

Estonia in autumn

25th September – 2nd October 2010



A chilly but highly productive start to the day in the Sootmetsa forest.

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Leaders

John Muddeman (The Travelling Naturalist)

Tarvo Walker (Estonian Nature Tours)

Raivo (Driver)

Participants

Ted & Penny Raynor

Gill Gregory

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John & Lucy Roots

David & Margaret Mees

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Introduction

Estonia is traditionally thought of for its remarkable variety of birdlife in the spring, with the European 24-hour record having been set here in the past on more than one occasion, and the European day record from one spot also held here. But located in the SE of the Baltic Sea, it always lies on a major flyway from the Arctic, both down the W coast of Finland and also from overland for birds coming down the White Sea.

This was our very first autumn tour of the W of the country, to coincide with the peak of the autumn migration, particularly of cranes and waterfowl, and we certainly were not disappointed! Indeed, with a slightly later autumn migration than usual, we also enjoyed a greater variety of species than normal, given the continued presence of a number of passerines.

The weather is notoriously fickle and difficult to predict, so we were more than happy with the chilly, windy and heavily overcast conditions for the first three days given that it stayed almost completely dry! This also helped trigger mass exodus of the cranes through and from Estonia and also the mass arrival of Barnacle Geese on passage, mostly ultimately on their way to Holland.

Daily diary

Saturday 25th September

Tallinn airport, Haapsalu.

A milky sun, warm and calm.

After transferring in a remarkably busy Helsinki airport, we finally arriving in Tallinn, picked up our bags, met our local guide Tarvo and driver Raivo, changed some cash, and were soon off though the quiet city outskirts. With a fine mild evening, the views as we passed through the very flat and rather wooded countryside were good, with the forests splashed with autumn reds and golds, particularly of the Norway Maples and Rowans, plus some stands of Silver Birch. Indeed, the Ash trees were already leafless, showing how far ahead they were compared to the UK.

Few birds were seen en route, though a couple of Eurasian Jays (part of a notable ongoing autumn influx) and a flock of Common Cranes, beautifully etched against the red skies of the setting sun, were noted amongst others. After just 90 minutes we checked into our lakefront hotel in Haapsalu, and despite it being basically dark outside could make out plenty of duck and Mute Swans on the water, and soon had the first of our meals there.

After a relatively long day's travelling we were soon in bed, especially important since we were to be out early to try and witness migration in full swing in the morning, since the forecast was predicting a sudden change to moderate NE winds which could push down lots of birds from the Arctic...

Sunday 26th September

Põõsaspea Peninsula, Dirhami bay, Wiigi café Haapsalu, Matsalu N.P.

Calm start + low 8/8 cloud and chilly in a moderate NNE wind by the coast and on our return to hotel.

We left in still and very misty conditions. "Don't worry" said Tarvo, "It's always windy by the coast". And so it was that almost an hour later and finally with some reasonable light, as we crossed the last open area before the final spit, a superb male Snow Bunting flew low, parallel to and very close to the bus, using us as shelter from the promised chilly wind! Whether it then escaped the attentions of a marauding Eurasian Sparrowhawk which sped past we'll never know, but I hope so!

Parking at the end it was apparent that heavy wildfowl migration was underway, with regular small and some large flocks of ducks, geese, Great Cormorants and even small parties of divers going past, though with a stiff tail wind, all these largely flashed through! Patience paid off though, and in addition to the large numbers of passing Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Long-tailed Ducks, Eurasian Wigeon and Brent and Barnacle Geese, lots of which were either too far or simply too fast for some of the party, we also looked hard at the numerous birds on the water on either side of the spit. Despite moderate waves, among the large numbers of Common Goldeneyes we also noted two Red-necked Grebes, a (very elusive) winter-plumaged Black Guillemot, plentiful Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser and a couple of distant Common Eider. Single long-billed Dunlin and a fine Eurasian Oystercatcher (apparently

rather late), plus a few small birds were present along the shore too, and included very mobile Whinchat and Winter Wren and even a passing Grey Wagtail, a national rarity in Estonia, and fortunately seen by Ted and heard by John!

