



Estonian Nature Tours

Trip	: Mammal Watching Holiday
Period	: Sat30Apr – Sat07May 2011 : Sat21May – Sat28May 2011 : Sat04Jun – Sat11Jun 2011
Group size	: 4/6 pax
Grading	: B; regular walking, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel and/or guesthouse with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Local specialist(s) / ornithologist
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!

- Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, transfer to Alutaguse
- Day 2 Flying Squirrel tracking (and watching)
- Day 3 Brown Bear tracking; overnight in Bear Hide
- Day 4 Wolf and Lynx tracking; alternative overnight in Bear Hide
- Day 5 Transfer to Tartu, Great Snipe watching
- Day 6 Alam-Pedja Nature reserve
- Day 7 Beaver watching
- Day 8 Departure

Highlights

Mammals: Raccoon Dog, Red Fox, Elk, Roe Deer, Flying Squirrel (in darkness 70% guaranteed), Wild Boar (90%), Brown Bear (90%), European Beaver (95%), tracks and droppings of Lynx and Wolves (100%, or even the animals themselves if you are lucky!)

Birds: Black Stork, 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.

One of the most important and endangered type of forests in Estonia is Western Taiga.

*Western Taiga is a complex forest habitat type, ranging from dry pine forest (*Pinus sylvestris*) to damp spruce forests (*Picea abies*). Some stands in such forests may be quite young, having regenerated after a forest fire that would have occurred over hundred years ago. Whilst others will be significantly more mature. In all cases, natural undisturbed western taiga – not subjected to commercial forestry – is extremely rich, providing habitats for many threatened species of lichens, bryophytes, insects and birds. The dead wood, in particular, plays a central role in maintaining this high conservation value.*

Estonian forests and woodlands are well-known in Europe for the number of mammals living

there. 700-800 Lynxes, over 150 Wolves, 500-600 Brown Bears, almost 20 000 Beavers are remarkably high numbers for such a small territory while the flying squirrel is the pride of Estonian forests – in Europe they can only be found in Estonia and Finland.

Estonian Western Taiga forests in North-Europe also stand out for their extraordinary richness in birds species. One of the most important indicators of diversity are definately the woodpeckers with, 8 different species of woodpeckers nesting here. During birding trips, there are often mornings when 6 different species of woodpeckers can be found in one woodland!

The numbers of the nesting owls is also high and have stayed stable during recent decades: Tengmalm`s Owl 200-400 pairs, Ural Owl 1500-2500 pairs and Pygmy Owl 600-1200 pairs.

The only concern is the steep drop in the number of Eagle Owls. The typical Grouse in Estonian forest areas is unquestionably Hazel Grouse and up to 40 000 pairs nest here. The number of Capercaillie has stabilized during the last decades at about 2000-3000 pairs. The most endangered species nesting here is Black Stork.

1 Sat TALLINN, transfer to Alutaguse

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport at ... and drive to the North-East region of Estonia called Alutaguse. After (or before) check-in at Matsu Guesthouse we will go for an optional excursion by listening to the night sounds of the wetlands and western taiga forests, before we have our evening meal at the guesthouse (Matsu Guesthouse).

2 Sun FLYING SQUIRREL TRACKING & WATCHING

Today we will reach the species-rich Western Taiga forest environment and enjoy the 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 that have been found in the North-East region of Estonia. We also hope to be entertained by other attractions in this area include Black Grouse, Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse, Wryneck and some interesting woodpeckers. After a very nice picnic-lunch at Oonurme village house we will take a rest. In the late evening, after 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).

3 Mon BROWN BEAR TRACKING / BEAR HIDE

Early morning takes us to the 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. Also, 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". There are numerous real-life stories of young bears in human villages but local people still manage to take it with humor and live side by side with bears. Other storys relate to wolves as this animal can kill 30 sheep at one night just to teach killing to youngsters.

