Sörknatten and Baståsen

Welcome to Sörknatten

A walk up to the top of Sörknatten can be an exciting experience. The path runs over grey-white, virtually bare rock, where nothing much grows other than mosses and a large number of lichens. Quartzite soil is poor in nutrients, but in places you are taken by surprise by a completely different type of vegetation in small ravines and crevices. In these places the more nutrient rich shale provides the right conditions for calcareous species. Plants such as liverleaf, wild marjoram and angular solomon's seal can be found here and in some years the pale red, large flower spikes of toothwort grow up through the leaf litter under hazel bushes. Gnarled and weather-beaten stunted pines grow on the tops of the mountains and on a clear day you can see across forests and lakes all the way to Lake Vänern and Kinnekulle.

A number of lichens grow on the quartzite rocks; among them you may recognise the characteristic cushions of *Cladonia stellaris*. In the past, this grey-white lichen was picked and used to soak up the condensation between the inner and outer window panes. It was also given to cattle as winter fodder. It is now used for decorating wreaths, Christmas flower arrangements and advent candle holders. A lichen is actually two fungi living in symbiosis with an alga.

Mountains and Quartzite

The Knattarna Mountains are unique to Dalsland and are part of an ancient mountain range known as the Dal Formation. The Knattarna Mountains are made up of a rock called quartzite, which is hard and resistant to weathering. They have thus withstood glaciers and millennia of erosion and now rise up from the landscape like a dragon's back. Quartzite consists largely of quartz and is an important natural mineral. It has long been quarried and used for road surfacing and in the metal industry. The quarries are now large scars in the landscape. Sörknatten and the other Knattarna Mountains are sometimes known as "the Roof of Dalsland".

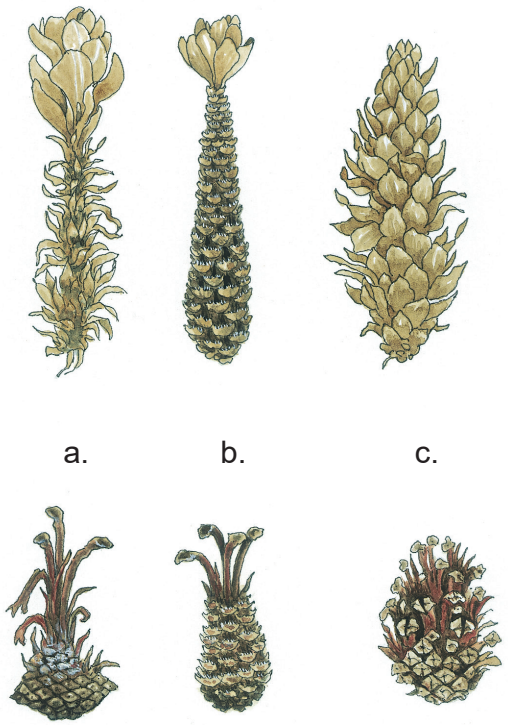
Old Growth Forest

The Nature Reserve is much more than just bare quartzite mountains. Spruce and patches of broadleaved woodland grow in the valleys, where there are also plants such as sanicle, black pea and the rare wood fescue grass. The Reserve also contains one of the largest areas of old growth forest in Dalsland, where the oldest trees are more than 300 years old. It is fascinating to think that these trees started to grow when Charles XII was the King of Sweden!

The Vingnäsbergen Mountains are situated in the northern part of the Reserve. This is where the artist Otto Hesselbom found inspiration for several of his National Romantic style paintings. The best known, which is called "Our Land, Our Homeland", was painted in 1902. It depicts a view across Lake Ånimmen and hangs in the National Museum in Stockholm. Sörknatten has also played a role in a film. "Ronia the Robber's Daughter" based on the well-known story by Astrid Lindgren, was largely filmed in the Reserve. The set for Matti's Fort was built on top of Sörknatten, and the deep crevice known as Hell's Gap is also located in the area.