As the pace slackened slightly and the chill began to get through our multiple layers, despite sheltering behind a small hut, we decided to take a walk. Ted had already been off 'scouting', and we managed to re-find most of what he'd seen, including a late Spotted Flycatcher and the first of several European Robins, plus heard a Brambling amongst a Common Chaffinch flock. But it was the sheer numbers of Goldcrests which stole the show, with hundreds present, forming large constantly roving flocks, and entertaining (and sometimes frustrating) us as we tried to search out Great, Blue, Coal, Crested and Willow Tits, plus Eurasian Treecreeper, all of which we managed to see well in the end. One of two calling leaf warblers simply evaded us though, frustratingly, but with more flocks of ducks and geese passing over intermittently, plus a brief immature White-tailed Eagle overhead, it was hard to concentrate on just one theme at times!

Walking back to the vehicle was timely, as a calling Woodlark fluttered overhead for a few moments, and improved light now meant that we could watch the passing ducks better, including two groups of half-a-dozen Velvet Scoters going past. We were certainly grateful for the relative warmth back inside the vehicle however and while en route to another site! The journey was punctuated twice, first for a stop for a Hazel Grouse which dropped down across the road and into some thick scrub near Tuksi, though evaded being seen once on the ground (and quickly disappeared into the forest), and then secondly for a 'Houdini' Great Grey Shrike, which once we stopped had simply vanished! Dirhami Bay was next, where a short walk through the forest revealed an elusive Dunnock, but the shore held a first-winter Baltic Gull (the rather small and slender Baltic-breeding version of the Lesser Black-backed Gull and sometimes treated as a separate species) and as we watched the slightly calmer waters, a Eurasian Hobby powered out over the sea to try its luck on the plentiful incoming Meadow Pipits and White Wagtails. A large flock of some 450 Wood Pigeons also came over, again reinforcing that what appear to be sedentary species in the UK can actually be very migratory in much of their mainland European distribution.

We returned to the Wiigi Bar for a reviving lunch in very warm conditions, and then spent the next few hours at our leisure during a long 'siesta'. However, the allure of the massed duck on the lake in front was too much to ignore for several of us, and as soon as we could we were back outside to take a look. Two or three adult White-tailed Eagles ruled the roost, though several Western Marsh and 'ringtail' Hen Harriers also constantly patrolled the far reedbeds and several Grey Herons also passed over. But the thousands of massed Eurasian Wigeon, Gadwall and Eurasian Coots, plus smaller numbers of Mute Swans, Great Crested Grebes, Mallard and even a few very close Goosander formed the bulk of the birds down on the water. But as if this wasn't enough in itself, mass migration of geese and cranes was underway, with large flocks of Barnacle Geese and Common Cranes regularly rising up over the far forest and passing overhead or across the lake, and plenty of smaller flocks included Greater White-fronted, Bean and Greylag Geese too! It was a phenomenal sight, with wave after wave of birds appearing, and even an Osprey decided to brighten up a few quieter moments as it drifted over, and three Whooper Swans powered low over in direct flight as they headed westwards!

The remainder of the afternoon was spent at a tower hide at Rannajõe (Matsalu National Park) overlooking a vast open meadow, where hundreds of Common Cranes were feeding and resting prior to roosting, though plenty of extra interest was noted in the form of adult male and a ringtail Hen Harrier, a Red Fox asleep on top of a bale, between 15 and 20 Roe Deer scattered across the meadow and three superb male Black Grouse which soon decided it was time to disappear into scrub though. Flights of Common Cranes and Barnacle Geese, a large flock of hundreds of Bean Geese and even passing White Wagtail flocks and a family party of beautiful white-headed Long-tailed Tits kept us busy until dark. We even resisted the temptation to go and pinch a pasty or two from a large tray of them available for a photography group present, who mostly very generously left the raised hide for us to get better long-range views with the scopes, especially given the low light conditions.

Back at 8 p.m. we took dinner at 8:30, with the call-over interrupted as a Red Fox padded nonchalantly past along the base of the dining room window!

Monday 27th September

Tahu, Soolu, Haeska, night drive.

Generally overcast and chilly, though the sun was visible through thin clouds midday! Moderate NE wind and light rain mid-afternoon onwards.

After a 7 a.m. breakfast we headed off to a different part of the same huge bay which ran past the hotel, with just a brief stop en route to look at a large flock of Eurasian Linnets and European Goldfinches and also noted a Great Grey Shrike on wires, though we didn't stop.

