

N2 TRAVEL EUROPE

From the hide at Vargas Wilderness Lodge, you can watch brown bears in their natural habitat – and they will be blissfully unaware of your presence.



CARNIVORE WATCHING SWEDEN

Bears in the woods

Seeing Europe's largest predator in Sweden is now easy, says **Simon Birch**, but it isn't the only reason to visit.

Why should I visit Sweden?

Because it's one of Europe's most underrated wildlife destinations. Sweden's vast coniferous forests and pristine lakes and wetlands are packed with exciting species, including 2,500 European brown bears, more than 200,000 beavers, 250,000 moose and 200 wolves.

So where should I go?

Though there are excellent areas to watch wildlife all over Sweden (which stretches for 2,000km from north to south), virtually all of the country's top species can be seen in a relatively small area just three hours' drive from Stockholm, so you don't need to spend all your time travelling around.

Will I see bears?

Bears are notoriously hard to spot, but the Vargas Wilderness Lodge near Bollnäs has established Sweden's first bear-watching hide where you're

virtually guaranteed to see them. The lodge provides food for the bears on a daily basis, which means you'll enjoy great views.

What about beavers and moose?

You're likely to get nothing more than a fleeting glimpse of beavers before they spot you and dive beneath the surface in the rivers and lakes near Skinnkatteberg. You will, however, see plenty of evidence that they're around, from gnawed tree stumps to dams made from branches and twigs. Moose are less elusive. Sunset and sunrise, when they emerge from forest cover to graze in local meadows, are the best times to look for them.

And wolves?

If you're really lucky, you'll hear wolves howling in the forests west of Köping. Look out for their tracks, though actually seeing them is much harder.

What's the birdlife like?

Brilliant. In the Svartådal river valley, just north of Västerås, you'll see many birds that are normally associated with the forests of the far north of Scandinavia and Russia, including virtually all of the northern coniferous forest owls, such as the great grey, Ural and Tengmalm's. Other forest birds include capercaillies and black and three-toed woodpeckers. In the wetlands, expect to see flocks

TOP SPECIES TO SEE



Sweden's tolerance of **BROWN BEARS** means it has the densest population of the species in Europe.



The **MOOSE** is the world's largest species of deer. Spot them in the meadows near Skinnkatteberg.



See **GREAT GREY OWLS** in the woodlands in the Svartådal river valley just north of Västerås.

of common cranes, as well as ospreys and white-tailed eagles.

When's the best time to visit? Wildlife emerges from the long Swedish winter in April, but May is better.

NOW YOU DO IT

GETTING THERE

- » Return train fares from London to Stockholm (total journey time is 26 hours) start at £240 ☎ 0844 848 4064; www.raileurope.co.uk
- » One-week car hire from Stockholm costs from £200 ☎ 0871 472 5229; www.holidayautos.co.uk

ORGANISED TOURS

- » Nature Travels run beaver, moose and wolf-watching tours ☎ 01929 463774; www.naturetravels.co.uk
- » For birdwatching, contact Birdsafari Sweden ☎ 00 46 7061 84316; www.birdsafarisweden.com
- » For bear watching, contact Vargas



Wilderness Lodge ☎ 00 46 2783 4096; vargas@nordicnature.se

FURTHER INFORMATION

- » For certified eco-friendly tour operators, look for the Nature's Best label ☎ 00 46 6312 1244; www.naturensbasta.se

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