

GOTLAND

Island of birds





White-tailed eagle
Cover: Bar-tailed godwits

In the bleak winter light, a white-tailed eagle on a rock by the sea. In spring the elegant avocet, black and white and long-legged in the bay. In the light green meadows of spring the collared flycatcher sings its monotonous song. But soon the songbirds arrive, the true singers! The island is filled with bird song, the skylarks are trilling over fields and grazing grounds, the curlew fluting over the shoreline meadows. And in July the waders are flocking on the shores, already southbound.



Eagles

Gotland probably has the densest population of golden eagle in the world. The white-tailed eagles also thrive, feeding on fish, geese and ducks and can often be seen along the coast.

The golden eagles, more gracious flyers, can perform tight rapid sweeps and like catching rabbits and hares but also ducks and geese.

Eagles usually only raise 1–2 chicks a year and are therefore vulnerable. It took a long time to come back from the brink of extinction after they were exposed to toxins in the environment in the middle of the last century, but now they are finally back. Don't miss the chance to enjoy them here on the island!



Common buzzard
– often mistaken
for an eagle, but
much smaller.

White-tailed
eagle – the
largest of all
eagles in Europe,
wingspan of
240 cm.



Young golden eagle with
white on wings and tail,
the old are all brown.

Waders

On Gotland there are many good sites to watch waders. Several species breed along the shorelines and in wetlands, even more pass migrating during spring and autumn. The spring migration is intensive and soon over, all are eager to reach their breeding grounds and find a good spot to raise the young ones.

After laying the eggs follow a few weeks of incubation, hatching and time for the young to grow. The young search for insects and other bugs themselves.

Many females migrate south already in late June or early July. Along the shores of Gotland they feed and rest. The males and the young ones follow a few weeks later.



Redshank



Dunlin



Purple sandpiper



Broad-billed sandpiper



Little stint



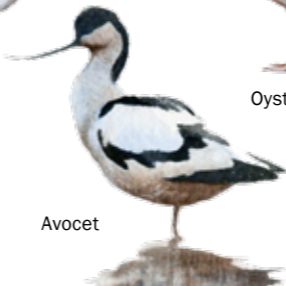
Curlew sandpiper



Lapwing



Oystercatcher



Avocet

Ducks

In spring ducks gather along the coasts of Gotland, all in their most beautiful plumage. During this time, the males must look their best in order to attract a female.

Shovelers with their dark green heads and the rusty brown spot on the side can be commonly seen. The gracious pintails are unbelievably beautiful, but not quite as common. The softly round-headed widgeons with their large white wing spots are easy to recognise. The smaller ducks, teals and the discreet but splendid garganey also gather in flocks, which can best be seen from the various bird watching towers on the island.

Don't miss the chance for a fantastic experience of beauty, get out there in April and May and enjoy the colourful splendour.



Widgeon



Garganey



Left to right: shovler (male and female), teal (male), pintail (male) and gadwall (male).

Geese

During spring and especially autumn, tens of thousands of geese migrate over Gotland. It is no exaggeration to say that the whole sky is covered by flocks of barnacle geese towards evening when they gather to find rest for the night.

Some of them stay for a good while and fly back and forth over the island when changing feeding places. Smaller flocks of other species of geese – brent, greater white-fronted and bean geese – can also be seen. But most often the large flocks consist entirely of barnacle geese, a species which earlier was very uncommon on Gotland and in the rest of Sweden. They have changed their migrating route so that they nowadays pass the island, but they have also – like most other geese – multiplied since they find winter food in the green winter fields of Europe.



Barnacle goose

Collared flycatcher

Collared flycatcher is the provincial bird of Gotland. It is a cute little bird, which can be rather tough and chase away other birds who claim the same nesting place.

The male is black and white with a white collar around its neck. The female is more discreet and brownish.

In Sweden they can be found almost only on Gotland, Öland and around Kalmar, usually they live farther eastward in Europe. In winter they migrate to Africa.

Collared flycatchers live in holes in tree trunks in deciduous woods, gardens and hedges. Therefore they prefer older forests with mature trees with lots of holes in their trunks. They are also fond of birdhouses.



Male



Female

Spring birds

Spring on Gotland is a wonderful time and comes extra early with the skylarks already in February. Soon thereafter arrive shelducks, ringed plovers, oystercatchers and curlews.

When the skylarks sing over fields and pastures summer is here, even if it is only May. To a birdwatcher, summer ends in July when the waders return south.

In the world of birds spring means hurry: fly to the breeding grounds, find a good territory, sing like mad or dance around like a lunatic with raised neck feathers to attract a female. Then laying eggs, brooding, hatching and raising the young ones. Many birds fly by the island in April and May, a great time for bird watching.

Photo: Niclas Ahlberg/N (skylark, ruff, pied wagtail).
Magnus Martinsson/N (shelduck, curlew).
Stefan Oscarsson/N (barn swallow).



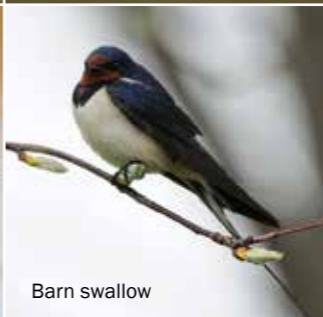
Shelduck



Skylark



Curlew



Barn swallow



Ruff



Pied wagtail

Autumn birds

In autumn the birds have to eat a lot and build up a good layer of fat. Many will move far and some of them hardly stop along the route and have to make do with their fat reserves. Small insect-eating birds migrating all the way to Africa leave quite early since food here in the north disappears in early autumn. Seed-eating birds can stay a bit longer or even all winter.

