

Vatikuru Nature Trail



Fells are full of life

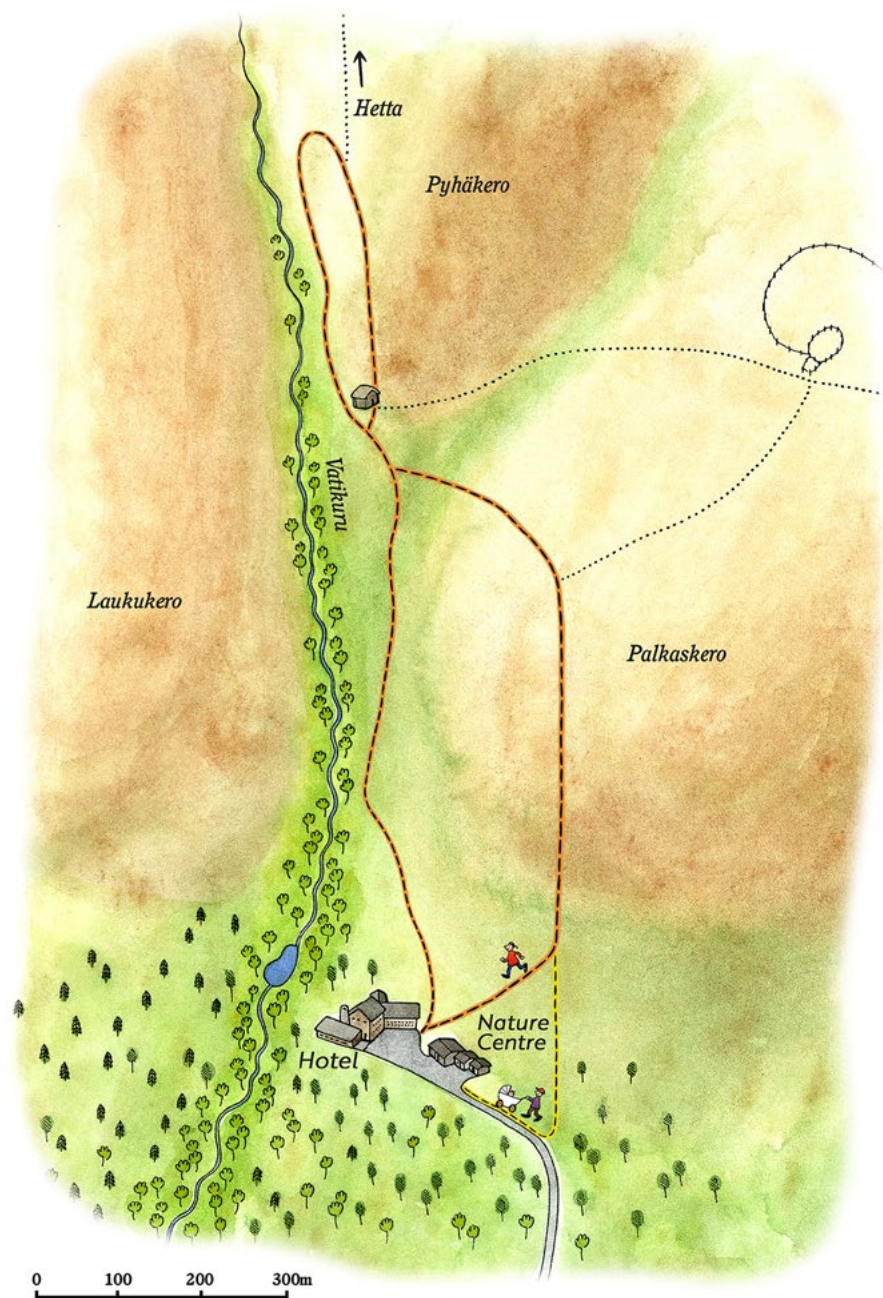
Come and walk along the Vatikuru Nature Trail and explore the life of the Pallasunturi Fells. The three-kilometre trail is easy to travel, and it is marked with blue cone symbols. Parts of the trail are also accessible with baby prams.

Text: Maarit Kyöstilä. Illustration and layout: Tupu Vuorinen



Look up for cone signs

Follow the cone symbols like a curious squirrel and see where they lead you!



Hotel in the fells

The current log-built hotel was completed in 1948. The first hotel, a modern functionalist creation, was situated up on the open fells. The old hotel was destroyed at the end of the Second World War.

The new log building is more modest in terms of appearance than its predecessor. Instead of competing with the fells for attention, it radiates warmth in the midst of the snowy landscape.

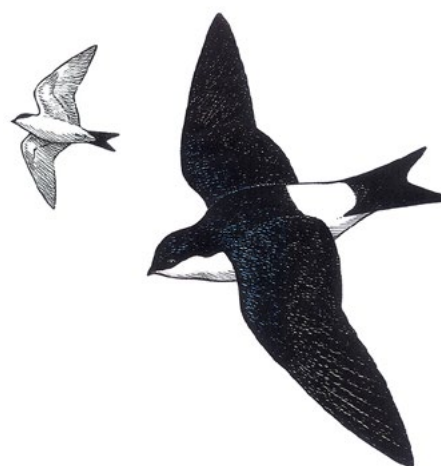


*The current hotel soon after completion.
Source: Photo archives of the Finnish Heritage Agency.*

Luxurious living

The hotel offers spectacular accommodation also for birds. Common house martins have occupied all nooks under the house eaves and above the window frames.

