



Estonian Nature Tours

Trip	: BIRDS & MAMMALS IN SPRING
Period	: Fri 8th May – Fri 15th May 2020
Group size	: 4/7 pax
Grading	: Walking is mainly on good level tracks but we may also enter the forest in search of tracks and signs and this terrain can be a little more difficult
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel and/or guesthouse with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Kaarel Võhandu
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Organizer/Agent	: Estonian Nature Tours, e-mail: info@naturetours.ee

An 8-day fully-inclusive holiday amongst unique, untouched nature with winding rivers, vast floodplains, mires, bogs and primeval forests, where we will search for mammals including Raccoon Dog, Red Fox, European Beaver, Wild Boar, Elk, Roe Deer, Flying Squirrel and Brown Bears and enjoy birdwatching as well. You have a slim chance of seeing one of the more elusive residents such as Wolf and Lynx! Even if you don't see these animals, you will have plenty of fun deciphering the many mammal tracks we find along the way!

Estonian forests are renowned in Europe for their healthy populations of mammals with around 700-800 Lynx, over 150 Wolves, 500-600 Brown Bears and almost 20 000 Beavers – tremendous numbers for such a small country. In all, sixty-four species of mammals have been recorded in Estonia including several European rarities, the most endangered examples being the European Mink, several species of dormouse and the Flying Squirrel.

NB! In spite of the impressive number of mammals in Estonia, it is not always easy to see them. Abundance of forest habitats to aid concealment, nocturnal or crepuscular behaviour, and a natural wariness instilled through centuries of hunting, combine to make many of our mammal inhabitants shy and elusive but with patience, and the skills of a naturalist guide, a visitor can be rewarded by memorable encounters with some of Europe's rarest creatures.

- Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to Western Estonia
- Day 2 Matsalu National Park; Beaver boat trip
- Day 3 Leidissoo & Põõsaspea, to South-East Estonia
- Day 4 Järvelja & Aardla; Great Snipe
- Day 5 Transfer to North-East Estonia; Bear Hide
- Day 6 Birding & tracking at Alutaguse
- Day 7 Flying Squirrel tracking (and watching)
- Day 8 Departure

Highlights

Mammals: Raccoon Dog, Red Fox, Elk, Roe Deer, Flying Squirrel (in dusk 80% guaranteed), **Wild Boar (difficult! African swine fever)**, Brown Bear (99%), European Beaver (95%), tracks and droppings of Lynx and Wolves etc.

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

1 Fri (8th May) TALLINN, transfer to West-Estonia

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport and drive to west Estonia. After check-in at the hotel and a short rest we will go for an optional excursion to listen to the night sounds of the wetlands, before we have our evening meal (Roosta Holiday Village).

2 Sat (9th May) MATSALU NATIONAL PARK; BEAVER BOAT-TRIP

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. A selection of waders also take advantage of the rich feeding grounds; Ruff, in particular, sometimes occurring in great abundance, the males resplendent in their 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 climb observation towers to scan over the marshes and also take a boat ride through the vast reed-beds, the largest expanse on the Baltic coast. 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, with background sounds by Bittern, Water Rail, Spotted Crake and Savi's Warbler. We eat our dinner in the boat or at a restaurant (Roosta Holiday Village).

3 Sun (10th May) LEIDISSOO & PÕÕSASPEA, to South-East Estonia

In the early morning we will enjoy a mammal tracking searching for Elk, Wild Boar, Roe Deer, Raccoon Dog and a Red Fox. The area is a mixture of heathland forests, wetlands, open clearings and fields. We also hope to be entertained by the autumn 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. We will move to South-East region by late afternoon. After check-in we will have our evening meal at the guesthouse (Hansa Hotel).

4 Mon (11th May) JÄRVSELJA FOREST & 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 and other forest bird

species. 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. 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, both Great Spotted and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Ruffs, Penduline Tit, Citrine Wagtail etc. Later in the afternoon, our itinerary takes us next to Tartu area where we will look at marshy areas nearby and visit an area known as one of the best spots for Great Snipe in the Baltic. Late dinner at the guesthouse (Hansa Hotel).