A cold wind was blowing, but this hadn't deterred, or perhaps it had triggered, large numbers of small songbirds on migration, with an almost constant passage of Eurasian Siskins, Common Chaffinches, Meadow Pipits, Fieldfares, Song Thrushes, Redwings, Yellowhammers, Bramblings and Eurasian Skylarks once we were out at the tower hide near Tahu Bay, and while most were heading S, some were off N! A couple of calling Tree Pipits flashed past too. A Northern Goshawk was a bonus for the front-runners as they had headed out, plus, while in the bushes calling Common Chiffchaffs and Eurasian Bullfinches kept the rest of the group busy too. Most of the time though was spent scanning the rather distant bay with scopes for the birds in front, with some calling Bewick's Swans finally located, a young male Western Marsh Harrier cruising past over the reedbed and multiple flocks of geese, including some Greater White-fronted, 'Bean' (mostly Tundra but possibly with a few Taiga included) and lots of noisy Barnacle, plus a few groups of elegant Common Cranes flying past and over. Pauses en route back to the bus we made for a Moor Frog, a torpid Large White and a small mixed flock of tits, which also included a very elusive Lesser Whitethroat, but small bird passage suddenly came to a halt at about 10:30 a.m.

We transferred to an area of species-rich woodland in broad shelter-belts between large open fields in the hopes of finding geese and cranes on the ground. Some hunting activity meant that the geese were generally very flighty, with Barnacle, 'Bean' and Greylag Geese groups all taking off at distance, though one group of clearly tired Barnacle Geese sat tight, giving fine views and plenty of Common Cranes stayed long enough to be enjoyed from the vehicle. Another walk here had to be diverted to reach a more sheltered spot, and with persistence we managed to see an immature White-tailed Eagle, several Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Common Buzzards and a fine male Hen Harrier in flight. A Spotted Nutcracker was finally noted amongst the passing Eurasian Jays, and seemed to be passing from its distant feeding to its food-storing area, allowing us to see it three times, albeit distantly, as it came, returned, and then came back again! A very yellow Willow Warbler and two Common Chiffchaffs kept us busy in the meantime, while back at the vehicle, a typically very pale 'Scandinavian' Willow Tit gave a good show, as did 7 Whooper and a single Bewick's Swan which pitched into the field in front of the bus for us to admire!

Lunch was delayed again when the call of "wheatear" in an adjacent field saw a few of us getting out to check, and though a female Merlin made a pass and return, it sat tight and we confirmed that it was a first-winter Northern Wheatear, and quite a late bird. A flock of some 15 Woodlarks was also noted in flight by Ted though they dropped back into the field before being seen by others.

After lunch and a rest back at the Promenaadi in Haapsalu, we left at 4 p.m. for a visit to the Haeska tower hide, which overlooks a long edge of the shallow Matsalu bay. With hundreds or thousands of Barnacle Geese and Common Cranes in the fields and moving over the area, even getting there was a little delayed, though driving light rain made things trickier than hoped!

Walking out to the hide revealed a Great White Egret on the bay edge plus a flock of birds in a line of trees, including a Brambling or two, a couple of Common Chiffchaffs – including a very brown eastern bird – and a couple of Marsh Tits among commoner tit species, though all these were best seen from the various more sheltered layers of the tall tower hide itself, except the open top floor!

Lots of birds were present in the water or along the edges, including plenty of Common Snipe, a Dunlin, a couple of Grey Plovers, a female Northern Shoveler, four Northern Pintail, plus numerous Eurasian Teal and Northern Lapwings of most note. Passing flocks of noisy Barnacle Geese made periodic interludes, though no other rare small geese could be found among them, despite careful checking. Standing in the driest parts of the tower hide made quite good viewing despite the continued rain!

Dinner was taken early, also affording a good opportunity to warm up and dry off, in a superb restaurant in the field, and given the now heavier driving rain we continued with our attempt at a night drive and

watch, but restricting it to the vehicle. Remarkably, not long after starting we surprised a Raccoon Dog running along the side of the road though it dived off the side into thick vegetation before some could see it, and a grey morph Tawny Owl perched in a roadside tree also showed well for those with clearest views, before it flapped quickly off into the adjacent woods.