Reindeer are happy to roam around the parking area, as the wind keeps the mosquitoes at bay. When the day grows too hot, the reindeer rest on the asphalt and chew on their breakfast grass.



*Common house martin
Delichon urbicum*

Lift ride to the fells

In the early days of downhill skiing, enthusiasts had to climb up the fell by themselves. The first ski lift was built on Palkaskero in 1953.

The next lift was built on Laukukero, so far from the hotel that skiers were driven there with a snow groomer. Today, skiers can simply slide to the lift straight from the hotel's front yard.

The slopes located in the national park are natural slopes, and the goal is to keep them as natural and inconspicuous as possible.



First ski class students at Pallas. Source: Photo archives of the Finnish Heritage Agency.

Off to adventures on a reindeer sleigh

In the early years of the old hotel, the trip from the foot of the fell to the hotel was an adventure in its own right. In the winter, the road often disappeared under a thick snow cover, and visitors travelled the 14-kilometre distance from the village of Kutuniva to the hotel by reindeer sleighs.



Source: Photo archives of the Finnish Heritage Agency.

Ruins of old-time splendour

The Finnish Tourist Association's dream of a fell hotel became a reality in 1938. The construction of the functionalism-inspired hotel took place under difficult conditions, and the building process lasted for almost two years. The bricks were manufactured nearby, and the hotel foundation was laid in a tunnel under layers of snow. The stylish look of the hotel was completed by furniture designed by Alvar Aalto. The hotel was opened to the public the same year as the Pallas-Ounastunturi National Park was first established.

During the Winter War, the authorities of the State Provincial Office of Lapland and their families were evacuated to the hotel, away from the bombings. Later on, the hotel served as a popular holiday destination for German soldiers. During the Lapland War, almost all buildings and structures in Lapland were burned down, and the hotel on the Pallastunturi Fells was also blown up.



*The first hotel on the Pallastunturi Fells.
Source: Photo archives of the Finnish Heritage Agency.*

Electricity and milk from the fells

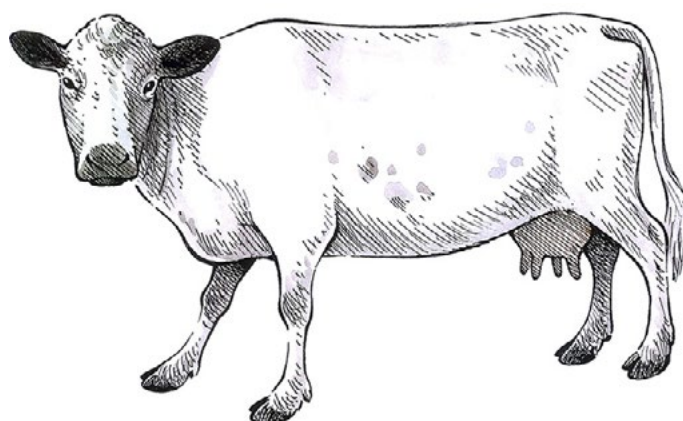
The hotel was self-sufficient in many ways. Electricity was produced with a generator from the Vatikuru brook. Cows were kept in the hotel cowshed, and they provided the hotel guests with fresh milk for their coffee and porridge.

Hay was brought to the hotel for the cows and horses, and as a result, several meadow plants were introduced to the fells. To this day, they still grow on the ruins of the old hotel.



*Meadow vetchling
Lathyrus pratensis*

The Northern Finncattle is an old species, and the animals are always white with black spots.



Visiting a reindeer herders' hut

Reindeer herders used to stay in huts in the summertime, when the reindeer were rounded up in a nearby pen for calf marking.

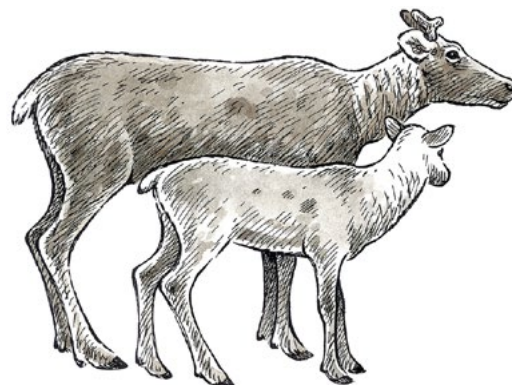
In the early summer, reindeer graze freely in the lush pastures found in the northern wetlands and along the brooks. Around Midsummer, the nuisance of the mosquitoes brings the reindeer together into large herds. The reindeer are then rounded up in a corral, and each calf is given a mark of ownership on its ear.

Later in the summer, the reindeer scatter into the forests to find mushrooms and gain weight for the coming winter. The subcutaneous fat layer beneath the animals' skin gives them energy in the freezing weather.



Mummy is here

Reindeer calves and dams communicate with each other by making different sounds. The low calls echo from deep in the animal's chest, and the sound carries surprisingly far. The mother will find its lost calf even from among thousands of reindeer in no time.