5 Tue (12th May) Transfer to North-East Estonia; BROWN BEAR HIDE

After the breakfast, we will move to one of the most densely forested corners of Estonia - it is similar in appearance to taiga and is called Alutaguse. A large storm in 2001, and forest cuttings after that, have changed the look of this landscape a lot. New forest is the best place to find Roe Deer and Elk who in turn are targets for carnivores. Alutaguse is situated near the Russian border and forms a solid natural landscape through to St.Peterburg Oblast's forests and bogs. That's why Alutaguse is an area with huge number of Bears and now – after hundreds of years – is also the heart of Estonian "bear culture". This area is also one of the best place in Estonia for searching forest bird species. We will hope to be entertained by other attractions in this area including Black Grouse, Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse, Wryneck and 4-5 different target species of woodpeckers.

After check-in and a lunch we have a rest at the guesthouse. Later in the afternoon, we will take a walk through the forest (1 km) to the Bear Hide (packed dinner with us). The wooden hide is cozy, with comfortable seats and viewing slots at the front and beds at the back so you can sleep in the very darkest part of the night or catch a nap. At the far end is a separate dry toilet (wet napkins/tissues provided). Brown Bear can appear at any time during the night (sometimes even before). Raccoon Dogs and sometimes even Wolves occasionally visit the feeding place (Bear Hide/Matsu Guesthouse).

6 Wed (13th May) BIRDING & TRACKING

You will remain in the hide during the early morning. Whether or not you are in luck, it is fantastic to watch (and hear) the forest come alive with the first rays of the morning sun. Forest tits, Spotted Flycatchers, Crossbills and other passerines are at their most active, restlessly flitting about in search of food. Sometimes single Golden Eagles and Buzzards also appear. If we are fortunate we may hear Capercaillie, Black Grouse or even see several species of woodpeckers from the hide. You will enjoy your late breakfast at the guesthouse and take a rest until to lunchtime. In the afternoon, a local specialist will share with you his knowledge of tracking of Wolves, Lynx and Brown Bear. You will spend the rest of today exploring on foot and by vehicle in one of the Estonian's best known Brown Bear regions where you have a slim chance of seeing one of these more elusive residents. Even if you don't see any of animals, you will have plenty of fun deciphering the many mammal tracks you find along the way! Later in the evening, we will have an owling session before we return to the hotel and have our evening meal at the guesthouse

(Matsu Guesthouse).

7 Thu (14th May) FLYING SQUIRREL TRACKING & WATCHING

Today we will reach the species-rich Western Taiga forest environment and enjoy Flying Squirrel tracking led by zoologist-ecologist Uudo Timm for a whole day. Uudo has had a particular interest in Flying Squirrels for the last 20 years and has been researching their ecology and protection plus monitoring their spread and distribution. The Flying Squirrel is a bit smaller than the ordinary squirrel and a pride of Estonian forests – in Europe they can only be found in Estonia and Finland. It has received its name from hairy folds of skin between its fore and hind legs which help it to make jumps up to 35 metres from one tree to another. Right now there are 80 known sites for Flying Squirrels in the north-east region of Estonia. We also hope to be entertained by other attractions in this area including Black Grouse, Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse, Wryneck and some interesting woodpeckers.

Later in the afternoon, after a dinner, we will go for a Flying Squirrel night session. If we are fortunate we may even see them jumping from one tree to another. Radio receivers and night watching instruments are used to observe animals at night (Matsu Guesthouse).

8 Fri (15th 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 cobble stoned 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: **1695 Euro per person**
Single suppl. 210 Euro

Includes:

English speaking local specialist(s) throughout the journey. All meals and all local transport. Bear Hide costs (1 night). Entrance fees to protected areas. All overnights in shared double:

www.tuulingu.ee

www.fototurism.ee

www.matsutalu.eu

etc. VAT.

Excludes:

Beverages and sauna. International tickets. Insurance.

Booking and deposits can be made if you click on our Tour calendar. **BOOK HERE** will guide you to our booking system, where it is possible to insert data and also instantly pay by credit card (coming next week). Another possibility is to pay through bank transfer. Automatic invoice and confirmation will be sent to your email address.

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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