Tuesday 28th September Transfer to Saaremaa island, via Puise coast and peninsula, Rannajõe tower hide, Lihula, Massu, Laelatu, Virtsu and Muhu island to Mändjala.
Strong, cold ENE wind, with some light rain a.m., breaking mid-afternoon to cold but much clearer and with some sun.

Leaving the hotel at 8 a.m. we headed towards the Puise area, noting a Great Grey Shrike on wires en route, with our first stop overlooking a rather distant shore of the Matsalu Bay. A couple of Northern Wheatears and a Black Redstart were noted by Ted behind some buildings while we scanned the shore for new birds. Among very large numbers of Northern Lapwings a few other waders were present, including European Golden Plovers, 3 juvenile Red Knot and a juvenile Ruff, but another, very Pectoral Sandpiper-like bird refused to show well and then flew off way beyond ID range before we could clinch its ID... The second Great Grey Shrike of the day flew in to land in front, watched some passing linnets and then took off in an attempt to take one in flight. The chase, including several near misses, lasted for a considerable time, with neither making much headway in the strong wind though finally the shrike gave up, not to the displeasure of some of the group!

The cold wind got through to most so we eventually got back into the vehicle and moved the short way up the road to a tower hide near the end of the peninsula. Plenty of small birds were moving here, including good numbers of thrushes, with Fieldfares, Song Thrushes and Eurasian Blackbirds commonest and a couple of Mistle Thrushes putting in an appearance. Common Chaffinches, Eurasian Siskins, Eurasian Linnets, a Tree Pipit, a few Yellowhammers, several Barn Swallows and a solitary House Martin all also passed, the latter looking very sad in the conditions. A woodpecker moving S pitched in behind some buildings, and when it reappeared was seen to be a male Great Spotted. We walked back down the road between the scrub, noting more thrushes, a few flighty Common Reed Buntings and hearing a few other birds including Goldcrests and a Common Chiffchaff. Diverting down to the shore produced three late Common Greenshank on a sandbank, with a calling Yellow Wagtail passing over, also notably late.

Moving on again we soon stopped to scan the first of several groups of Barnacle Geese in a field, with a few Bean Geese accompanying, though we didn't get out so as not to disturb some local hunters. More geese plus the first of plenty of Common Cranes were also then seen as we moved on, with a short stop at the tower hide of two evenings before, this time to look (unsuccessfully) for a mystery falcon which had been present earlier in the day. Excitement ensued when we thought we'd found a juvenile Golden Eagle flying low across the back of a vast meadow, until it finally came closer and we saw that it was a White-tailed Eagle clutching a long clump of hay in its talons, so appearing to have a long white-based and dark-tipped tail!

After a pre-lunch drinks break in the lovely little town of Lihula, we moved on again, this time to take lunch in a farmhouse at Massu. This was superb, with some tasty home cooking helping to revive those who'd flagged a little in the cold, while the decoration of numerous animal skins and deer and elk racks added a twist! The garden was quite something too, and a dry rattling call alerted us to the presence of Red-breasted Flycatcher, though this promptly went deep into cover and was only seen by one or two. Hundreds of Common Cranes in an adjacent field also then decide to take off noisily and flew round almost overhead, while birds in the trees included Coal Tit and a couple of Common Chiffchaffs and two separate Spotted Nutcrackers passed overhead! Ted went to refind the flycatcher, and despite seeing it, when the rest of had arrived, 'only' a superb Hawfinch sat in view, allowing scope views!

Another stop before catching the ferry to Muhu island was at Laelatu, along a narrow causeway, with the star birds being a female Common Redstart hiding in the bushes and an Osprey fishing over an adjacent channel. Two roadside Black Redstarts before we boarded the bus were only seen from the vehicle, though the crossing allowed views of a fine adult White-tailed Eagle before boarding the ferry,

and many hundreds of Tufted Duck and several good flocks of Greater Scaup on the sea. Four distant passing divers also went S, but were too far away to identify.

The rest of the time was spent travelling across to our hotel on the coast, despite a short pause to watch some resting cranes and a very large flock of Common Chaffinches. A few of us managed a short walk down to the beach after checking-in, enabling views of Common Goldeneye, migrating Bean, Greylag and Barnacle Geese and a couple of Sandwich Terns out to sea. With the cloud breaking to the W and N, a superb sunset ensued, with the black clouds to the S also set off by a spectacular frilly pink fringe as the sun set. Conditions were looking good for the morning...