Workshops and Woodpeckers

Did you know that you can find “cone workshops” under spruce and pine trees? Seeds from coniferous trees are an important food source for many birds and small rodents, and by studying the gnawed cones you can tell which animal has been eating them. Both squirrels and wood mice bite off the scales to get to the seeds, but leave a tuft on top of the cone. The wood mice chew the cones much more neatly when compared with squirrels, which leave frayed cones. The greater spotted woodpecker wedges the cones in a crack in a tree, and hammers and twists the scales with its beak to extract the seeds. In winter, you may find heaps of cones that have been worked in the birds’ “workshop”.



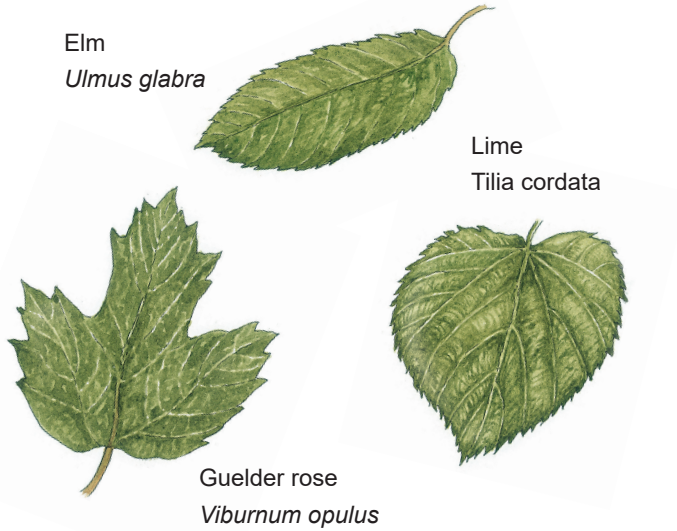
Who has been eating the spruce cones (upper row) and pine cones (lower row)?

The answers are below.

Answer: a – red squirrel, b – wood mouse, c – greater spotted woodpecker

The black woodpecker is the largest of Sweden’s woodpeckers. It throws out woodchips over large areas as it hammers its nest holes in a tree trunk. You may also see several other species of woodpecker and forest birds in the area. The three-toed woodpecker can be spotted occasionally. Capercaillie and hazel grouse may startle you with the noise they make when they take off from the ground or a tree. Black-throated loon, red-throated loon, and nightjar are other examples of birds that live in the Reserve. Thanks to the wilderness character of the Nature Reserve there are also elk, roe deer, beaver and other mammals.

Black woodpecker
Dryocopus martius



Welcome to Baståsen

Baståsen Nature Reserve is located on the slopes along the western shore of Lake Ärr. The Nature Reserve was increased in size from five hectares to just over 60 in 2013. The topography of the southern part is quite dramatic. This is also where the original part of the Nature Reserve is located; a five hectare steep slope, which is the closest you can get to a jungle in Dalsland! The woodland is wild and shadowy, on difficult terrain, and it is old, perhaps thousands of years old. If someone else had not done the job of clearing a path, you would need to hack your way through the vegetation on the slopes of Baståsen. The broadleaved woodland with lime, elm, ash, norway maple, guelder rose and fly honeysuckle is dense, with large hazel stools under the crowns of the old broadleaved trees. Large moss-covered tree trunks lie like pick up sticks on the ground.

Here it is shadowy and damp, even on sunny summer days. The water that seeps out on the slopes and the proximity to Lake Ärr creates a humidity which provides a safe haven for unusual lichens such as *Lobaria virens*, *Degelia plumbea* and *Lobaria amplissima*. *Lobaria amplissima*, can grow very large; up to a metre in diameter.

