



## Estonian Nature Tours

Trip	: ESTONIA IN SPRING
<b>Period</b>	<b>: Sun 5th May – Sun 12th May 2019</b>
Group size	: 6/7 pax
Grading	: Day walks only, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Local bird guide
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Organizer/Agent	: Estonian Nature Tours, e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@naturetours.ee">info@naturetours.ee</a>

### **An 8-day fully-inclusive holiday focusing on the spectacular bird migration and breeding birds in Estonia.**

Although not widely discovered yet, Estonia is the ideal country for observing one of the most spectacular natural shows – massive bird migration. This smallest and northernmost Baltic country lies on the crossroads of the Eastern Atlantic migratory flyway: Estonia is locked between the Finnish Gulf, the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea and Lake Peipsi near the Russian border. Geographically the Estonian waters and coastline are stepping-stones along the flyway between breeding and wintering areas for millions of Arctic waterbirds, making birdwatching in Estonia fabulous at this time of year.

Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to Tartu

Day 2 Järvselja forest and Aardla; Great Snipe

Day 3 Alam-Pedja, to central Estonia

Day 4 Soomaa National Park

Day 5 To western Estonia; Owl session

Day 7 Matsalu National Park; Beaver boat ride

Day 6 Leidissoo, Põõsaspea & Haapsalu

Day 8 Departure

### **Highlights**

Birds: Bittern, Black Stork, peak spring migration of waterfowls, Golden Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Black Grouse, Hazel Grouse, Capercaillie, Corncrake, Great Snipe, Whimbrel, Black Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Ural Owl, Pygmy Owl, Citrine Wagtail, Savi's Warbler, Penduline Tit, Golden Oriole etc.

Mammals: Raccoon Dog (probably), Red Fox, Elk, Roe deer, European Beaver, tracks of Brown Bear, Wolf, & Lynx (probably) etc.

#### 1 Sun (5th May) TALLINN, to South East Estonia

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport at ... and drive to Tartu town. After the check-in at the hotel we have a first dinner together (Tartu Hotel).

#### 2 Mon (6th May) JÄRVSELJA & AARDLA; GREAT SNIPE

Today we will travel out in the early morning and enjoy birdwatching in one of the oldest protected areas in Estonia, Järvselja forest, to see selection of woodpeckers as well as

Nutcracker, Pygmy Owl and other forest bird species. Although the size of the primeval forest area of Järvelja is not remarkable it still has significant value. In 1924 it was decided to maintain a part of the intact forest area as a sample of virgin forest. Within a small area the diversity of the woodland is very high. In the southeastern part the most impressive trees grow. They include up to 40 m-high and over 200 years-old giant spruces. Also some huge birches, aspens, lindens, ashes and maples can be seen here. In some places moving around is complicated due to the debris and old tree trunks lying on the ground, therefore a special wooden track has been constructed in the primeval forest quarter. After a rest at the guesthouse and lunch we will drive to the vast expanses of wetlands near Aardla. This area with lakes and ponds usually holds a good selection of water birds and we will be hoping for a few surprises. We will hope to find a wonderful diversity of species including Black Stork, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Penduline Tit, Citrine Wagtail, thousands of arctic Geese etc. After taking a rest at the hotel and a dinner we offer an excursion to the area where we can watch displaying Great Snipe at one of their best lekking sites in the Baltic (Tartu Hotel).

### 3 Tue (7th May) ALAM-PEDJA, to central Estonia

Whether or not we were in luck a day before, we still travel out in the early morning in order to experience the spring calling of resident Black, Grey-headed, Three-toed and White-backed Woodpeckers as well as listen for the mating calls of Hazel and Black Grouse.

It is always fantastic to watch (and hear) the forest come alive with the first rays of the morning sun. Forest tits, Crossbills and other passerines are at their most active, restlessly flitting about in search of food.

Later in the afternoon we will move to central Estonia and have our evening meal at the guesthouse (Vanaõue Holiday Center).