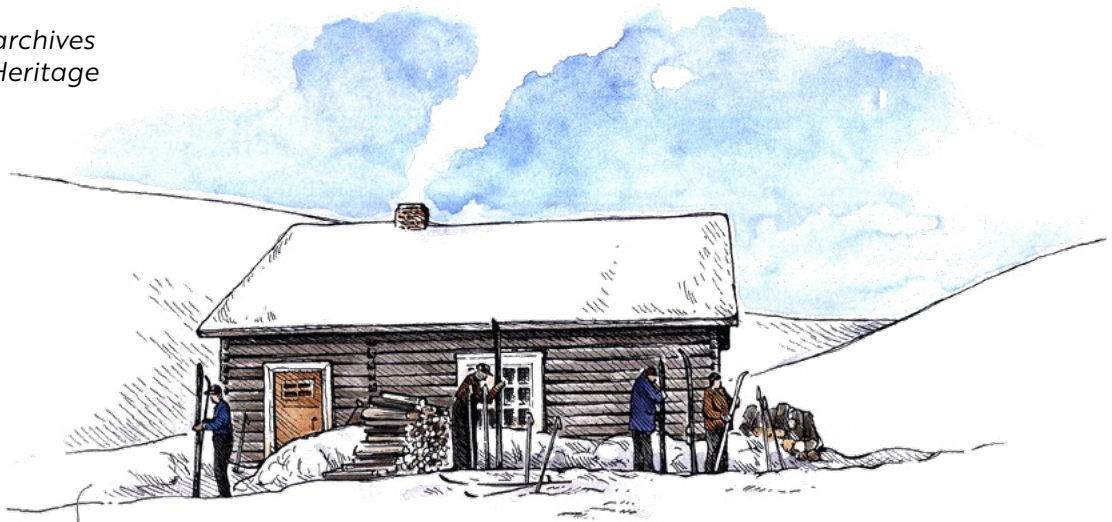
Women's hut

Ski tourism was kicked off with speed in the 1930s, when the Finnish women's physical education union (Suomen Naisten Liikuntakasvatusliitto) started organising fell-skiing courses on the Pallastunturi Fells. Moreover, the Hetta-Pallas trail, suitable for summer hiking, was marked around the same time.

Initially, the ski class participants stayed in a log hut on the shore of Lake Pallasjärvi. However, since the distance up to the slopes was long, the women decided to build a new headquarters up on the fells. The women's hut (Naistenmaja) was completed in 1935, and the ski courses were continued until the war years.

The women's hut was burned down at the end of the Second World War. Today, only a few cornerstones remain where the hut once stood. After the war, a new hut was built in Äkäslompolo. On a clear day, the silhouette of the Yllästunturi Fell can be seen on the southern horizon.

Source: Photo archives of the Finnish Heritage Agency.



Furry boots

In Lapland, the locals still wear shoes made of reindeer hide. Back in the day, they used dried up sedges inside the boots instead of socks. However, only specific sedge species suited this purpose, and they were first softened and then wound up into a tight ball for storage.

Slender sedge
Carex lasiocarpa



Virtuoso in blue

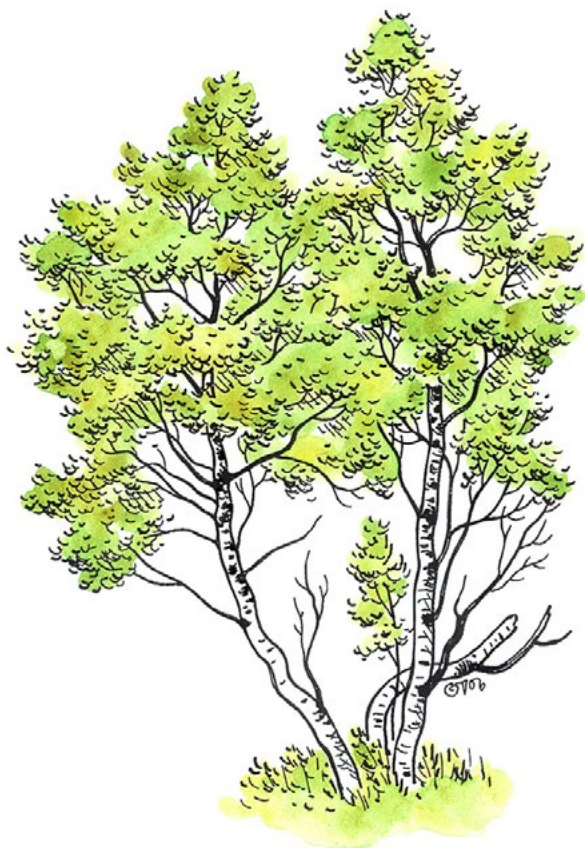
Crisp, clear spring water is trickling down the hillside, making the valley flourish. A bright Mountain birch thicket along the brook attracts the Bluethroat, the virtuoso of the fells. The Bluethroat has made its home in the light and airy birch thickets of Lapland, and it does not nest in the South.

The Bluethroat's vocal performance consists of bells, whistles, and rattling sounds, but it also includes imitations of as many as forty other bird species. The Bluethroat even borrows some of its warning sounds from other birds.



Bluethroat
Luscinia svecica

Mountain birch
Betula pubescens
subsp. *czerepanovii*



Larvae for lunch?

Larvae of the Autumnal moth are the absolute favourite food of baby Bluethroats. The Autumnal moth is a butterfly species whose larvae feed on birch trees. When there is an abundance of Autumnal moths, baby Bluethroats never have to go hungry. However, the situation is not so favourable for the Mountain birch, as the larvae may devour all the leaves on a tree. Fortunately, this does not happen very often.