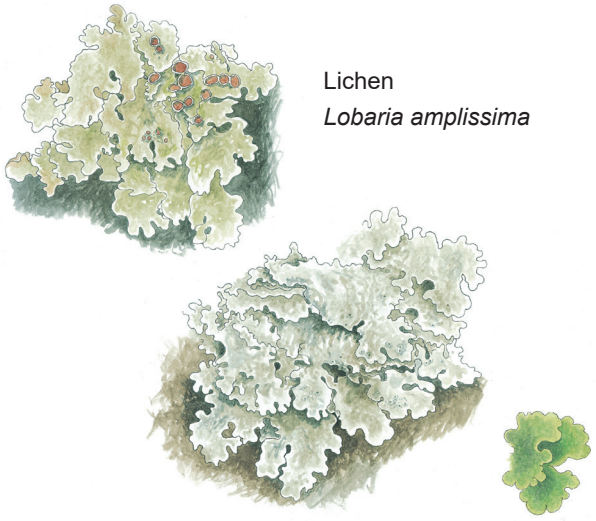
The broadleaved woodlands of Baståsen are not completely untouched by humans, despite the fact that it is steep and difficult to access. The name suggests that

lime has been harvested for “bast” here. The inner bark from lime provided the raw material for making rope in traditional farming communities. But the terrain is too steep for farming or forestry and probably even for grazing animals. This is why the woodland has been left virtually untouched.

Slow and Sensitive Creatures

The trees are not a thousand years old, but the woodland is, which is vital for some of the inhabitants. One such inhabitant is *Ena obscura*, a snail with a beautiful, long spiral shell, hardly a centimetre in length. Terrestrial snails are sensitive to drying out. They need shady, humid habitats and limestone to make their shells. This is why they thrive on the calcareous soils on the Dal Formation. They also need to have their habitats left untouched. With an operating range of only a few inches per day, it is pretty tough if someone fells the woodland where they live.

The most inaccessible broadleaved woodlands on steep slopes in the Dal Formation are rich in snails. More than 30 species of slugs and snails have been found in these areas. Many are rare. It is here, and only here, where they have remained when the broadleaved woodlands of the Atlantic period were eradicated. The chance of them getting a lift with a roe deer or a bird to another suitable habitat is microscopic. There can be hundreds of snails per square metre in a woodland such as this. But it is still not easy to find *Ena obscura* or one of their relatives.



Lichen
Lobaria amplissima

Gnarly pine

The majority are only a few millimetres in size, they live in the upper layer of the soil or under bits of bark and they also usually take cover during the hours of daylight.

Plant Riches

In addition to the jungle-like stony steep slopes there are some more accessible slopes where the woodland has been commercially harvested in more recent times. In the spring, the lovely blue flowers of liverleaf peep through the leaf litter. A little later in May or June the white flowers of baneberry and woodruff can be seen. Baneberry is a large plant that can grow to up to 70 cm and has a bad smell. It has also been said that frogs and toads find shade under the large leaves. The berries of baneberry are shiny and black. It thrives on calcareous soils, just like liverleaf. Woodruff is quite rare and forms large stands. It gives off a lovely smell when dried. If you visit the site during the summer you will see flowering wood vetch instead. The thin stalks can grow very long, up to 1.5 m and they are often tangled. The flowers are white with violet veins which make it easy to recognise.

In the northern part of the site there is a more open, airy broadleaved woodland and this landscape was characterised over a hundred years ago, by old fields, pastures and meadows which belonged to the farm called Byn. In places you can still see the remains of the farmed areas in the form of the old field ditches. A large quantity of spruce has been removed according to the management plan, in order to favour the broadleaved woodland.

Just like for slugs and snails, many lichens also require a humid environment. The rare lichen *Lobaria amplissima* has one of its largest populations in Baståsen. It is pure green when wet, but when it is dry it becomes silvery white. It is light demanding and prefers to grow high up on tree trunks.

How to get to Sörknatten...

The Reserve is 30 km south of Åmål and can be accessed from the E45. Turn off where it is signposted for Snäcke and follow the road north for about 8 km until you see the signpost for “Sörknattens naturreservat”, where the southern car park is located (coordinates: 58°52.649’N 12°28.569’E).

...and to Baståsen

To visit the northern part of Sörknatten with Husdalsbergen and Baståsen Nature Reserve, continue for another 7 km and turn off at the signpost “naturreservat”. After about 1 km, there is a car park (coordinates: 58°55.651’N 12°29.073’E) and information sign.

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LÄNSSTYRELSEN
VÄSTRA GÖTALANDS LÄN

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