



The dangerous crossing of the raging Iron Brook, was rewarded with the sighting of a Hawk owl with two recently-fledged chicks. Such obstacles mean that many of the Lapland Fixed Routes are covered by teams of two.



Think Your BBS Square is Hard to Get To?

Åke Lindström, Professor at Lund University, tells us about the Swedish equivalent of the BBS – and highlights some of the practical problems in surveying in the remote and sparsely-populated north of the country, as well as some of the rich rewards.

It is late June and 03.30am. I have lost the draw on who should count the first 3-km of our joint bird survey and so I grudgingly leave Richard in the car; he is my companion on this bird survey trip to Swedish Lapland. I am horribly tired after several days of survey and would definitely have preferred to stay in the car for some sleep but, once out in the subalpine birch forest, it feels better and so I pick up my notebook and start counting. After just 100m I hear an unfamiliar trill that brings Arctic Warbler to my mind. I have never heard this species before, and very few are found in Swedish Lapland each year. It goes on singing and I finally locate it and confirm its identity. A good start to the morning and one of my best lost draws ever!

AROUND THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

We are on a week's expedition around the Arctic Circle to census some Fixed Routes, the main programme within the Swedish Common Bird Monitoring Scheme. There are 716 routes distributed evenly over the country and the aim is to cover them all once a year. This is no problem in southern Sweden but to cover Lapland, an area the size of England, with only a dozen available local bird-watchers, we must send people up from the south. Luckily, the scheme gets some governmental funding for this. Richard and I are one of several teams out in Lapland this summer.

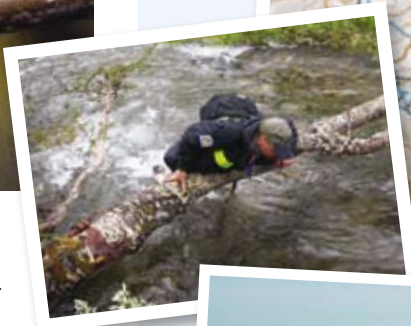
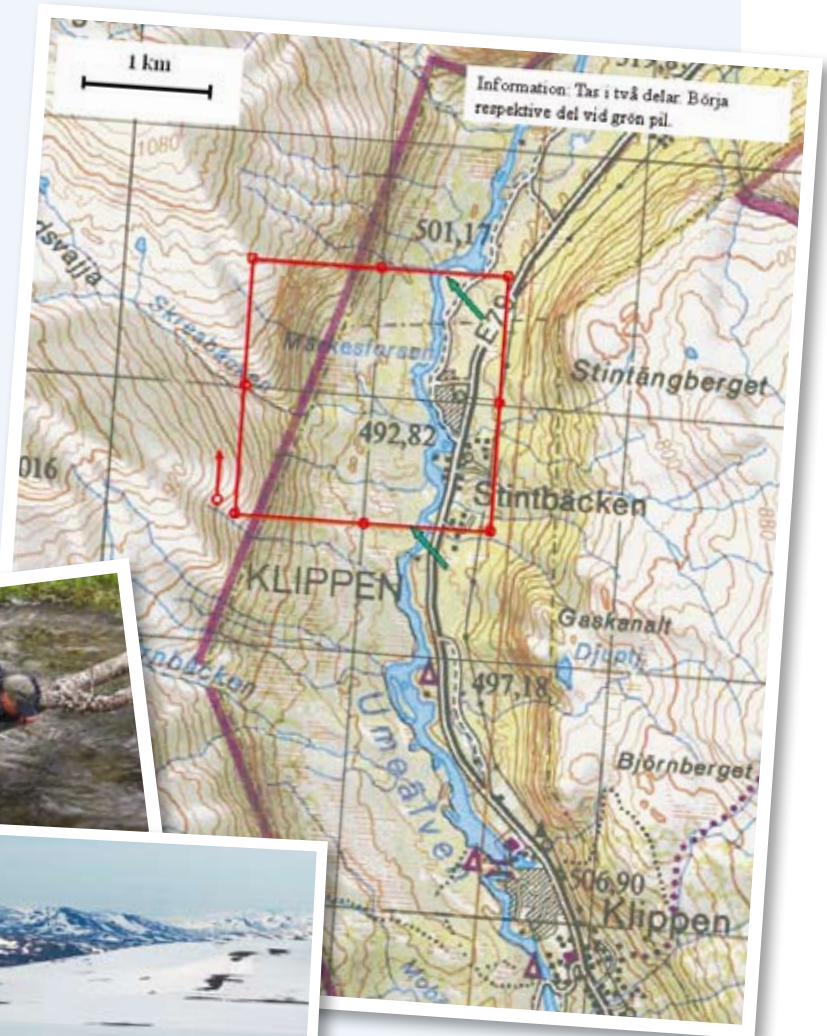
Each route is an 8-km line transect, arranged as a 2x2 km square, which means that you end up at the place you started (right). The next 3-km of my route brings the expected share of

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Surveying in Lapland is hard work but the rewards many. A few Arctic Warblers breed in northern Sweden, and the author was lucky enough to find one, just a few metres into one of the Fixed Routes.

Åkes' remote route...



Willow Warblers and Bramblings. Next comes the tricky western part of the route, which is at the other side of the wild Ume River. We drive 3-km south, park the car and cross the only bridge around. We now have to walk the whole way back north again, to reach the route.

A Fixed Route, like a BBS, is normally carried out by one person, but there is a reason for us being two here. We are now in road-less country and we have to cross Järnbäcken (Iron Brook). There are many small brooks to be crossed in Lapland, but a brook with a name normally means trouble! What we meet is roaring and ice-cold, waist-deep water and we have to take off trousers and boots and cling to a fallen tree to cross. You don't want to do this on your own. On our way through the pristine birch forest on the other side we run into a Hawk Owl with two newly fledged chicks, which makes up for the crossing. The rest of the route includes a 300m mountain climb and down again, but results in no special birds. We manage to cross Järnbäcken again and return, quite exhausted, to the car at 3pm.

YOU NEED WINGS!

Even worse, a few of the Fixed Routes can only be reached by helicopter! That afternoon we fly into the Vindel Mountain Nature Reserve, the largest in Europe. After 25km of road-less country we drop Richard off near a mountain lake. He has tent and food but, as it turns out, no insect repellent. After another 25km we land on gently rolling tundra at 1000m altitude. The near complete snow-cover comes as a shock! I shut out the midnight sun with a bandana over my eyes and fall asleep to the sound of

▲ Crossing the icy Järnbäcken (Iron Brook) and the beautiful rolling tundra at 1000m altitude.

▲ One of the routes covered by the author – a series of 1km transects, similar to BBS, but with 8 arranged together into a 2x2km square. In Sweden many of these Fixed Routes are in very remote country.

displaying Purple Sandpipers and Dotterels.

The next morning, my 8-km of trudging through the snow brings only 35 birds of 11 species. But that includes the waders I heard last night, as well as Temminck's Stint, Long-tailed Skua and Snow Buntings, all seen in a spectacular landscape under sunny skies. On our way back a few hours later we pick up Richard, badly bitten by mosquitoes, but happy nevertheless. He has found an active nest of Three-toed Woodpecker, as well as Black and Common Scoters, Whimbrel, Greenshank, Short-eared Owl, and several Bluethroats.

There are Fixed Routes all over the country, covering all the various habitats in the same proportion as these habitats occur in Sweden and in the last few years about 500 routes have been counted each year, producing 150,000 birds of 225 species. If you are passing by next summer, contact us in Lund beforehand and we may have a route for you!

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