



Estonian Nature Tours

Trip	: ESTONIA – A SHELTER FOR WESTERN TAIGA FOREST BIRDS
Period	: Wed09Apr – Mon14Apr 2014
Group size	: 6/8 pax
Grading	: Day walks only, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel and/or guesthouse with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Kaarel Võhandu
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Agent/Organizer	: Estonian Nature Tours, e-mail: info@naturetours.ee

A 6-day fully-inclusive holiday in search of owls, woodpeckers, grouse and other forest specialities of Estonia.

Estonian Western Taiga forests has an extraordinary richness of species. Up to 40,000 pairs of Hazel Grouse nest here while the number of Capercaillie has stabilised around at 2-3,000 pairs. Spring in Estonia begins in late March when woodpeckers start their drumming and all the swamps and bogs resound with displaying Black Grouses at sunrise. Hazel Grouse can surprise you near the roadsides while driving in forested areas. You can hear the calls of Ural, Pygmy and Tengmal`s Owls as it gets dark, or observe roding Woodcock above the trees. In one national park in Estonia more White-backed Woodpeckers may nest than in the whole of Sweden!

Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to West-Estonia

Day 2 Variku, Põõsaspea & Matsalu

Day 3 Matsalu, to central Estonia

Day 4 Toosikannu

Day 5 Toosikannu & Mõrdama

Day 6 Departure

Highlights:

Birds: Bittern, White Stork, White-tailed Eagle, Goshawk, Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Hazel Grouse, Eagle Owl, Ural Owl, Tengmalm`s Owl, Pygmy Owl, White-backed Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Black Woodpecker, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Nutcracker, Crested Tit, Bearded Tit, Parrot Crossbill etc.

Mammals: Red Fox, Raccoon Dog, Wild Boar, Elk, Roe Deer, European Beaver, tracks of Wolf or Lynx etc.

1 Wed (9th April) TALLINN, to West-Estonia

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

2 Thu (10th April) VARIKU, PÕÕSASPEA & MATSALU NATIONAL PARK

Today we will visit the heathland forest environment in the early morning. We hope to hear the bubbling display calls of lekking Black Grouse, whilst other attractions in this area include Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse and some interesting woodpeckers. We will continue our birding at Põõsaspea peninsula. This small north-stretching spit is renowned as one of the best place for observing Arctic waterbird migration. Tens and hundreds of thousands of Long-Tailed Ducks, Common Scoters and Geese species can be seen during the peak of migration, diver species as well.

Next we will reach the Matsalu National Park which is the oldest Ramsar site 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 geese regularly number tens of thousands. 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 and White-tailed Eagle. Matsalu area is also well known as an autumn Crane concentration area, but surely we will get very good views of several birds in early spring too. We will climb observation towers to scan over the marshes and also – if possible – 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 thousands of Bewick's and Whooper Saws and an early Bittern (Roosta Holiday Village).

3 Fri (11th April) MATSALU, to central Estonia

After breakfast we will drive to the northern shore of Matsalu Bay where we visit Haeska watching tower. The record for the highest day list of bird species in Northern Europe was achieved in this region at a similar time of year (in May) by Finnish birdwatchers – 128 species by nightfall. We will explore also a variety of Põgari-Sassi coastal habitats, then enjoy the fantastic dinner at a local farm or guesthouse. We will move to central Estonia in the late afternoon and eat our dinner at the guesthouse (Toosikannu Holiday Village).

4 Sat (13th April) TOOSIKANNU

In the early morning we will enjoy a mammal safari searching for Elk, Wild Boar, Roe Deer and hopefully Lynx. An open vehicle will help us to get good views of the different mammal species. The area is a mixture of old forests, open clearings and fields. The safari trip passes several feeding stations for Elk and Wild Boar where both mammals can be seen regularly. As woodlands around Toosikannu hold a nice mixture of deciduous as well as coniferous trees then a morning safari is remarkably good for finding several interesting forest birds. Grey-headed, White-backed and Black Woodpeckers, Hazel Hen, Nutcracker and Black Stork (maybe too early for Black Stork!) can be encountered here very often. In the early mornings stunning Crane families come with their young chicks to pick up cereals at the Wild Boar feeding stations. After a break at the guesthouse and lunch we drive around in more agricultural landscape where we hope to see flocks of migratory birds - including hundreds of Skylarks, Snow Buntings and Chaffinches, local breeding Crane pairs and White Storks. Beside passerine migration we hope to improve our bird list with several raptors, such as Rough-legged Buzzard and maybe even Hawk Owl! When it gets more dark, we will try to get sightings of another nocturnal mammal -

Raccoon Dog. Woodlands near our guesthouse hold habitat for little, angry looking Pygmy Owl and stunning Ural Owl. Beside those two superb birds we will encounter many roding Woodcocks and displaying Green Sandpipers (Toosikannu Holiday Village).

5 Sun (13th April) TOOSIKANNU & MÕRDAMA

Just after sunrise we will be out again taking a slightly longer route along forested areas, searching for missing forest birds. After that we will head to a more agricultural landscape there several interesting birds can be encountered, such as Great Grey Shrike, Rough-legged Buzzard, breeding pairs of Cranes and White Storks on the nest. If we are very lucky, even Hawk Owl may turn up. After a refreshing lunch in a local tourism farm (or restaurant), we will head to a polder area at nearby Pärnu town – Audru that is a well known stopover site for thousands of geese. Bean Geese are regular migrants and even Red-breasted Goose are found annually in this area. Just nearby there is a breeding site for another highlight woodpecker - Middle Spotted Woodpecker. We will return to the guesthouse late afternoon and eat our last dinner together (Toosikannu Holiday Village).

6 Mon (14th April) 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: 860 € pp.
Single.suppl. 170 €

Includes:

English-Estonian speaking guide(s) 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.roosta.ee

www.toosikannu.ee

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.

Legal contacts:

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