### 4 Wed (8th May) SOOMAA NATIONAL PARK

Early morning takes us to the Soomaa National Park in central Estonia. With the territory of 390 km<sup>2</sup>, Soomaa is our second biggest national park and one of the biggest nature protection areas in general. The national park is created to protect raised bogs, floodplains and paludifield forests. The territory of natural park is mostly covered with large mires, separated from each other by the rivers. The natural woodlands mixed with swamps and rivers, makes it perfect habitat for many Western Taiga forest specialities. With the great network of hiking trails, Soomaa is really enjoyable birding place for any nature lover. Early morning we will be looking for Capercaillies. As Soomaa NP has one of the strongholds for this endangered species, Capercaillie hens are fairly often found at the roadside when they pick gravel. With some luck one can spot males nearby trees or sometimes even lekking on the road. As the sunrise continues we will take few forest walks to search for Woodpeckers. Soomaa National Park is probably the best place to spot Grey-headed Woodpeckers, while Black and White-backed Woodpeckers are also regularly spotted. The same forests are also perfect habitat for another gamebird – Hazel Grouse.

After refreshing lunch and some rest, late evening will be spent to look for the Owls. Pygmy and Ural Owl has both good breeding population here. Beside birds it is also worth to keep your eyes open for the mammals. Early morning drives are good to spot Elks, while night drives usually provide sightings of Raccoon Dogs (Vanaõue Holiday Center).

### 5 Thu (9th May) To Western Estonia; OWL SESSION

After a breakfast we will move to Western Estonia. Having a lunch on a way and rest in the hotel we will go for an Owl session to Nõva and Leidisoo. Dinner at the restaurant (Promenaadi Hotel).

6 Fri (10th May) MATSALU NATIONAL PARK

Today we will reach the Matsalu National Park which is the oldest Ramsar area in Estonia. At times of peak passage over a million diving ducks have been estimated along the coast here, whilst counts of wild swans and Barnacle Geese regularly number tens of thousands.

Selection of waders also take advantage of the rich feeding grounds; Ruff, in particular, sometimes occurring in great abundance, the males resplendent in breeding finery. Although these migrants offer some remarkable spectacles, Matsalu is much more than just an avian motorway service station and among the 170 breeding birds recorded from the reserve are species such as Red-necked Grebe, Bittern, Osprey, White-tailed Eagle and Caspian Tern. We will move to the northern shore of Matsalu Bay where we explore a variety of Põgari-Sassi coastal habitats and visit Haeska watching tower. The record for the highest day list of bird species in Northern Europe was achieved in this region – more than 100 species by nightfall.

We will also climb Rannajõe and Kloostri observation towers to scan over the marshes and take a late evening boat ride through the vast reed-beds, the largest expanse on the Baltic coast, to listen to the night sounds of the wetlands. Dusk is the time that Beavers leave their lodges to spend an industrious night felling riverside trees and saplings. A little quiet patience is required here, but with luck you are likely to see several individuals going about their nightly construction work and swimming about. We eat our picnic-dinner in the boat (Promenaadi Hotel).

7 Sat (11th May) LEIDISSOO, PÕÕSASPEA & HAAPSALU

Today we will travel out in the early morning to enjoy wetlands and heathland forest environment. We hope to be entertained by the bubbling display calls of lekking Black Grouse, whilst other attractions in this area include Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse, Wryneck, and some interesting woodpeckers. We will continue our birding at Põõsaspea peninsula. This small north-stretching spit is situated at the migratory crossroads where masses of waterbirds coming from the Bothnian and the Finnish Bays meet. This is one of the best places to observe Arctic waterbird migration. Tens and hundreds of thousands of Long-tailed Ducks, Common Scoters and goose species can be seen during the peak of migration. This place is famous for its diver migration: up to a couple of thousand Black-throated and Red-throated Divers can be seen daily, and Yellow-billed Diver is frequently seen.

After a lunch and rest we will take a walk on Haapsalu promenade and visit the birdtower on the edge of the lake where we have a fantastic view from the top - several White-tailed Eagles, Goosander, Gadwall, Great Crested Grebes, groups of waders etc. Dinner at the restaurant (Promenaadi Hotel).

8 Sun (12th May) To Tallinn, departure...

We will return to Tallinn by late morning 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 cobbled 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 at ...

**PRICE:** 1395 € per person  
Single suppl. 210 €

Includes:

English speaking local bird guide throughout the journey. All meals and all local transport. Entrance fees to protected areas and museums. All overnights on a twin/double shared basis:

[www.tartuhotell.ee](http://www.tartuhotell.ee)  
[www.vanaoue.ee](http://www.vanaoue.ee)  
[www.promenaadi.ee](http://www.promenaadi.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/>

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