



Estonian Nature Tours

Trip	: MIGRATION HOTSPOTS
Period	: Sun 29th Sep – Sun 6th Oct 2019
Group size	: 6/7 pax
Focus	: Birds
Grading	: Day walks only, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Ivar Ojaste
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Organizer/Agent	: Estonian Nature Tours, e-mail: info@naturetours.ee

An 8-day holiday focusing on the most dramatic autumn bird migration locations in Estonia.

Estonia has been chosen to appear among the elite of the world's most dramatic migration locations for its amazing spring and autumn passage of birds, involving millions of wildfowl and waders flying along the coast between the Baltic Sea and breeding grounds on the Arctic tundra. In addition, there is an exceptional migration of songbirds through the country each autumn, while in winter there are large congregations of wildfowl (including Steller's Eider, now considered a Vulnerable species by BirdLife International) along its coastline. Estonia is a crucial country for birds and a visit or two should be on every birder's itinerary!

Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to South-East Estonia

Day 2 Mehikoorma & Järvelja

Day 3 Mehikoorma, to Pärnu

Day 4 Kabli & Soometsa forests

Day 5 Kihnu island, to Haapsalu

Day 6 Matsalu National Park

Day 7 Põõsaspea & Haapsalu

Day 8 Departure

Highlights

Birds: massive Arctic waterfowl migration, including thousands of Long-tailed Ducks, Velvet Scoters and Red-throated Divers; spectacular passerine migration with tens of thousands of Siskins, Chaffinches and Bramblings; possibility of massive invasion of Jays and Nutcrackers; stunning raptor migration with hundreds of Sparrowhawks in a few hours, Rough-legged Buzzard and White-tailed Eagle; also, Bewick's Swan, Common Crane, Hazel Grouse, Grey-headed and White-backed Woodpecker, Ural and Pygmy Owl, Great Grey Shrike, Waxwing and Yellow-browed Warbler.

Mammals: Elk, Raccoon Dog (probably), Roe deer etc.

1 Sun (29th September) TALLINN, to South-East Estonia

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport and drive to South-East Estonia. After check-in we have our first dinner at the guesthouse (Mooste Viinavabrik Guesthouse).

2 Mon (30th September)

MEHIKOORMA & JÄRVSELJA

We will start from the east of the country, just few kilometers of Mooste, at Mehikoorma. Every autumn, spectacular visible migration can be witnessed on the Estonian side of the huge freshwater lake of Peipsi Järv. Here the lake is at its narrowest where a peninsula extends from the Russian side. This narrowing is particularly favoured by diurnal passerine and near-passerine migrants. For example, between 15 September and 1 October 2012 more than 3 million passerines (mostly finches) were counted, including over 600,000 in a single day. Thousands of Wood Pigeons and good number of some raptor species (including Hen Harrier and Eurasian Hobby) use this „bridge“ route in autumn and many water birds, including divers, track the shoreline.

After a lunch and rest at the guesthouse we will 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 birds. Although the size of the primeval forest area of Järvselja 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. The most impressive trees grow in the south-eastern part of the forest, including giant spruces up to 40 m high and more than 200 years old. Also, huge birch, aspen, linden, ash and maple can be seen. In some places the terrain is difficult to traverse due to the debris of old tree trunks lying on the ground, so a special wooden track has been constructed in the primeval forest quarter. Dinner at the guesthouse (Mooste Viinavabrik Guesthouse).

3 Tue (1st October)

MEHIKOORMA, to Pärnu

After breakfast we will continue our birding at Mehikoorma once again. Later in the afternoon we will follow the direction of bird migration toward the south-west of the county. In the Pärnu area we will visit old-growth coniferous and mixed forest to search for the resident Black, Grey-headed, Three-toed and White-backed Woodpeckers, as well as Hazel Grouse (Ranna Hotel).

4 Wed (2nd October)

KABLI & SOOMETSA FORESTS

Today we will travel out in the early morning and visit the Kabli bird station near the Latvian border. This is the oldest bird station in Estonia, equipped with a huge 18m-high Helgoland type bird trap dating from 1969. Here, one can witness bird-ringing and often see birds in the hand, including stunning white-headed *europaeus* race Long-tailed Tits, Willow Tits, Crested Tits, Nuthatches and other woodland passerines as well as Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers and eastern vagrants such as Yellow-browed and Pallas's Warblers. It is worth visiting at first light because owls are caught here regularly but they are released early in the morning. After a very nice lunch in Häädemeeste village, we will visit a lookout tower and wooden pathway in the Tolkuse bog. We can enjoy the misty mystery of bog lakes and colourful patterns of peat mosses, which in combination with crane and geese migrating under a deep blue sky will epitomise our special northern autumn experiences... As the Soometsa woodlands hold a nice mixture of deciduous as well as coniferous trees, an afternoon here is remarkably good for finding several interesting forest birds. Grey-headed, White-backed and Black Woodpeckers, Hazel Grouse and Nutcracker are all frequently encountered here (Ranna Hotel).

5 Thu (3rd October)

KIHNU ISLAND, to North-West Estonia

After our breakfast we will drive to Munalaiu harbour where we take the ferry to Kihnu island. The crossing takes about one hour and already from Munalaiu harbour you may spot the first

Sparrowhawks crossing the sea and White-tailed Eagles hunting the seaduck. The ferry trip also produces good views of Greater Scaup, Velvet Scoter and Long-tailed Duck.