Wednesday 29th September Sõrve peninsula, Loode point, Lümända, Viidumäe, Loode oak wood. *Strong NE winds all day, though easing evening; persistent cloud despite increasing breaks a.m., increasingly sunny from 2 p.m. 8°C Sõrve peninsula, warmer Loode oak wood.*

A 6 a.m. breakfast was followed by a 30 minute transfer down to the southernmost point of the Saaremaa Island, though a good-sized Wild Boar well silhouetted on the roadside not long after leaving the hotel was fine reward for the early start! We headed straight to a short, narrow gravelly spit at the tip, plus its assortment of Soviet military buildings and small ruins, which fortunately provided good cover against the strong wind. From when we arrived to when we left at after 11 a.m., small birds were abundant, though largely flying slowly over in a N direction, and often coming in off the sea, possibly having come from Finland the night before, though apparently most small birds move N when presented with a strong head wind! Large numbers of Common Chaffinches, Eurasian Siskins and White Wagtails, plus Eurasian Linnets, Eurasian Skylarks, Bramblings, Fieldfares, Mistle Thrushes, Meadow Pipits, a couple of Woodlarks, Dunnocks, a mixed Rook – Western Jackdaw flock, plus single Common Redstart, Tree Pipit and Yellow Wagtail were all recorded. Larger birds were clearly principally heading S, with up to four Eurasian Sparrowhawks and up to five Common Buzzards at a time regularly noted going out, sometimes at great height, despite some that apparently later baulked out and returned almost at water level! Or were these Finnish or other birds seeking a rest on land before continuing?? A Eurasian Hobby, a couple of Eurasian Kestrels and three separate White-tailed Eagles also headed off out to sea. Numerous large flocks of Common Wood Pigeons started somewhat later, while numerous geese of several species, and large numbers of Common Cranes passed over at height too. A flock of Grey Plover on a spit, a remarkably late adult Arctic Tern (possibly the latest ever in Estonia!), Gadwall, a female Shoveler and a few Northern Pintail were also present in a bay along with a group of Grey Herons, and large numbers of Common Goldeneyes and Tufted Ducks of most note.

After a reviving cup of tea/coffee at the bus, and a short walk into the scrub areas to talk to a couple of Finnish ringers there (who informed us of the 9000 cranes that had passed the previous day in worse wind and also rain!), we stopped for a short while in the lee of the wind there and added a total of six Spotted Nutcrackers and 5 Eurasian Tree Sparrows going over, in addition to large numbers of finches and thrushes 'swilling around'.

With a break in the cloud only very slowly coming, we moved to the NW part of the peninsula at Loode, and given a stiff cold wind again, spent most of the time watching out to sea from the lee of a tower! However, the sporadic sun was warm enough to draw out a male Brimstone, a Red Admiral and a female Common Dart, all of which were sheltering in the Juniper scrub, and gave us better lighting of the distant birds passing offshore. More Eurasian Sparrowhawks were seen coming in or continuing S along the coast, a number of divers included several adult Red-throated, small groups of Common Scoter and three Velvet Scoter went S too, while several good flocks of Common Cranes, clearly having come from S Finland, passed over at height too. A female Merlin came in off the sea, perched on a rock and then sped off over the bushes in the dunes, pushing any small migrants even deeper into cover! This was once again a remarkable example of the visible migration we were witnessing!

Lunch called, so we drove half way up the W coast to Lümända and a superb lunch in an Estonian style rural restaurant. It was delicious, warming and once again, far too much, but we weren't complaining!

With minor complaints about the lack of woodland work, the excellent species-rich forest at Viidumäe

Nature Reserve, well OK, rich for plants and fungi (!), was a great destination for a good walk to work off lunch. Ted even managed a brief view of an Elk as it stalked off the road into the forest, but true to form it had vanished by the time we drew level. Hmm, how can something so big just disappear?! And while we only heard a mere handful of birds during the walk, at least a few managed views of a male Black Woodpecker as it flapped across the gap in the canopy above the track, and the variety of fungi, including some extraordinary honey-coloured branching clumps (a *Ramaria* sp.) and a few earth-stars (*Geastrum* cf. *triplex*), plus a few plants (including the slightly odd combination of bloody crane's-bill alongside bilberry!), were also very worthy of attention.

