



Estonian Nature Tours

Trip	: Estonia in Early Spring
Period	: March – April
Group size	: 14 +2 pax
Grading	: Day walks only, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Local field ornithologist
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Local organizer	: Estonian Nature Tours
Agent	:

A 7-day holiday in search of owls, woodpeckers and other wintering and spring-time specialities of Estonia

Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to Pärnu

Day 2 Soometsa forests

Day 3 Saaremaa Island

Day 4 Variku, Põõsaspea & Nõva

Day 5 Leidisoo & Matsalu

Day 6 Marimetsa bog, to Tallinn

Day 7 Departure

Highlights

Birds: Bittern, Eurasian White Stork, Steller´s Eider, White-tailed Eagle, Goshawk, Razorbill, 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, Grey Seal, Wild Boar (probably), Elk, Roe deer, European Beaver, tracks of Wolf or Brown Bear etc.

Estonia is a small and beautiful country near the Baltic Sea which has enjoyed moderate financial growth since gaining independence in 1991. The country has a long, indented and diverse coastline with more than 1000 islands and forests and woodlands cover almost half of the Estonian territory. Birdwatching in Estonia is wonderful as extensive undeveloped coastal areas with wide-spread reed-beds and grasslands as well as winding rivers, vast floodplains, mires, bogs and primeval forests in the central part of the mainland are habitats for thousands of migrating and breeding birds. There are also many species of mammals and rare plant species.

Estonians have always had a close relationship with the land and its forests. The harsh environment created a strong respect for nature. This included its conservation. Environmental factors, such as the landscape, soil type, ground water level and acces to waterbodies and forests, determined the placement of traditional Estonian buildings. Forests were never needlessly cleared nor wild animals killed, many sacred trees, groves and burial mounds are still preserved. Due to its geographical location between the East and West, the territory of Estonia was under the rule of different countries for last seven centuries - German, Danish, Swedish and Russian and the rich history is the other reason to visit our country.

*Spring birdwatching in Estonia begins in late **March** when woodpeckers start their drumming, Capercaillies become very active under the old pine forests at dusk and all the swamps and bogs resound with Black Grouses at sunrise. On shallow bays, their traditional feeding sites, there are thousands of Whooper and Bewick´s Swans and different duck species, on the fields*

gather tens of thousands of geese. When it gets dark you can hear the calls of owls in the forest and observe Woodcocks flying above you.

1 MON TALLINN, to Pärnu

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport at ... and drive to Pärnu town. After check-in and short rest we will go for an Owling session. If we are fortunate we can hear Ural and Pygmy Owl or even see the Eagle Owl hunting for small mammals at the forest edge. Dinner at the local restaurant (Villa Wesset or Scandic Rannahotell).

2 TUE SOOMETSA FORESTS

Today we will travel out in the very early morning and visit old grown coniferous and mixed forest in order to experience the spring calling of resident Black-, Gray-headed, Three-toed and White-backed Woodpeckers as well as listen the mating calls of Hazel Grouse. After a very nice picnic-lunch, we will have a short visit to the 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 migration under a blue sky will summarize up our special northern spring experience... In the late afternoon, before we return to the hotel, we will have another owling session... (Villa Wesset or Scandic Rannahotell).

3 WED SAAREMAA ISLAND

Today we will have the opportunity to scope Steller's Eiders. To see dense flock(s) of these magnificent birds we have to take the ferry from Virtsu at 8 A.M. Depending on winter severity and weather in spring the Suur Väin Strait can be covered with ice, or host nice flocks of seaducks. At half past 8 we arrive at Kuivastu harbour on Muhu Island and drive westward. A local guide is joining us in Kuressaare. The hot spot for Steller's Eider is located on the northwesternmost part of Saaremaa, close to Cape Undva. Because of biogeographic reasons Saaremaa is not rich in rarer woodpecker and owl species, but if we still miss Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Wood Lark or any species that the local guide knows of, we can see or hear them on short stops on our way to Undva or after that. Uudepanga Bay near Undva hosts up to 1000 Seller's Eiders each winter. Usually the numbers remain between 300 and 600, sometimes less. Birds form dense flocks where they behave synchronously, especially when diving. We will return back to the mainland during late afternoon and drive to the West region of Estonia. After check-in we will eat our dinner at the hotel (Roosta Bungalows or Promenaadi Hotel).

4 THU VARIKU, PÕÕSASPEA & NÕVA FORESTS

In the morning we will enjoy nearby wetlands and hope to be entertained by the bubbling display calls of lekking Black Grouse. then, after a late breakfast, we will continue to the most North-Easterly point, the Põõsaspea. This small north-stretching spit is situating at the migratory crossroad, where masses of waterbirds coming from Bothnian and from the Finnish Bay direction meet. This place deserves to be mentioned as one of the best place for observing the Artic waterbird migration. Tens and hundreds of thousand s of Long-tailed Ducks, Common Scoters and Geese species can be seen during the peak of migration. After a rest at the hotel, later in the afternoon, we will go for an optional excursion to listen to the night sounds of the wetlands and western taiga forests near Nõva before we have our evening meal (Roosta Bungalows or Promenaadi Hotel).

5 FRI LEIDISSOO & 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 again, whilst other attractions in this area include Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse and some interesting woodpeckers. Next 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 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, White-tailed Eagle and Caspian Tern. Matsalu area is also well known as an autumn Crane concentration area, but surely we will get a very good views of several birds in early spring too. After a very nice lunch at local tourism farm we will pass through a large boggy heath called Tuhu Bog with stunted pines and heather and stop at the tower. This is a good place for Golden Eagle and Black Grouse as well (Roosta Bungalows or Promenaadi Hotel).

6 SAT MARIMETSA BOG, to Tallinn

In the early morning we will take the nature trip to Marimetsa Bog (6 – 8 km, breakfast with you). 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 stoned streets & buildings that date back to the 15th century. After the walk we will have our last medieval dinner together (Hotel in Tallinn Old Town).

7 SUN Departure

After the breakfast we have some free time for shopping before we will drive to the Airport to catch your homeward flight at...

Read more: www.llk.ee (homepage of Läänemaa Bird Club)
www.eoy.ee (homepage of Estonian Birding Society)
www.vironlintuseura.fi
www.einst.ee
www.estonica.org

Hotels: www.roosta.ee or www.promenaadi.ee or www.altmoisa.ee in West-Estonia
www.scandic-hotels.ee or www.wesset.ee in Pärnu

PRICES:

Includes:

English-Estonian speaking guide(s) throughout the journey. All meals and coffee-breaks. All local transport. All overnights in shared double. Entrance fees to protected areas and museums. VAT.

Excludes:

Beverages and sauna. International tickets.

CANCELLATIONS

Less than 15 days prior, 50 percent charge of movable cost fee per person. Cancellation on the day of arrival or no-show, full cost applies.

Cordially

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