Although Kihnu island is the least-visited migration point by local birders, the most southern tip of the island, Cape Pitkänä, is definitely one of the most interesting place for migratory passerines and raptors in the autumn.

On the last week of September and first two weeks of October, days with over 100,000 migrants are not rare. You can encounter here masses of Chaffinches moving over the sea, accompanied by Bramblings, Siskins and pipits.

Kihnu island is the best place to witness raptor migration in Estonia. On 2nd October 2012, 1,000 raptors were counted in a single day, including 955 Sparrowhawks, 17 Merlins, 10 Hen Harriers, 3 Hobbies, a late Honey Buzzard and a Rough-legged Buzzard. Other big daily counts include 9,650 Common Cranes and an astonishing 76,000 White-fronted and Bean Geese. Rare birds here in autumn have included Estonia's first Naumann's Thrush, as well as White-billed Diver, Pallas's Warbler, Greater Short-toed Lark and Hawk Owl. Each day can bring new surprises!

We will stay at the southern point until our lunch break, which is a real cultural experience – the local women still wear the national costume as their everyday attire! Kihnu is the largest island in the Gulf of Riga and the seventh largest in Estonia. Originally used by seal hunters and fishermen Kihnu is now a culturally significant and essentially matriarchal society. The women guard the cultural heritage whilst the men go off to sea and fish. UNESCO has proclaimed the Kihnu marriage ceremony as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity”.

We will return to the mainland in late afternoon and drive to the northern shore of Matsalu Bay. After check-in we will eat our dinner at the guesthouse (Tuulingu Guesthouse).

6 Fri (4th October) MATSALU NATIONAL PARK

Following our coastal pursuit of migratory and staging waterbirds we reach Matsalu National Park. This is the most famous bird area in Estonia, known as one of the most important breeding and stop-over areas for waterfowl and shorebirds in the whole of Northern Europe. Over 40 sq km, this reserve consists of large open floodplains and coastal meadows, riparian and coastal woodlands, river delta and marshlands and shallow Matsalu Bay with 3,000 hectares of reedbeds, numerous islands and seven birdwatching towers around it. This makes this reserve wonderful as migratory staging place for vast numbers of coastal and waterbirds. Matsalu Bay is typically covered with the white spots of about 10,000 Whooper and Bewick Swans (in early Spring and late Autumn), tens of thousands of Goldeneye, Pochard, Wigeon, Teal and waders. Also, several thousand Barnacle, Bean, Greylag and White-fronted Geese harvest the grass of local meadows and fields. The Matsalu area is also well known as an autumn Common Crane staging area. As many as 20,000 birds gather around the bay and feed in the adjacent fields (peak time is mid-September!).

We will drive to the Puise Peninsula in the early morning and explore a variety of Põgari-Sassi coastal habitats. We also visit Haeska watchtower (the record for the highest day list of bird species in Northern Europe was achieved from this tower in May – 128 species by nightfall). After lunch we drive around in more agricultural landscape where we hope to see flocks of migratory birds - including hundreds of Bramblings, Chaffinches and Waxwings. Besides passerine migration we hope to improve our bird list with several raptors, such as Rough-legged Buzzard etc. When it gets darker, we shall watch from viewing platforms and while enjoying the geese or late Cranes we'll also look out for White-tailed Eagles, harriers – and Elk. Dinner at the guesthouse (Tuulingu Guesthouse).

7 Sat (5th October) PÕÕSASPEA & HAAPSALU

We will start from the most north-easterly point, Cape Põõsaspea. This small north-stretching spit is situated at the migratory crossroads where masses of waterbirds coming from the gulfs of Bothnia and Finland meet. Cape Põõsaspea is the best place for autumn passage waterbirds. During one season (July-October), nearly 2.5 million Arctic-breeding wildfowl passed this narrow bottleneck, with daily totals sometimes exceeding 100,000. The biggest daily counts here include 8,400 Velvet Scoter, 6,000 Greater Scaup, and over 2,000 Red-throated and Black-throated Divers. Around 300,000 Long-tailed Duck pass the point during the first two weeks of October. Rare waterbirds seen from this location include White-billed Diver, King Eider, Grey Phalarope and Little Auk. Rare or scarce passerines have included Desert Wheatear and Yellow-browed and Dusky Warblers.

After a lunch at Dirham, we will visit Haapsalu town which has many shallow sheltered bays, coastal lagoons, marshlands and reedbeds. The spectacular view from the coastal promenade over Haapsalu Bay can deliver tens of thousands of Goldeneye, Coot, Greater Scaup, Tufted Duck, Wigeon and other wildfowl, including Smew. Regular distractions include White-tailed Eagles, swans, waders and other exciting birds are all present (Tuulingu Guesthouse).

8 Sun (6th October) To Tallinn, departure...

On our way back to Tallinn, we will make a short visit to some old-growth coniferous and mixed forest where we hope to be entertained by Black Grouse, whilst other attractions in this area include Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse, Wryneck, and some interesting woodpeckers. 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 on account of its medieval city centre, the finest in Northern Europe, with cobblestone streets and buildings that date back to the 15th century. We will have some free time for shopping before driving you to the airport for your homeward flight...

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

Includes:

English speaking bird guide throughout the journey. All meals and all local transport. Ferry tickets. Entrance fees to protected areas and museums. All overnights in shared double:

www.fototurism.ee

www.rannahotell.ee

www.tuulingu.ee

etc. 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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