We rounded off the afternoon with a lovely walk through the Loode oak wood reserve in very sunny conditions. A couple of Hawfinches gave brief views at the start and finish and a couple of Common Redstarts did their "too-whoee" Willow Warbler calls, though the sun had also enticed out various Hornets, a Viviparous Lizard and various odonates, including a Siberian Winter Damsel, more Common Darters and a few Migrant Hawkers to catch our interest. One can only imagine how impressive it must be with the thousands of Lady Slipper Orchids that flower here in May!

Thursday 30th September Sõrve peninsula, Kuressaare, Koguva, Kuivastu, Tuhu Bog, Nedrema. Cool, with heavy cloud until p.m. and then a little intermittent brief sunshine. Calm and staying dry.

After a 7 a.m. breakfast we headed down to Sõrve bird observatory again, though it was very different today in almost calm conditions. With almost no small passerines flying overhead and no passage of geese, cranes or raptors, the contrast with the previous day was impressive! A Blackcap, though flighty, was the first for most, with a number of Goldcrests in the small wooded garden keeping us very busy. A small leaf warbler with a wing bar eluding being refound, though two or three Eurasian Treecreepers, a couple of Common Chiffchaffs and a marauding Great Grey Shrike, trying hard to catch the latter in a pine tree, were well watched.

The adjacent bay held three juvenile Ruff, distant single Common Ringed and European Golden Plovers, a couple of Whooper Swans, numerous Northern Shoveler and a few Northern Pintail of most note among numerous Common Goldeneye and Eurasian Wigeon, with presumably the same Grey Herons as the day before holding court on the shore.

After walking down the spit and finding a very shy chiffchaff en route, which had our hopes raised for a while, we also looked at the Eurasian Linnets, European Greenfinches, Meadow Pipits and a Common Ringed Plover – the first for the whole group – on the beach. Massed herring and Common Gulls and dozens of Great Cormorants, also migrants, were resting on the end of the gravel spit, which was covered in White Wagtails too. And all this despite it apparently being very quiet...!

We left earlier than expected, and used the time for a drinks break in the lovely town of Kuressaare before moving on again, noting White-tailed Eagle and a Great Grey Shrike en route, to the relatively small island of Muhu where we stopped for lunch at a fantastic set of thatched buildings. Once again this was delicious, excellently timed and even left us with a nice break at the ferry port to take a short walk around, finding a mixed flock of Common Chaffinches, Bramblings, Eurasian Tree Sparrows, a female House Sparrow (our first!) and four flighty Common Redpolls, though a male Eurasian Bullfinch, visible before we'd arrived, had somehow vanished. With just two Common Cranes on a roadside field as we progressed, the contrast with just a couple of days before was truly remarkable. The crossing, into the slight breeze, was chilly, but several ducks were present, including a few Greater Scaup, with two White-tailed Eagles perched distantly on a small island.

Two stops before our hotel, and during the rest of the afternoon, were terrific. The first saw us walking a narrow double plank boardwalk across part of the vast Tuhu Bog in dead calm conditions. Two male Black Grouse flew off as we got out, and the front-runners also saw two females in flight later. A few Meadow Pipits and Common Reed Buntings flew over, while the plants and insects also got a good look-in, with a few lingering male Black Darters and a large hawk present, and plants including Bog-bean, Bog Myrtle, Cloudberry, a wild Cranberry species (*Vaccinium microcarpum*) and Labrador-tea amongst a few others, in a remarkable semi-flooded landscape including ancient dwarf pines growing among

Sphagnum hummocks.

The second was in the Nedrema wooded meadow, now managed to retain its open structure and rich ground flora – apparently including one of the richest plant concentrations in Europe –, where a calling Eurasian Nuthatch was heard as we got out, and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was tracked down several times in different trees before finally flitting off for good. John was naturally particularly happy with the woodpecker which had eluded him before!

We reached our hotel in Pärnu in good time, with an hour before dinner, and Ted and Penny used this to excellent effect with a walk in the park opposite, yielding them no less than three Spotted Nutcrackers and a small group of the white-headed Long-tailed Tits amongst other species!

