



Estonian Nature Tours

Trip	: BUTTERFLIES IN ESTONIA
Period	: Fri 29th June – Fri 6th July 2018
Group size	: 6/12 pax
Grading	: Day walks only, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Erki Õunap
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Local organizer/Agent	: Estonian Nature Tours

An 8-day fully-inclusive holiday in search of the butterflies of Estonia, amongst them a fine selection of rare species as Baltic Grayling, Scarce Heath, Scarce Fritillary, Bog Fritillary, Cranberry Blue, Woodland Brown, Northern Chequered Skipper, Poplar Admiral etc.

Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to central Estonia
Day 2 Rabivere & Aegviidu
Day 3 To South-East Estonia, Kärkna & Laeva
Day 4 Järvselja & Uulika
Day 5 Piusa & Värska
Day 6 To Saaremaa, Puhtu-Laelatu
Day 7 Saaremaa island
Day 8 Departure...

Despite its small size and northern position Estonia is a wonderful place to see butterflies and dragonflies. Because of its history, large parts of the country have remained completely wild, while farming methods in many areas are unintensified resulting in a mosaic of excellent habitats such as numerous flowery meadows, natural forests and massive bog areas. As a result we have many insect species which are rare elsewhere in Europe, such as Clouded Apollo (*Parnassius mnemosyne*), Moorland Clouded Yellow (*Colias palaeno*), Large Copper (*Lucaena dispar*), Siberian Winter Damsel (*Sympecma paedisca*) and Lilypad Whiteface (*Leucorrhinia caudalis*).

There is a large overlap of southern and northern species here. Many species with a more northern distribution reach the southern part of their range including butterflies such as Baltic Grayling (*Oeneis jutta*), Lapland Ringlet (*Erebia embla*) and Northern Chequered Skipper (*Carterocephal silvicolus*) plus dragonflies like Bog Hawker (*Aeshna subarctica*) and Arctic Bluet (*Coenagrion johanssoni*). Weaver's Fritillary (*Clossiana dia*), Woodland Brown (*Lopinga achine*) and many other species reach their furthest north, particularly where limestone reaches the surface. For other species this is the centre of their distribution in Europe including several of the delightful 'Whiteface' dragonflies such as Ruby, Yellow-spotted and Dark Whitefaces (*Leucorrhinia rubicunda*, *L. pectoralis* and *L. albifrons*) as well as the coastal Baltic Hawker (*Aeshna serrata*) and butterflies such as Cranberry Blue (*Plebejus optilete*) Bog Fritillary (*Proclissiana eunomia*) and Cranberry Fritillary (*Boloria aquilonaris*).

1 Fri (29th June) TALLINN, to central Estonia

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport at ... and drive to the central region of Estonia. After the check-in at the guesthouse we have a first dinner together (Toosikannu Holiday Village).

2 Sat (30th June) RABIVERE & AEGVIIDU

Today we will visit Rabivere Bog and Aegviidu military area. The landscape of Aegviidu military area is offering lakes alternating with glacial eskers and moraine drumlins. This area together with Kõrvemaa military polygon is called 'Estonia's Switzerland'. Among other species the Chequered Blue (*Pseudophilotes vicrama*) can be expected here in mid-June. However, this place is most attractive for butterfly enthusiasts in midsummer, as peat bogs alternating with dry sandy habitats create a basis for an particularly interesting complex of butterflies where bog species can be found side by side with dry heathland specialists. For example, *Colias palaeno*, *Maculinea arion*, *Pseudophilotes vicrama*, *Boloria aquilonaris* and *Clossiana titania* can all be seen within only few hundred meters in a lucky day in early July.

Rabivere Bog is offering some historical thrill, as there have been found some artifacts from the 17th century (a buried women's body with clothing and silver jewelry, all well conserved in acidic peat). It is a previous lake area, that has been growing over with swamps. There are interesting karst areas around the bog, while the water, that is flowing out from the bog, disappears quickly under the ground. In addition to Early Marsh Orchid and some other protected species one can find here *Saussurea esthonica* – Estonia's endemic species here. Butterfly fauna offers some nice species, e.g. Bog Fritillary (*Procllossiana eunomia*), Frigga Fritillary (*Clossiana frigga*), Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*), Chequered Skipper (*Carterocephalus palaemon*) and others. Dinner at the guesthouse (Toosikannu Holiday Village).

3 Sun (1st July) To South-East Estonia, KÄRKNA & LAEVA

Early in the morning, we will enjoy a mammal safari searching for Elk, Wild Boar, Red and Roe Deer. An open vehicle will help us to get good views of the different mammal species. The area is a mixture of old forest, open clearings and fields. The safari trip passes several feeding stations for Elk and Wild Boar where both mammals can be seen regularly. We also try to get sightings of another nocturnal mammal - Raccoon Dog.