Autumnal moth
Epirrita autumnata

Crisp fell streams

Snow accumulating in a ravine protects the plants underneath it against the freezing northern temperatures. The river valley is a lush environment, thanks to the existing favourable microclimate, as well as the nutrients and spring water brought along by the springtime floods. Species such as the Wood cranesbill, Alpine lady's mantle, Lady fern, Melancholy thistle, Hornemann's willowherb, Sweet vernal grass, and Matgrass grow here, sheltered by the Mountain birch trees.

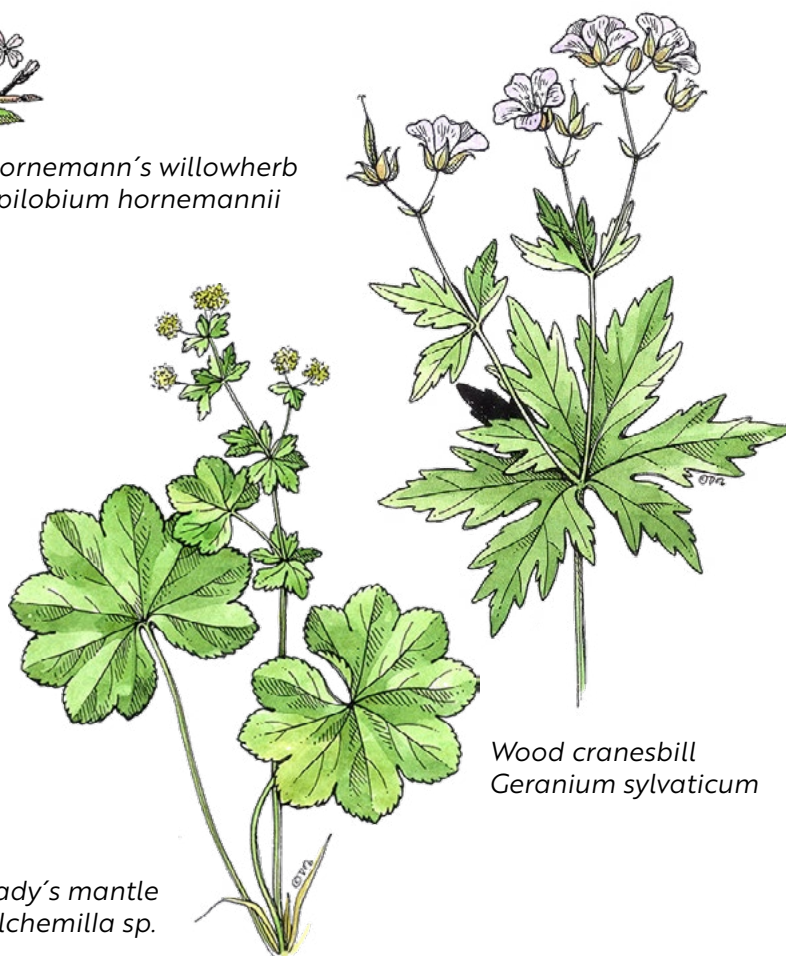
The pale white side of the Mountain birches reveals the thickness of the snow cover: the shiny brown lichen (*Melanohalea olivacea*) only grows above the snow line. This species of lichen requires a long growing season with lots of light, and it cannot survive the long winter under a heavy snow cover.



Sweet vernal grass
Anthoxanthum odoratum



Hornemann's willowherb
Epilobium hornemannii



Wood cranesbill
Geranium sylvaticum



Lady's mantle
Alchemilla sp.



Flower from the fairy garden

The Grass of Parnassus is as delicate as a forest fairy dancing in a misty summer night. It grows in beautiful, fairytale-like forests, where you can almost catch glimpses of tiny elves. The famous botanist Carl von Linné was so enchanted by the beauty of the flower that he named it *Parnassia palustris*. The name is a reference to Mount Parnassus, which in Greek mythology was the home of the nine Muses.

