

## Birds

For watching birds of boreal forest, routes 1, 5, 6, 8, 16, 17, 18 and 19 are recommended, as is Iivaara (page 132). To find the birds of the mires and wetlands, try routes 6, 13 and 20, plus the additional sites mentioned on pages 140 and 186. Fell birds are found on routes 9, 14, 15, 19, 21 and 22 and in the Utsjoki area (pages 162-163) and Ounastunturi fells (page 180) Further information on birdwatching is given on page 202 and onwards.

Owls, and waders, Red-flanked Bluetails and Long-tailed Skuas – Finnish Lapland has a unique and superb bird-life. With roughly 143 species of breeding birds, Lapland's birdlife measures up with that of the better sites in southern Europe – quite amazing at this latitude. Many of them can only be found in Lapland, since the alternative sites in interior Russia are too hard to reach. No wonder this region draws both Finnish and foreign birdwatchers.

The thing that spoils the birding feast somewhat is the elusiveness of many of Lapland's specialities. Densities of birds

are naturally low in this region. For various reasons (see page 75 and box on page 32) the bogs and forests are uncertain and usually frugal providers. As a consequence, birds either roam vast territories or have adopted a nomadic lifestyle, moving to those areas where food is available. Moreover, the season in which birds are active is very short. But if you get the timing right, you are in for an extraordinary birding experience. This makes Finnish Lapland a real challenge and every observation all the more enjoyable. For finding the really difficult species, such as owls and grouse, you are advised to seek assistance from local birdwatchers or birding companies (See page 203 for details).

Waders, such as this Greenshank (right) and Snipe (bottom), breed in the mires of Lapland. They frequently perch on trees to display or alarm.



### Siberian Jay – your inquisitive companion in the north

The Siberian Jay is THE bird of the old-growth forest of Lapland. Unlike other birds of the crow family, the Siberian Jays hasn't traded in its original habitat for parks and villages. The few birds that do breed near settlements have little luck in rearing their young because other members of the crow family rob the nests too frequently.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its preference for remote areas, Siberian Jays are not shy and even show an explicit interest in the activities of hikers, particularly when there is the prospect of finding something edible. You will find Siberian Jays most likely at a shelter or hut in the middle of the forest. They appear suddenly and silently as they glide from branch to branch towards the camp. Siberian Jays are not afraid of fire and may pick out crumbs of bread from the edge of the fireplace. Only when they have young, during June, are they shy and remain in the woods, afraid to disclose the location of their offspring. In July, when the young are able to fly, the new family noisily combs the forest for food.

Maybe it is this inquisitive behaviour that gave the *Kuukkeli*, as the Finns call this bird, its many nicknames. They are known as birds of fortune to the Sámi hunter. When a jay appears, the hunt is blessed. Only when you find a jay's nest, you are in trouble. You are not to disturb the nest, according to Sámi lore, since, if you do so, misfortune will strike you or your family.

Like other members of the crow family, Siberian Jays are smart birds. Recently, researchers discovered that this bird has developed an ingenious predator alarm system, with different calls to identify the type of predator. Siberian Jays warn each other when there is an owl or a Goshawk around. Furthermore, they even have different calls to qualify the threat level of the predator. A perched Goshawk invokes a different and tamer alarm than a hunting hawk.

The research does not tell us whether jays have a special call reserved for humans. If they have, it must mean something like 'potential food source detected'. So come prepared – that is, have some crumbs reserved – and you'll find the Siberian Jay to be a faithful companion on your hikes.



Siberian Jay