On our way to South-East Estonia we will visit Kärkna forest near Tartu town. The remarkable fact is that we have almost continuous forestry data of this site from 1844. Therefore thorough forestry studies have been taken place here, now statistically linked with GIS. In Kärkna, founded in the early 13th century at a major ancient road there has been a Cistercian monastery, demolished by Russian army in 1559. Most interesting butterfly species are Scarce Fritillary (*Euphydryas maturna*), Woodland Brown (*Lopinga achine*), Poplar Admiral (*Limenitis populi*), *Limenitis camilla*, *Apatura iris*, *Apatura ilia*, *Nymphalis xanthomelas* and *Satyrium w-album*.

The nearby area Laeva is also well known site for good raptors – so it is always worth to check the high sky. Quite often Lesser Spotted and White-tailed Eagles can be found hunting in this area. Bog itself is good breeding habitat for several birds, such as Wood Sandpiper, Golden Plover, Red-backed and Great Grey Shrike.

We will arrive to Mooste later in the afternoon and eat our dinner at the guesthouse (Mooste Viinavabrik Guesthouse).

4 Mon (2nd July) UULIKA BOG & JÄRVSELJA FOREST

Our itinerary takes us today to Uulika bog in Tartumaa County, not far from Lake Peipsi. The bog is rather compact massif about 2 by 3 km, next to valuable virgin forests of Järvelja reserve. Right now partly as a species protection site – permanent habitat of Osprey, but planned as a reserve. Several valuable protected species can be found there – in the surrounds one can encounter Ural and Eurasian Pygmy-Owl and Three-toad Woodpecker. In small forest roads – a Hazel Hen might surprise you and Red-breasted Flycatchers are not uncommon here. Creeping Lady's Tresses and Wolf's-foot Clubmoss are growing in the surrounding forest. Potential butterfly species of the location are Cranberry Blue (*Vacciniina optilete*), *Plebejus argus*, *Plebejus idas*, Moorland Clouded Yellow (*Colias palaeno*), possibly also *Clossiana tullia* and, if you are VERY lucky, some worn specimens of *Procllossiana eunomia*.

After a lunch we will have a few kilometers walk around Järvelja along the forest roads. Järvelja

is surrounded mostly by moist habitats, target species would therefore be Large Chequered Skipper (*Heteropterus morpheus*), *Lycaena dispar* and *Argynnis laodice*.

Järvselja is also famous for a high diversity of longhornbeetles, as several Estonian rarities (e.g. *Pachyta lamed* *Leptura thoracica*, *Anoplodera variicornis* and *Necydalis major*) have been recorded here. Careful check of flowering umbellifers is therefore certainly worth considering. Dinner at the guesthouse (Mooste Viinavabrik Guesthouse).

5 Tue (3rd July) PIUSA & VÄRSKA

The first destination of the day will be a railroad dam and surrounding heath forests with pine-tree near Piusa and Veski villages, South-East Estonia. This location with its partly forested and partly opened xeric/mesic sites are by far among Estonia's most species-rich butterfly sites. These sandy sites are first of all of high botanical interest, containing pontic and ponto-sarmatic flora elements, invaded along riversides from South-East (Russia). The most interesting species are *Arenaria procera*, Yellowgreen Catchfly (*Silene chlorantha*), natural Hen and Chickens Houseleek (*Jovibarba sobolifera*), Sheep's Bit (*Jasione montana*), Dwarf Everlast (*Helichrysum arenarium*), several wintergreen and orchid speies. Lepidopterological highlights would be Large Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus alveus*), Moorland Clouded Yellow (*Colias palaeno*), *Melitaea cinxia*, *Coenonympha arcania*, Sooty Copper (*Lycaena tityrus*), Purple-edged Copper (*Lycaena hippothoe*), Purple-shot Copper (*Lycaena alciphron*) etc. There is a slight possibility to see *Maculinea arion* as well but the abundance of this species in Piusa region has severely declined during recent years. It is also good site to get sightings of one eastern bird specialities - Greenish Warbler and quite often Golden Orioles can be heard calling in nearby forests. If you are lucky – you may find some breeding woodpeckers – especially Black and Grey-headed Woodpecker from here. After a nice lunch at local tourism farm we will take a boardwalk at Kuresoo bog near Värskä in order to see more interesting butterfly species, such as *Boloria aquilonaris* and *Plebejus optilete* (Mooste Viinavabrik Guesthouse).