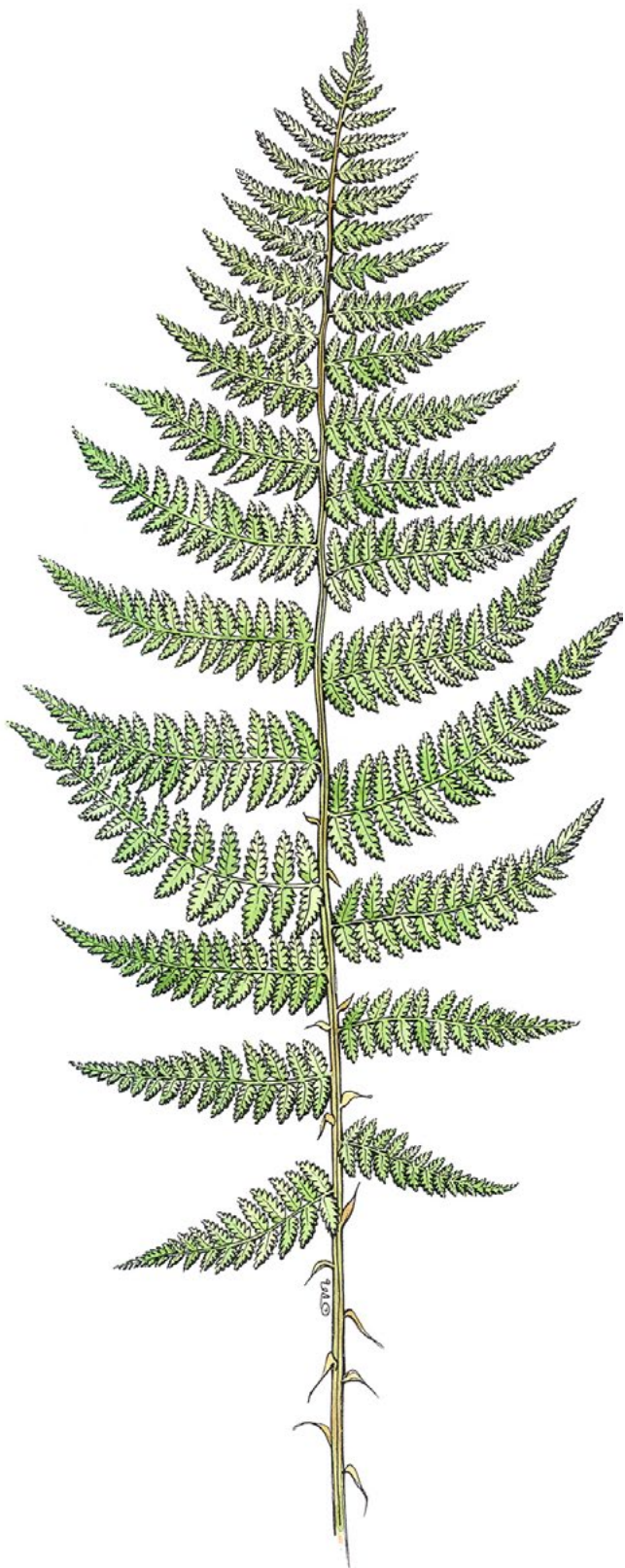
Grass of Parnassus
Parnassia palustris

Bird of the mountain meadows

The Meadow pipit is a loyal companion of all hikers, but due to its modest appearance it often goes unseen. However, when you learn to recognise the “eest-ist-ist” calls of a flying Meadow pipit, you will surely spot the bird. Meadow pipits keep travellers company, both on the southern shores and wetlands and on the northern fells.



Meadow pipit
Anthus pratensis



Ladder for a mouse

The Finnish name of the Lady fern, *Hiirenporras*, is an imaginative one: it translates into “mouse’s ladder”, which describes the plant well. However, there are no actual mice in the fells. All the little critters here belong to the vole family. In fact, a fern known as the Mole ladder exists as well, but it does not grow in this area.

Lady-fern
Athyrium filix-femina



Wind in the fells



Willow grouse
Lagopus lagopus

Ptarmigan
Lagopus muta

It is always windy up on the fells. The Ptarmigan lives in the fells all year round. In the summer, the Ptarmigan's grey summer plumage allows it to blend into the lichen-covered, rocky landscape. In the winter, the birds change into a snowy white plumage. Only the male's black facial stripes and the red comb above the eye during the mating season stand out in the white surroundings.

Food shortage may occasionally cause Ptarmigans to wander down from the fells into the forests. The Willow grouse, which lives in Mountain birch thickets and in the forest treeline, is very similar to the Ptarmigan in terms of appearance, but it lacks the black facial stripes of the Ptarmigan. In early spring, the Willow grouse's loud, cackling mating calls echo among the birch trees.



Ptarmigan in summer plumage.

Fell top garden

Flowers of the Diapensia lend a decorative touch to the Ptarmigan's home fells. The plant grows in small patches on the ground. The Creeping azalea covers the ground in larger areas, giving the open fell landscape a beautiful purple tone. The flowers of the fell grow modest in height – in fact, visitors must get down on their knees to get a closer look at their beauty!

In the autumn, the Alpine bearberry covers the fells with its blazing red leaves. Ptarmigans feast on its plump berries in the winter when the wind reveals these delicacies from underneath the snow.

Creeping azalea
Kalmia procumbens



Diapensia
Diapensia lapponica



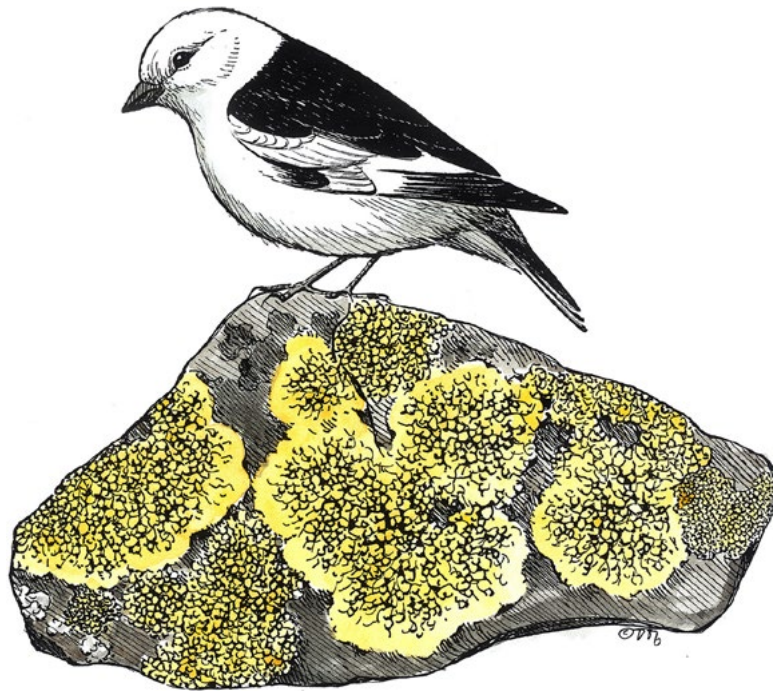
Alpine bearberry
Arctous alpina



Snow bunting – bird of the early spring

As the first patches of land emerge from underneath the snow in the spring, the Snow bunting arrives at the fells to share the neighbourhood with the Ptarmigan for the summer. The treeless fell tops of Pallas are the southernmost nesting area of the Snow bunting, which is also the emblem of the Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park. The Snow bunting thrives in Arctic areas, and it only migrates south when the winter truly comes.

