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## **Tromso 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

I figured there was little point in following my usual trip report format for this holiday, as the birding really was minimal, and I imagine it's unlikely many people will choose Tromso as a place to bird in the winter. However, with next to no material on the area online, I hope it can be of use to some, who may end up here at this time of year in search of the Aurora Borealis, for which Tromso is famous for.

This is why my girlfriend and I visited for a few days in December. We also had a whale watching trip with [Arctic Whale Tours](#) booked for the 15<sup>th</sup> (which got moved to the 16<sup>th</sup> due to demand, no problem for us, but could be for others). This trip was absolutely fantastic – we enjoyed sensational views of two pods of Orcas, as well as several close encounters with Humpback Whales. All the key birds I saw were from the boat, again offering some wonderful views.

The weather was very mild for the time of year, with rain and cloud hampering our hopes of seeing the Northern Lights. The Arctic Night was also in full swing, with around 2 hours (from 10:30-12:30) of murky light all you got, making birding pretty much impossible. On the way home we stopped at Oslo for a night, and a birding morning with the extremely knowledgeable [Simon Rix](#) was as enjoyable as my previous experience, and we had great views of Nutcrackers, and a fleeting one of a Hazel Grouse at Lillomarka.

With help from Simon, and two relatively dated piece on birds in the Tromso area, I managed to patch together some gen, leaving my targets White-billed Diver and King Eider - both species are said to winter in the fjords and offshore in decent numbers. Arctic Redpoll and Gyrfalcon, both residents, were remote possibilities. I didn't keep a list of birds (it would have been tiny!) but of the passerines, singles of Fieldfare and Chaffinch were of note.

### **Highlights**

**King Eider** – Roughly 35 were seen from the boat in 2 rafts in Kvalsundet fjord on the 16<sup>th</sup>. These birds were flighty, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> I saw none in the same area from the land.

**Gyrfalcon** – A massive, and welcome, surprise, was a presumed male dark/silver morph seen from the boat on the 16<sup>th</sup>. The bird was seen twice, firstly flying south over Hakjerringholmen islet before again about half an hour heading east towards Ringvassoya. Apparently this species will take sitting Auks from the water, which this individual was presumably thinking of doing.

**Little Auk** – Whilst not a target, the views of this delightful species from the boat on the 16<sup>th</sup> were by far the best I have had. At least 12 were seen in total, including several showing down to a few feet from the vessel.

### **Not seen**

**White-billed Diver** – Possibly a little too far from the actual sea for this species, which is said to winter in numbers off the north-west coast.

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**Arctic Redpoll** – Not too surprising that I didn't see any, as there was next to no light, and next to no passerines.

### **Other birds of note**

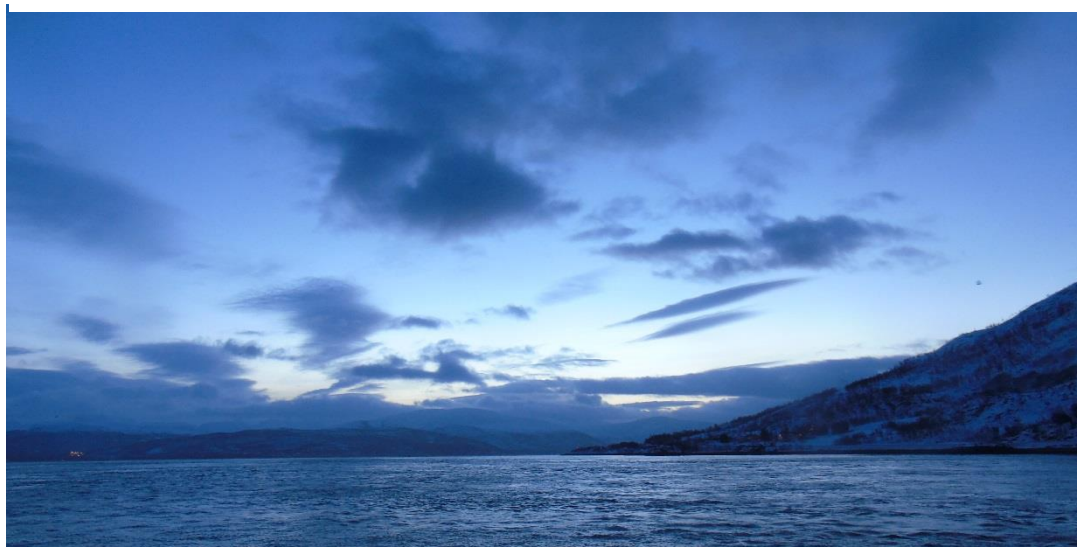
**Whooper Swan** – I was surprised to see 3 at Rakkfjordmyran on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

**White-tailed Eagle** – Extremely abundant, mainly along the Kvalsundet fjord (though 2 were at the airport on the 14<sup>th</sup>), where they took dead fish floating at the top of the water. As many as 15 were seen on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and at very close range – these birds are so confiding in the winter, and I enjoyed jaw-dropping views. I would go as far as to say these are probably the best views one will get in the Western Palearctic.

**Glaucous Gull** – A few seen amongst commoner species on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, all along the Kvalsundet fjord.



**A roadside view of an Orca passing 2 White-tailed Eagles**



**As light as it gets during the 'Arctic Night'**