6 Wed (4th July) To Saaremaa, PUHTU-LAELATU

On our way to Saaremaa island, we will visit Puhtu-Laelatu Nature Reserve. Wooded meadows are sparse natural stands with a grass cover that needs regular mowing and they are the most species-rich ecosystems in Estonia. Some plant communities of wooded meadows are among the most species-rich in the world. The best example of that will be Laelatu Wooded meadow with up to 76 vascular plants per square metre! Walking through the woods we may find Early Purple & Bird's nest Orchids, Bulbous Bittercress, Norfolk Scullcap, White Swallow-wort and some naturalized Martagon Lilies.

Later in the afternoon we will take a ferry to Muhu island and drive westward. After check-in and a short rest we will eat our dinner at the guesthouse (Pilguse Guesthouse or similar).

7 Thu (5th July) KOGULA ALVAR & VIIDUMÄE

Today we reach Saaremaa island which is the largest island in the Moonsund archipelago. This part of Estonia is mostly either dry alvar-like landscape or wooded meadows, partly overgrown by deciduous woods. There are also many small and shallow bays on clayen shingle soils, therefore partly overgrown with reeds and other macrophytes (bulrushes, cattails, bur-reeds and water parsnips), there are also sea-shore meadows and with Sea Milkwort, Blackgrass and Creeping Bentgrass and dunes with Spurious Butterbur, Marsh and Dark-red Helleborine, One-flowered Wintergreen, Green-flowered and Umbellate Wintergreen et al. The day begins with visiting Kogula alvar, which is situated between Kuressaare and Viidumäe reserve. Alvar meadows in Saaremaa are usually on very thin calcareous soils with limestone bedrock. Soil may occasionally be missing, while bare shingle is exposed. Yellow Bedstraw, Mountain Everlasting (Catsfoot), Sheep's Fescue, Pyramidal Orchid, Musk Orchid, Green Strawberry (*Fragaria viridis*), Snowdrop Windflower, Lady's Fingers, Goldmoss and White Stonecrop – these are some plant species from these communities. We also expect lots of butterflies, e.g. Glanville Fritillary (*Melitaea cinxia*),

Nickerl's Fritillary (*Mellicta aurelia*), Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis lucina*), Large Blue (*Maculinea arion*), Dingy Skipper (*Erynnis tages*) and the Small Blue (*Cupido minimus*) as the typical examples. Juniper trees growing in this alvar is another great habitat for passerines, like Scarlet Rosefinch, Red-backed Shrike and Barred Warbler.

After a lunch at Lümanda the next stop will be in the Viidumäe Nature reserve (Mäepea wooded meadow). Viidumäe is famous for its historically evolved (semi)natural diversity. There are several different wood ecosystems, fens, swamps, wooded meadows and alvar meadows around. The Rauna Hill nearby Viidumäe was emerging from the early Ancylus Lake stage of the Baltic Sea about 10 000 years ago, while later sea stages have broken some coastal cliff formations, now situated quite in the middle of the island. More than 700 species of vascular plant species are found here (including endemic *Rhinanthus osiliensis*). The fauna of butterflies and moths consist of 675 species. Let us name some of them: Woodland Brown (*Lopinga achine*), Scarce Fritillary (*Euphydryas maturna*), in late June Dark Green Fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*). Viidumäe is also good place for several forest birds, like Nutcracker and Red-breasted Flycatcher. At night once again moths catch will take place. Dinner at the guesthouse (Pilguse Guesthouse or similar).

8 Fri (6th July) Departure...

We will return to Tallinn by early afternoon and have a pleasant guided tour of Tallinn Old Town. Tallinn was made a UNESCO World heritage Site in 1997 due to the medieval city centre, the finest in northern Europe, with cobble-stone streets & buildings that date back to the 15th century. We have some free time for shopping before we will drive to the airport to catch your homeward flight...

Price:

6-12 pax	1495 € pp.
Single suppl.	230 €

Includes:

English-Estonian speaking lepidopterist throughout the journey. All meals (7 lunches and 7 dinners) and all local transport. Elk & Wild Boar safari and ferry tickets. Entrance fees to protected areas. All overnights in shared double:

www.toosikannu.ee

www.fototurism.ee

www.pilguse.ee

VAT.

Excludes:

Beverages and sauna. International tickets. Insurance.

CANCELLATIONS

More than 70 days	deposit (20%) only
70-15 days before departure	50% of total tour cost
15 days or less before departure	100% of total tour cost

INSURANCE

It is a condition of joining one of our holidays that you must be fully insured against medical and personal accident risks. Please send to us the name of your insurance provider, the contact telephone number, your policy number, expire date and details of the medical and repatriation cover provided.

Terms and Conditions Instruction: <http://www.naturetours.ee/terms-and-conditions/>

NB! There are many amazing holidays you can't afford to miss... When you would like to travel with your friends we would be happy to give you more information or offer an extra tour with special price whenever you find a suitable time.

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