Snow bunting
Plectrophenax nivalis

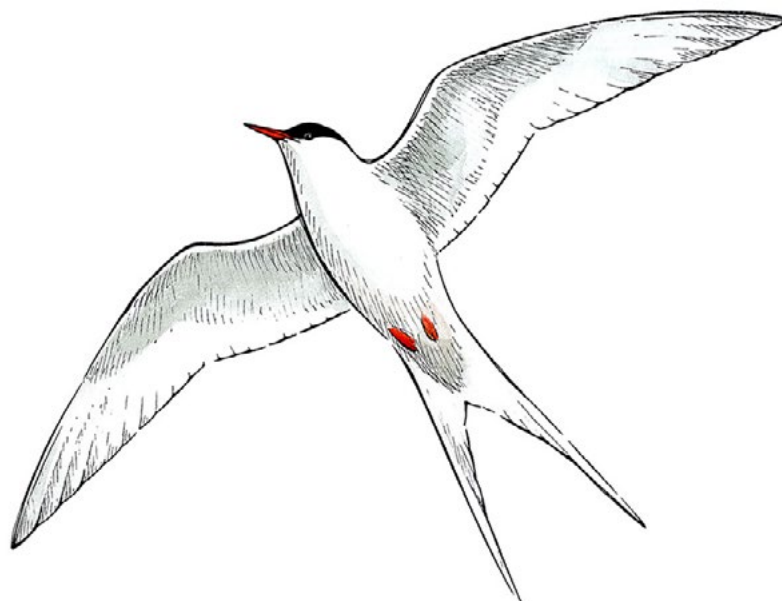


Over the seven seas

The Arctic tern chooses an Arctic destination for its summer holiday. Arctic terns come to Lapland to nest and migrate to the Antarctica for the winter. This narrow-winged bird can fly for up to 30,000 kilometres per year during the migrations!

The Arctic tern seems to enjoy the midnight sun. The sun never sets in its summertime nesting areas – nor in its winter destination!

Arctic tern
Sterna paradisaea



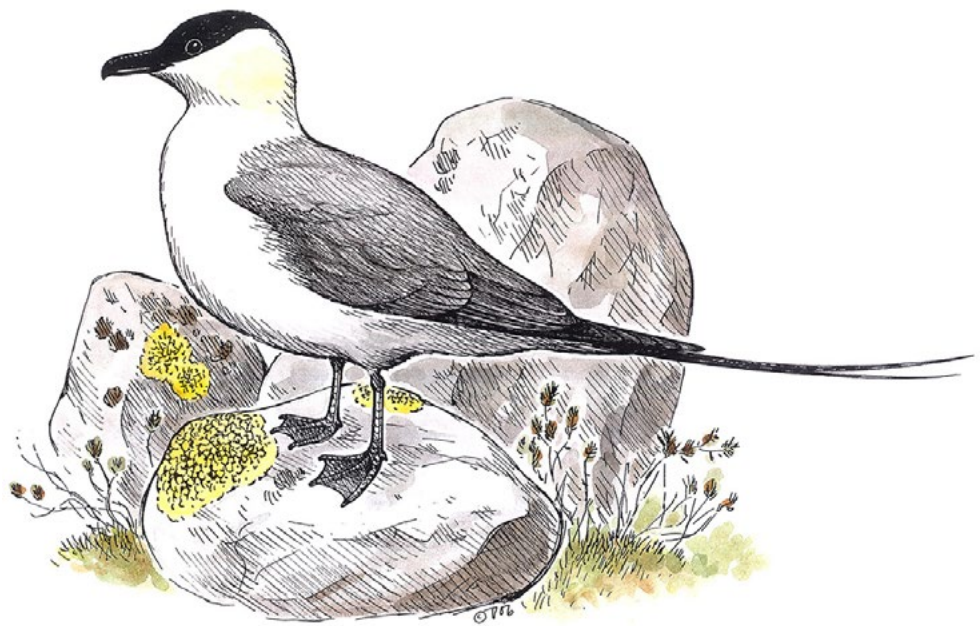
Meet the skua

Visitors may find this impressive inhabitant of the fells, the Long-tailed skua, slightly confusing at first. What kind of a bird is that? It resembles a gull, but it has beautiful, long tail feathers.

The Long-tailed skua belongs to the gull family, and it nests in small numbers in the open fells. Visitors can spot a skua sitting on high ground, keeping an eye on the surroundings. At times, the birds will fly high above the fell to look for voles. Visitors who approach the nest of a Long-tailed skua are soon driven away by the adult birds, who will swoop menacingly down on the intruder.

The Pallas-Ounastunturi Fells are one of the southernmost nesting areas of the Long-tailed skua. The skua is most at home in the vast fell highlands of the northern wilderness.

Long-tailed skua
Stercorarius longicaudus



Tableware from a fairytale

The pitcher-shaped flowers of the Mountain heath and Bog rosemary look like the goblets of tiny elves. The Mountain heath grows on the fells of Lapland, and Bog rosemary on the edges of wetlands.