Others simply look for better feeding places on shallow shores in Central Europe. Along the coast of Gotland geese, ducks, loons, gulls and waders from northern Sweden fly south, grebes fly past or stay over winter. The auks from the Karlsö Islands move south as soon as their chicks are ready to swim in the open waters, heading south.

Photo: Niclas Ahlberg/N (chaffinches). Magnus Martinsson/N (wood sandpiper). Stefan Oscarsson/N (wood pigeons, yellowhammer).



Chaffinches



Wood pigeons



Yellowhammer



Wood sandpiper

Winter birds

In winter, northern birds come to Gotland to escape harsher weather. Ducks, which have been breeding in the northern mountains and forests stay over winter along the coasts around the island and can be seen in large flocks.

Thousands of scaups bob in the steely grey sea together with tufted ducks, great crested grebes and the beautiful smew. The male smew is beautifully black and white. The goldeneyes often gather closer to land, but usually just a few together. The elegant long-tailed ducks from the northern mountains pass the winter far out at sea, east of the island, but some can also be seen from land.

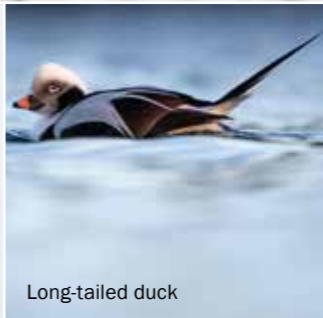
Photo: Niclas Ahlberg/N (white-tailed eagle, smew, long-tailed duck, scaup). Magnus Martinsson/N (golden eagle).



White-tailed eagle



Smew



Long-tailed duck



Scaup



Golden eagle

Birdwatching sites on Gotland



Great crested
grebe



Black-throated loon

1. **Norsholmen.** Waders in spring and summer, eagles in winter.
2. **Fardume träsk.** Reeds with bittern, marsh harrier, hobby.
3. **Furilden.** Exciting passerines during migration.
4. **Asunden and Vägumeviken.** Waders in spring and autumn when low water levels. Ducks and grebes in winter.
5. **Storsund.** Nesting great egrets. Reeds. Birdwatching tower.
6. **Lina myr.** Corncrake and night singing warblers. In autumn and winter whooper and tundra swan, geese and raptors.
7. **Kuppen, Östergarn.** Migrating brent and barnacle goose, loons, ducks and gulls.
8. **Lausviken.** Ducks, waders and eagles. Tens of thousands of barnacle geese in autumn and spring. Two birdwatching towers.
9. **Hammaren.** Barnacle goose, white-tailed eagle, golden eagle. Wintering greater scaups, smew and grebes.
10. **Närsholmen.** Waders in summer and autumn, nesting avocets. Rare passerines in autumn and spring.
11. **Ronehamn.** Scaups, tufted ducks and smew in winter. White-tailed eagle.
12. **Grötlingboud.** Barnacle goose, ducks and waders during migration. Nesting avocets, dunlins and ruff.
13. **Faludden.** Loons, ducks, geese, waders and gulls during migration. Rare passerines.
14. **Stockviken.** Great site during spring with ducks, geese, herons, waders.

15. **Muskmyr and Alvret.** Good for raptors: eagles, buzzards, harriers and falcons, occasionally red-footed falcon and Montagu's harrier.
16. **Hoburgen.** Exciting year round. Ringing in spring and autumn. Migrating waterfowl, raptors, passerines and rare species.
17. **Näsudden and Burgsviken.** Exciting passerines in autumn and winter, e.g. horned larks, snow buntings, twite. In winter, sometimes hundreds of smew in the bay.
18. **Nisseviken.** Waders from mid July through September.
19. **Mästermyr.** Winter site with geese, whooper and tundra swans, rough-legged buzzards, eagles, hen harriers, peregrine falcons and great grey shrikes.
20. **Stånga returvattendammar.** Slavonian grebe, little grebe, red-necked grebe and ducks.
21. **Stora and Lilla Karlsö.** The only steep coastal cliffs in the Baltic with breeding auks: guillemots, razorbills, black guillemots. Also eider, barred warbler and common rosefinch.
22. **Kronholmen.** Large numbers of eiders migrating in April. Geese and ducks.
23. **Paviken.** Ducks, bitterns, rails, crakes, marsh harriers and penduline tit. Two birdwatching towers.
24. **Kappelshamnsviken.** Ducks in thousands during winter: tufted ducks, scaups and smew, also loons and grebes.

Migration in spring and autumn

The birds pass along various migration routes from the winter areas in the south to the breeding sites in the north. Millions of birds pass through the Baltic area, many follow the coasts as far as possible and



avoid to the very last the open sea. Others fly unconcerned close to the water surface. In the Central Baltic area hundreds of thousands of ducks, geese, gulls and waders can be seen along the coasts. Past Gotland, the archipelago of Stockholm and Åland and via the eastern side along the coasts of Latvia and Estonia they fight their way up to the northern forests or mountains or over to Finland and Russia.

Gotland is a paradise for birds and bird watchers. Here you will find exciting birds all year around: eagles, geese in the tens of thousands, waders along the shores and beautiful small birds in meadows and pastures. Welcome to watch birds on marvelous Gotland!

Baltic Wings is a cross-border collaboration, promoting the central Baltic area as a birding and nature tourism destination. The aim is to create new work opportunities in rural areas. The project runs from 2018 to 2020 and is mainly financed by the European Regional Development Fund. Region Gotland co-finances the Gotland part of the project which is implemented by Föreningen Närsholmen. More info at www.balticwings.org.

ILLUSTRATIONS: Peter Nilsson.