So, we will spend the rest of today exploring on foot and by vehicle in one of the Estonian's best known Brown Bear regions looking for signs, droppings, scratching on the trees as well as tracks of Wolf packs with our local specialist. As you walk, you will need to be as quiet as you can. You have a slim chance of seeing one of the more elusive residents such as Wolf, Lynx and Wild Boar! Even if you don't see any of these animals, you will have plenty of fun deciphering the many mammal tracks we find along the way! After lunch we have a rest at the guesthouse. At the late afternoon, the local specialist will guide us through the forest (1 km) to the Bear Hide. The wooden hide is cozy, with comfortable 8+1 seats and viewing slots at the front, beds at the back for those not prepared to sit up all through the night. At the far end is a separate dry toilet (wet napkins/tissues offered by us). Brown Bear can appear at any time during the night (sometimes even before). Raccoon Dogs and sometimes even wolves can occasionally visit the feeding place. The delicious „hide-dinner“ will be prepared by local ladies ([Bear Hide](#)).

4 Tue WOLF & LYNX 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 as the rays of the morning sun warm the clearing and the species in it. 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 breakfast at the guesthouse and take a rest until to the lunchtime. In the afternoon, the local specialist will share with you his knowledge of tracking of Wolves, Lynx and Elk and demonstrate the various ways of communicating with them, some of which have been used by the region's hunters for hundred of years. In 2002-2003 the population of both for wolf and bear was at its lowest but now the species have recovered. Last autumn 32 wolf families and 128 lynx families were recorded in Estonia. The Elk population has also stabilized and the population number is estimated at 11 000 animals. If you have not seen a bear during the first observation, we will take anyone who is interested back to the hide for a second night ([Matsu Guesthouse and/or Bear Hide](#)).

5 Wed Transfer to Tartu, GREAT SNIPE

We will enjoy our breakfast and move to Tartu region by late morning. After lunch and a short rest in the hotel 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 such as Citrine Wagtail and Spotted Eagles. After dinner we offer an optional excursion to an area where we can watch displaying Great Snipe at one of their best lekking sites in the Baltic ([Trofee Guesthouse or Hansahotell](#)).

6 Thu ALAM-PEDJA NATURE RESERVE

Our itinerary today early morning takes us to Alam-Pedja, an area of marsh with adjacent forest. This is a truly remote and wild region of undisturbed floodplains and winding rivers where it is claimed there are only 20 human residents on 260 square miles of wilderness! We will hope to find a wonderful diversity of species including Black Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Black Stork, both Great Spotted and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Penduline Tit, and Great Reed, Icterine, Marsh and Barred Warblers. Returning to the guesthouse (or hotel) for lunch, you will have the opportunity

to have a rest, visit marshy areas nearby or enjoy cultural sightseeings in Tartu town (Trofee Guesthouse or Hansahotell).

7 Fri **BEAVER WATCHING**

Today we will travel out in the early morning and enjoy wetland and heathland forest environments. This wild region with winding streams holds a good population of European Beavers and there is a chance of Beaver sightings by looking for them from land here. Once again - a little quiet patience is required. Beaver safaries are led by our top specialist of semi-aquatic mammals in Estonia, Remek Meel. With an ealry start - two hours before first light (in May at 3.30am!) you will leave the Beavers a few hours after sunrise and transfer back to the guesthouse for a good rest in the late morning and afternoon. In the evening, we will take a boat ride through Emajõgi river 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. „In my further career, whether working at science and monitoring, photographing or filming or lecturing on wildlife and setting out study programmes, all my work has been related to semi-aquatic mammals. The beaver is a mammal that greatly changes its surrounding environment through its vital functions, thus creating suitable habitats for many other species. I think we should be pleased to have such a strong population of beavers in Estonia. There is nothing better than spending an evening with beavers and focusing on the world of this mysterious mammal which lives half of its time in water and the other half on land. This is real therapy!“, Remek said (Trofee Guesthouse or Hansahotell).

8 Sat **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: **1495 Euro per person**
Single suppl. 120 Euro

Includes:

English-Estonian speaking guide and local specialist(s) throughout the journey. All local transport. Bear Hide costs (1-2 nights). All meals and coffee-breaks. Entrance fees to protected areas. 6 (six) overnights in shared double:

www.matsutalu.ee

www.trofee.ee

www.hansahotell.ee

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/>

And, don't forget, when you would like to travel with your friends – plan your dates, put together your group and book your own tour as soon as possible! Ask for our special price when your Group size is more than 10 people. There is a 40% discount for group leaders. We would be happy to give you more information or offer an extra tour whenever you find a suitable time.

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

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