Mountain heath
Phyllodoce caerulea



Bog rosemary
Andromeda polifolia

Golden plover – guardian of the fells

The Golden plover is the messenger of hikers and the creator of an authentic fell atmosphere. Its melancholy whistle is enough to bring a tear to the visitor's eye. The Golden plover sees – and reports – everything in the fells. It will also make visitors aware of its territory. In addition to the open fells, the Golden plover nests in the wide raised bogs and mires of Ostrobothnia.

The Dotterel upholds gender equality among the fell birds. Female Dotterels are more active than the males during mating, and they leave the males to incubate the eggs and look after the fledglings. In fact, the females migrate south soon after laying the eggs.

Dotterel
Charadrius morinellus



Golden plover
Pluvialis apricaria



Berry of both crows and ravens

Is there a special plant for every animal? Well, there is one for the Hooded crow. The Crowberry is as black as parts of the Hooded crow's plumage. However, in the North, the Crowberry is called by another name, kaarnikka, which is a reference to the old Finnish name of the Raven – kaarne.

Crowberry
Empetrum nigrum



At a reindeer fence

The modern-day reindeer descend from a wild breed of Scandinavian mountain reindeer. Even today, reindeer husbandry is based on the natural behaviour of the animals and on the annual cycle of the seasons.

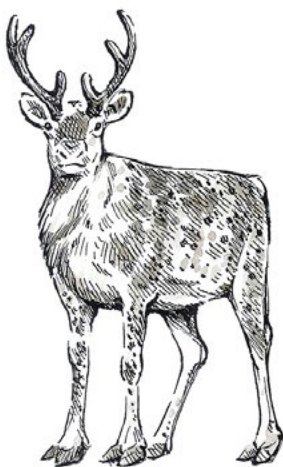
The reindeer herding year begins in May when the calves are born. The calves will triple their birth weight by Midsummer. Around that time, the bloodthirsty mosquitoes of the North cause the reindeer to gather into large herds, and the reindeer herders will drive them into a pen and give each calf an earmark to indicate its owner.

In the autumn, it is time for the reindeer rutting season. The males round up females into their private harems. After the rutting season, the reindeer herders start rounding up the reindeer into pens. The animals sent for slaughter are separated from the livestock that is left to roam the fells and procreate.



kalppinokka

Reindeer at the round-up.



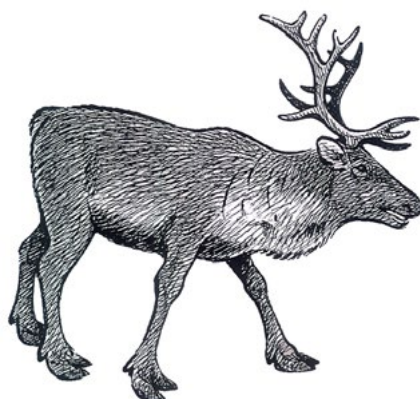
kirjakka

Fur in all colours

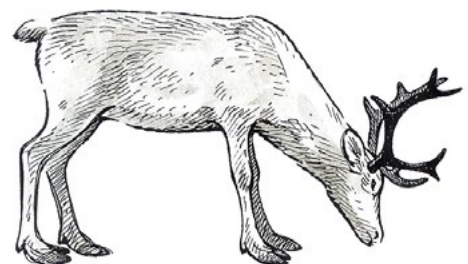
In Finnish, different-coloured reindeer are known by different names: *suivakka* means a light reindeer, *valkko* stands for a white one, *musikka* is a black and grey reindeer, *kirjakka* has dark and light spots, and *tavallisen-karvainen* is a regular, grey reindeer. It is said that white calves are particularly sleepy. In fact, they are such heavy sleepers that if you creep up quietly, you may even get close enough to touch a sleeping calf.



valkko



musikka



suivakka

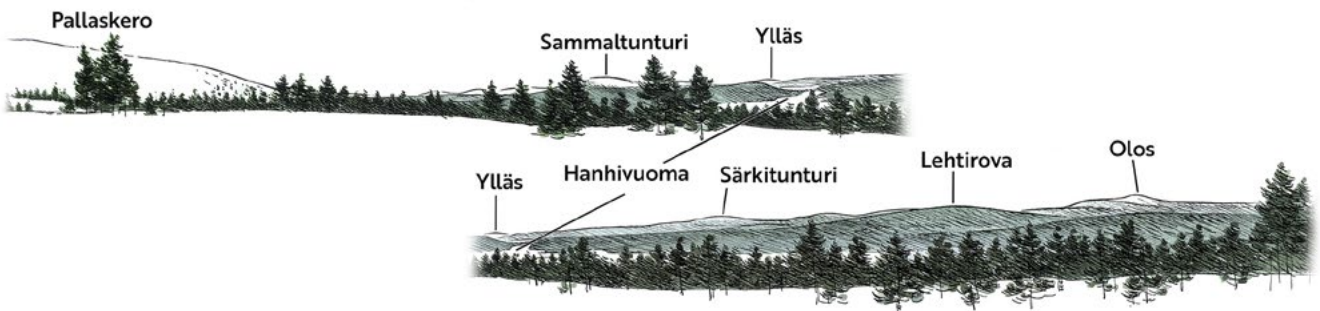
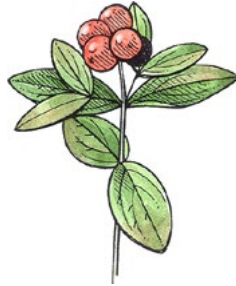
Fells on the horizon

A spectacular chain of fells, stretching over one hundred kilometres, runs from the Ounastunturi Fells in Enontekiö to the Yllästunturi Fells in Kolari. The fells are remnants of the Svecokarelian mountain range, which rose as high as the Alps approximately 1,800 million years ago.



