th May 2008

In late afternoon Hampus, Aron and David sadly left Slettnes and flying home from Mehamn. Kristoffer, Alain and myself will have one morning more before we travel to Kiruna by car via Porsangerfjord (hoping to see the Lesser White-fronted Geese).

Today we counted 40 Glaucous Gulls in all ages, which was a highest daily count during the trip!

Sightings worthy to mention:

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*: At least three roosting at sea off the lighthouse.

Pintail *Anas acuta*: Two pairs seen.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: About 400 birds (females and 2nd cal males in majority and one 3rd cal male).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: At least four birds on several times during the day.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: A single at the lighthouse.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*: About 50 birds at the lighthouse.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: One bird in the harbour.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Five in the harbour.

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*: The breeding pair seen at several times.

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoideus*: One 2 cal year in Gamvik harbour (Hampus)

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*: One bird seen from our house in the evening!

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*: One at the lighthouse.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: One 2 cal male still at the lighthouse.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: Several seen and heard.

Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*: Three males at the Nature reserve.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: At least 200 birds in total.

Otter *Lutra lutra*: One at the lighthouse (the Swedish birders from Finspång).

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*: Several seen off Slettnes lighthouse.



Glaucous Gulls at the lighthouse on 18th May. Note the moulting gap of the inner primaries, which is typical for most 2 cal year birds in May at Slettnes. Photos: Kristoffer Nilsson, Sweden.

19th May 2008

We did seawatch at the lighthouse for two hours early in the morning and we saw 15 lovely White-billed Divers and four Long-tailed Skuas passing by. And as a farewell a beautiful dark Pomarine Skua chased a Kittiwake just twenty metres from the lighthouse, flying around the buildings and then settled at sea. What a show!

Now, we will take a nap for a couple of hours before we hit the road back to Kiruna via Porsangerfjord. We hope you have enjoyed the daily updates concerning sightings, countings and photos from our trip!



A pair of Arctic Skuas at the Nature reserve early this morning! Photo: Kristoffer Nilsson, Sweden.

20th May 2008

I am sorry, but I did hope that my words above, on 19th, was the last ones from our trip. But, there were some more sightings and complications on the road back home. Driving through the Nordkynn peninsula was a soft photo orgy of dramatic and breathtaking views. We started early from Gamvik, just to have plenty of time in margin, which was smartly.



Road signs at the harbour in middle of Gamvik, when leaving the village. Photo: Niklas Holmström



View of the landscape at the high plateau of Nordkyn peninsula. Photo: Niklas Holmström

The road from Gamvik to Lakselv was good with sightings such as displaying Rough-legged Buzzards, two Ring Ouzels, about 200 Snow Buntings, Velvet Scoters (2 pairs), Grey Shrike, Kestrels and Ravens. At Porsanger fjord we did search hard for any possible Lesser White-fronted Geese, but we only find Bean, Pink-footed and Graylag Goose. Beside all ducks and waders, about ten close White-tailed Eagles, which was a high-light, especially for Alain.

We had a dinner at the probably northernmost pizzeria in Europe; Molino, in Lakselv. We just paid and eat. Oh, I forgot to tell we didn't see any supposed Lesser White-fronted Geese at Porsanger.

Later on, between Karesuando and Vittangi, both nice and bad things happen. About ten minutes after passing Karesuando in silent night it started to rain and snow. The snow did come and go, which was frustrating. Alain took it easy behind the wheel, but we recorded about 10 Ptarmigan, 22 Capercaillie (of which four was males!), Rough-legged Buzzard (2), Short-eared Owl (3), Grey Shrike (2) and finally we saw three lovely Siberian Jays feeding for about twenty minutes close in front of us, standing on the road in silence while the snow was falling softly!



The snowy road to Kiruna about two o'clock in Tuesday morning! Photo: Niklas Holmström

It was strange walking around at Kiruna Airport in snow and hearing and seeing lots of Lapland Buntings and Bramblings, a Willow Warbler singing in the snowy trees as well as seven (blackish) Spotted Redshanks flying over. Back in Stockholm everything was green, sunny and hot. Everything there seem to be so normal and somewhat booring. Depends of who you ask. I do miss the silence and the sea...

Niklas Holmström, Sweden