Friday 1st October Soometsa forest, Kabli, Häädameeste, Pärnu park, Soometsa forest (after dark). *Sunny and calm all day except for a very light N breeze on coast. Ground frost but warming to c. 10°C.*

A 6 a.m. breakfast was quite hard work, but when we saw it was crystal clear, despite a hard ground frost and some light mist as we drove to our first stop, the blocks of attractive and species-rich mixed woodland interspersed with clear-felled areas containing a few tall dead or specimen trees looked good. And so they proved to be!

A good walk along a wide ride and then down some smaller tracks was superb. Plenty of small birds were calling, including Marsh and Willow Tits and passing Bramblings, though some loud calls soon alerted us to the presence of a fine Black Woodpecker, which hacked great chunks off the side of a dead tree as we watched. Indeed, 2 or 3 were present in the area, calling loudly as we continued looking, but a sudden purple patch highlighted the value of this area. First, a noisy Grey-headed Woodpecker flew over, though pitched high into some leafy poplars and remained unseen as we moved to try and get views. A White-backed Woodpecker then started calling, but as we were about to look for it, a huge bird was disturbed from trees beside the path and flapped a few metres back. After locating our scopes at strategic points and heights to take advantage of gaps in the foliage, we were soon looking through the scopes at an impressively large Eagle Owl peering back at us from a little way back in the forest. A great find and all the better given how difficult it was to find a hole in the trackside spruce trees to look through! A noise below it was a Hazel Grouse which had flushed, and then started its high-pitched whistling call, unseen of course (!), from deep in the undergrowth.

The owl finally decided it had to find a quieter spot and moved off, so we followed suit. Walking along a very cold and frosty track in deep shade didn't seem very productive, but after emerging onto the edge of another cleared area, containing just one tall dead tree, we were in luck. Firstly a Grey-headed Woodpecker came in to the tree and gave good scope views. Then, after we almost left the area, we were delayed by a superb Great Grey Shrike plus a tree-full of Common Ravens which were eyeing-up a very calm Common Buzzard in the same Ash. This was to our advantage, since a short 'pik' call had Tarvo returning to check, and there in the same dead tree as before was another woodpecker, though this time it was a superb European Three-toed Woodpecker! This then stayed for extended scope views, and we even watched (and heard) it drumming numerous times.

A reviving hot drink in the field, especially when combined with the warming sun, was very welcome, after which we moved on to the ringing station on the coast near Kabli. Pulling up alongside the huge roadside Heligoland trap was quite remarkable, especially when one of the ringers was already inside vigorously shaking a stick covered in bells in order to guide the birds into the collecting box!

We spent some time just watching from beside the station, since there was an almost continuous movement of small birds towards the S in and over the coastal forest, including several flocks of the showy white-headed Long-tailed Tits, but also including Blue, Willow and Great Tits, a single Lesser Spotted and a few Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Eurasian Siskins, Bramblings, and, of course, Common Chaffinches, but a Common Crossbill or two also 'chopped' over, a few Hawfinches flew N and some 'pinging' revealed the presence of unseen Bearded Reedlings on the move.

A walk down towards the shore revealed numerous Whooper and Bewick's Swans on the shore among

numerous commoner ducks and gulls, though 21 Great White Egrets were also very impressive! Some reedlings pinged again, and after a few false starts, finally climbed high and moved noisily off to the S. A calling Serin passed S, with another (or the same) returning N later, though both went rapidly over. Returning saw us see the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in the hand, plus two male Eurasian Bullfinches feeding in one of the numerous a fruiting Rowans. A little dog also present found and played with a large bush cricket 8sadly to the latter's demise), while a fine Small Copper was also out enjoying the sun.

With a slight slowing of migration evident, we moved a short way up the coast to have lunch – another truly excellent meal – in a women's cooperative in a nearby village. The relatively warm conditions responsible were for the appearance of a few butterflies too, including Brimstone, Comma and a superb Camberwell Beauty, much to the delight of all.

