

## SCA planning to log unique bird area in northern Sweden

Finträsk is located in Sweden, south of the town Piteå, where the border of the two counties Norrbotten and Västerbotten meet. Finträsk is a unique bird area with many large birds of prey such as Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*), Ural Owl (*Strix uralensis*), Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) and Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*). There are plenty of grouse such as Black Grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) and Western Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*). Nearly all these species are dependent on old forests. Conservationists and ornithologists have appealed to the Swedish forest company SCA for nearly 10 years, to save the remains of older forest that are vital habitats for birds in this area.



Ural Owl in a hollow tree trunk in Finträsk. Photo: Björn Mildh

Finträsk is (was) abundant in birdlife, which meet the criteria of Important Bird Area (IBA), although it has not been officially recognised. During the last ten years, SCA has repeatedly been informed about the area's unique qualities as a bird habitat with its mosaic of islands with older natural forests, marshes and small lakes. Despite this, the company has persistently continued to log the few remaining islands of natural forest, which are important habitats for many birds of prey. The small areas that have been protected by SCA,

have not been protected on the company's own initiative. It has always been due to pressure from the outside. In other words, SCA does not care about bird protection in Finnträsk despite its overstated promises. SCA's own words: *"The forest is also the habitat for thousands of animals and plants. Whenever felling takes place, certain areas that are important for vulnerable species are saved."*



*The Ural Owl Forest in Finnträsk, September 2009. Photo: Björn Mildh*

Beautiful words are one thing - action is another. Now, it is the turn of the Ural Owl's forest. It will become a pine plantation. This is what happened to the Ural Owls' former hollow tree trunk in Finnträsk. The forest was logged in the mid 1990s and the tree trunk ended up on a clear-cut, which now is a lodgepole pine plantation. Because of this, I set up a new hollow tree trunk in an adjacent forest in 1997, which SCA now wants to log. The tree trunk was already used by Mother Ural Owl a couple of months later, during the winter/spring 1998, and it has been her and her young ones' dwelling until now.

SCA, which initially did not plan to save a single tree around the hollow tree trunk, will defend themselves claiming that they have re-marked Mother Ural Owl's forest many times and will leave some trees next to the tree trunk. They will also argue that the forest has been thinned. But this is exactly the kind of forest that the Ural Owl wants as habitat, a rather open, older, mixed forest. SCA will also claim that it can not afford to save the Ural Owl's forest (ten hectares is enough). If they save the Ural Owl forest, they have to log the "Capercaillie Forest", another small, valuable forest residue in Finnträsk with a capercaillie courting ground.

It has been like this all the time, one bird species is set against another bird species. The promise of vital habitats is just fair words. It is of no importance to SCA if the birds disappear. Preferably, the birds shall be removed so that the remaining old-growth forests

can be logged without protests. SCA ignores the birds' habitat. It is much more important that the third quarter profit of 2009 is 2,199 million SEK.

Dear Mother Ural Owl, who has given me and others unforgettable experiences at your hollow tree trunk; please kindly overlook if SCA cuts down your home forest. The company does not know better.

Björn Mildh  
Board Member, Protect the Forest