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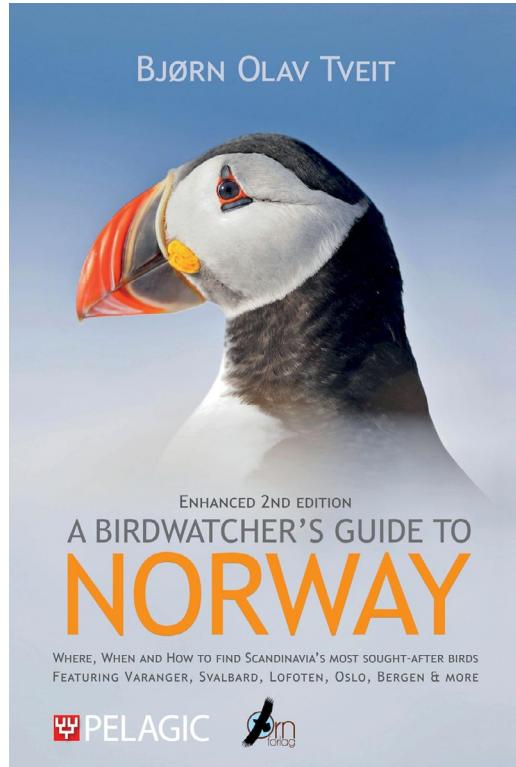
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A GUIDE TO BIRDWATCHING IN NORWAY



Tveit B.O. 2024. A Birdwatcher's Guide to Norway. Where, When and How to find Scandinavia's most sought-after birds. 2nd ed. Ørn Forlag & Pelagic Publishing. 460 pp., many color photos and maps.

Norway is located on the Scandinavian peninsula with a population of only 5.5 million as 2024 and a total area of 385,207 square kilometers. Its fjords spread over much of the coastline are famous. Bjørn Olav Tveit is a well-known birdwatcher, who has explored all the best birding sites of Norway. In 2024 BirdLife Norway granted him a honorary award for his many years of commitment to birdwatching, organizational involvement and bird conservation. As the author wrote in his first preface 'Every respectable nation should have at least one birdwatching site guide'. Thirteen years have passed since the first English edition of this book was published; now the second edition has been edited. Norway, due to its location far north in Europe, has a number of species that are difficult to see further south. The country is considered a very safe area because of low crime rates and no really poisonous or otherwise dangerous animals, except for Polar bears on Svalbard islands.

This book describes in detail the best sites for finding the most sought-after birds. More than 530 species of wild birds have been recorded in Norway, of which 220 breed regularly and about 100 are considered regular visitors either as migrants or winter visitors. The book is di-

vided into eight areas, easily recognizable by a small map at the top right of each odd-numbered page, where the area of the region in question within the borders of Norway is reproduced in red. A total of 151 birdwatching sites are described in detail, two of which on Svalbard islands.

All of Norway is dotted with birdwatching spots, watchtowers and comfortable wooden birdhouses; so birdwatching is greatly facilitated and provides numerous opportunities to observe interesting species. Some Norwegian environments are very well organized for visiting; for example in the Fokstumyra marsh during the breeding season traffic is only permitted along the easy-to-walk boardwalks. Many visitors from abroad use the main international airport Gardermoen as their gateway to the country. The airport hotels are also regular venues for business conferences, and many people may therefore have a few hours at their disposal near the airport to see birds. Gardermoen is particularly popular in terms of birds that even the resident birdwatchers regularly make the trip up there.

Here are reported some considerations on environments and species that may be useful for the reader. Forests occupy a wide surface in Norway; among the birds the Black woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* is the most important provider of natural large cavities in the Scandinavian forests. It uses the hole only the year it makes it, leaving it for the breeding of owls and many other secondary users (e.g., many species of tits) in subsequent seasons. Differently from the previous bird, the

White-backed woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* is an endangered species that has almost completely disappeared from many parts of Norway. The Pine grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*, a large member of the finch family and the only species of the genus, lives with eight subspecies in coniferous woods with a rich juniper undergrowth across the northern part of the north hemisphere, and is a sparse breeder in the Pasvik valley (north Norway). The Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, like the Woodlark *Lullula arborea*, is usually found in association with dry, open pine forests; it has the strongest population in the south-eastern parts of Norway. The ornithologist notoriously uses his hearing as well as his sight to a great extent; Nightjars are seldom seen, and their presence is usually noticed by the buzzing song performed in quiet early summer nights.