The Dwarf cornel thrives in humid climates, and it grows on northern fell heaths and around forests in the southern archipelago. The tiny, dark flower is protected by four white bracts that look like petals. The berries are floury and flavourless.

Dwarf cornel
Cornus suecica



Raven, a magical bird

A lonely Raven soaring high above the fells is a true bird of the wilderness. Due to its black plumage and gloomy calls, people used to believe that the Raven had magical abilities. According to legend, there was a lucky white feather under the Raven's pitch-black wing. Whoever found that feather would get supernatural powers.

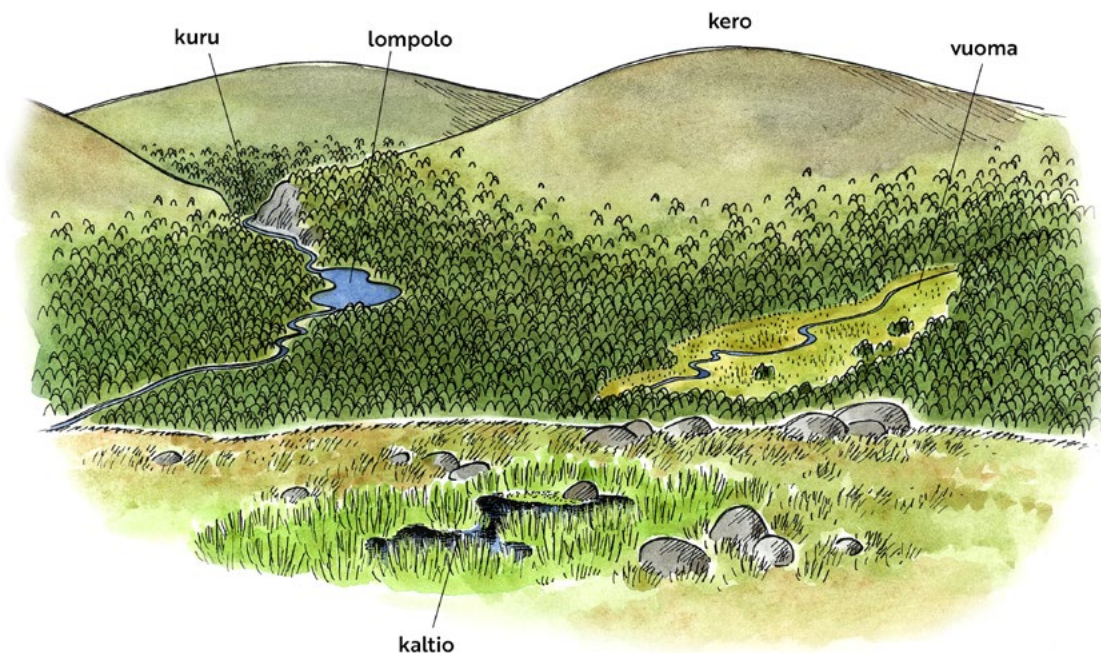
Raven
Corvus corax



Unique placenames

The maps of Lapland are filled with peculiar placenames that may seem confusing to first-time visitors. Up in the North, people speak several Northern Ostrobothnian dialects that have unique features not found in standard Finnish or in other regional dialects.

The Sámi language has had a strong impact on the Northern Ostrobothnian dialects and especially on the vocabulary associated with nature, reindeer husbandry, and northern living conditions. Words derived from Sámi include, for example, *jänkä* (mire), *kaltio* (spring), *keino* (road), *kero* (treeless fell summit), *lompolo* (river lake or pond), *tieva* (sandy hill or ridge), and *vuoma* (river valley or an open bog).

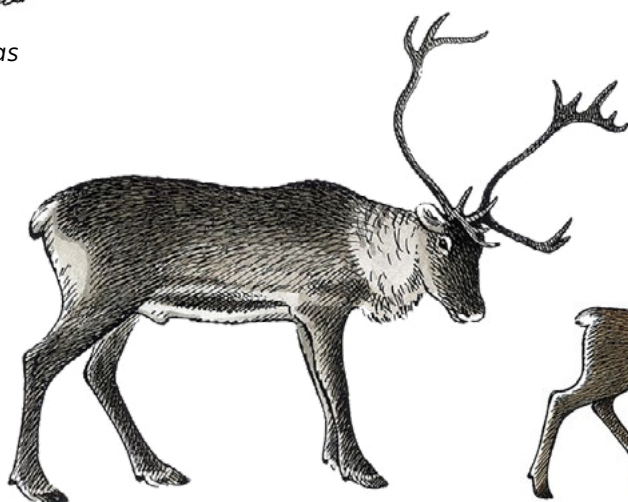


kellokas

Name for every age

When it comes to reindeer, there is a different word for them at every age. A calf (*vasa* in Finnish) is called a *kermikkä* after its first winter. After the second winter, male calves are called *urakka* and female ones *vuongeli*. An adult male reindeer is known as *hirvas*, and females are called *vaadin*. When the males shed their antlers in the autumn, they are known as *nulppo*. And when a reindeer gets a bell around its neck, it is called a *kellokas*.

hirvas



kermikkä

vasa