Willow ptarmigan *Lagopus lagopus variegata* is considered the only endemic taxon in Norway, that is the only bird that is not found in any other country. It differs from other Ptarmigans in that it does not turn completely white in winter; however, the taxonomy of Ptarmigans is confused, just because of the changes in plumage several times a year and the different colors and pattern of the summer plumage. Therefore the species should deserve a more in-depth taxonomic study.

Northern European countries have not always protected their species, especially birds of prey. In old times White-tailed eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* were hunted by trappers; they sat in a hiding place

where a lamb carcass had been deposited. When the eagle landed, the trapper grabbed hold of the eagle's feet. In 1968 the eagle was protected and this tradition ended. Presently it has become common in eastern Finnmark (north Norway). Today the population of another raptor, the Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus*, is greatly reduced, not only for the human nest depredation but also for the collision with reindeer fences, a growing problem difficult to solve.

Norway is a country rich in water; streams and rivers flow through many areas of the country and as a result, bird species related to these environments live at ease. The Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* was named Norway's national bird in 1963; it thrives in waterways in most of the country, and it will survive as long as it has access to open, flowing water.

Also wetland environments are widespread in Norway and provide excellent opportunities to observe birds rare in Europe. Pectoral sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* breeds in North America and Siberia, and is one of the most regular of the rare shorebirds in Norway. Knot has one of the most important staging grounds in Norway; many individuals are color ringed for research purposes and many birdwatchers go in search of these birds to read their rings and communicate their position to researchers. Black-tailed godwit has in Norway two subspecies, the southern *limosa* breeds on Joeren, while the northern *islandica* in north Norway. Interestingly, this subspecies winters hundreds of kilometers from the nesting site

and the two sexes migrate separately. Sabine's gull *Xema sabini* is an arctic species that can be observed in the Varangerfjord (north Norway). Another interesting bird is the Arctic tern *Sterna paradisaea*, the world's longest-travelling migrant; it breeds along most of the Norwegian coasts and in Svalbard, and every year its migration journey covers thousands of kilometers to reach the wintering areas in the Antarctic seas. The Arctic skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* has one of the largest and densest colonies in Norway at Slettnes headland.

King eider *Somateria spectabilis* has its most important wintering area in Europe along the coast of Finnmark (north Norway), particularly in the Varangerfjord. Even the beautiful Steller's eider *Polyysticata stelleri* has the most important wintering area in Europe in eastern Finnmark; however, the numbers have decreased noticeably in recent years. In several places along the Varangerfjord also the Shore lark *Eremophila alpestris* nests right down to the sea-level; elsewhere in Norway it is a distinctly mountain bird associated with dry tundra, often occurring side-by-side with the Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*.

Storm petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* spend their lives on the open sea and only come ashore during the breeding season under the cover of darkness. Interestingly, because of the midnight sun in the north of the country, this seabird postpones nesting until the nights are dark and it can crawl into the nest holes without risking attacks from gulls and other predators. It would be interesting

to know whether this is a genetically fixed adaptation.

A chapter is dedicated to two sites on Svalbard islands, where the birdwatcher can truly observe numerous Nordic species. But beware: an encounter with the Polar bear is possible. A final chapter is devoted to 155 'Selected Species'; the biology of each is briefly outlined and information is provided on the best opportunities to encounter them in Norway.

The book is excellently illustrated with beautiful bird photos and maps of all the sites the birdwatcher can visit. If you are an ornithologist or a birdwatcher and you decide to visit Norway, pack this book, it will be very useful!

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