A walk out towards the shore from here was also very worthwhile, with numerous dragonflies, including a female Moustached Darter in the park as we left, plus many dozen Common Darter and a few Migrant Hawkers, and though no kingfisher was present along the small river, Eurasian Nuthatch and Marsh Tit were calling in the trees. The lake shore was relatively rich too, and once we'd discovered that standing still on a rather wobbly tower hide was the best option, managed to find several new birds, including a Common Shelduck (a very late one again!), a fine flock of Bar-tailed Godwit and a couple of diminutive Little Stints amongst a rich selection of waders and wildfowl.

We returned to our hotel with a few hours spare before an early dinner, with most enjoying a good walk in part of the huge park in the town, seeing a few birds such as Crested Tits, Eurasian Treecreepers and a large flock of noisy Eurasian Siskins of most note. Our 6 p.m. dinner turned out to be a good move, with numerous other diners starting early on Friday evening, and allowing us to drive out as dusk fell. Nothing was seen en route though, since the main road was also rather busy, and when we turned off into the forest we stepped out to discover noisy logging work continuing into the night... However, we persisted, and at one stop along a long track, a Tengmalm's Owl or two shrieked (yes, their calls are slightly eerie!) from the depths of the forest and a Pygmy Owl sang out one phrase of rising whistles to our delight. Despite seemingly perfect dead still conditions, we heard nothing else and mammal-wise only noted a bat or two skimming past, so we called it a night slightly earlier than planned. We returned to a final drink and call-over before turning-in or completing final packing!

Saturday 2nd October transfer to airport, with majority staying for a Tallinn city tour and lunch too. *Cold, misty and clear start (2°C) rising to a pleasant 12°C in Tallinn in glorious sun.*

Leaving for the airport at 7:45 we then had to hunt down a refuelling point before starting the 90 minute drive to Tallinn. With thick mist in places this was a little slower than hoped, but we still arrived with over an hour before the first group flew out, which was plenty of time considering the small size of the virtually empty airport! A few Roe Deer, a Red Fox (for Pam) and even an Elk (for Gill) were seen along the route, though given the mist, birds remained virtually unseen.

Continuing into Tallinn, the remainder of the group quickly met with our vivacious city guide who took us on a tour of the beautiful old centre of the city, pointing out numerous architectural monuments and colourfully describing their history and other anecdotes as we went. Time flew by, and after seeing the two old centres, we had just a little time left for shopping (yes, it does happen on a TN tour very occasionally!) and then we went for a fine lunch at the famous Medieval restaurant (from the decor down to the menu) near the centre. The honey beer was good accompaniment too, though we enjoyed things for a fraction too long perhaps before walking back to the bus and transferring to the airport with just an hour before the flight! But this too was no problem, and we were rapidly through, even having time to sit and relax before taking the short hop across to Helsinki, once again noting the remarkably large numbers of Japanese tourists doing the same...! The wait at the airport went without incident and the flight back to the UK smooth and on time.

After collecting luggage (all except me, since my case was still in Tallinn...) we bade our respective farewells and went our separate ways. I hope that you all had safe journeys home.

Despite the cloudy, cold and windy days at the start, we only experienced rain on one afternoon and evening, and with the skies clearing leaving a beautiful final full day and a half, the changes helped move many migrants and provide us with some superb birding spectacles. The mass exodus of Common Cranes and mass arrival and passage of Barnacle Geese at the start, followed by large numbers of seemingly disorientated small birds over the Sõrve bird observatory and movement of small birds, especially those gorgeous white-headed Long-tailed Tits, at the Kabli ringing station were all excellent examples of the phenomenon of visible migration at this migration crossroads. Apart from these spectacles, I'm sure we'll all have our own highlights, with the Raccoon Dog running along the road, the surprise Eurasian Eagle-owl, or observations of both Grey-headed and European Three-toed Woodpeckers in the same tree, probably figuring among them. I hope so! And 142 bird species recorded on an autumn tour certainly can't be bad going!

I look forward to seeing you again on a Travelling Naturalist tour, and wish to thank you all for helping make this such a rewarding, and indeed groundbreaking, holiday.

Very best wishes, John Muddeman

SPECIES LISTS

Before reading, please note that the bird names and list follow the taxonomy and names used by F. Gill and M. Wright. 2008. *Birds of the World: Recommended English Names*. Princeton University Press.

This differs significantly in order, but only slightly in the common and scientific names used when compared to most field guides currently in use (and even the checklist!). Most significant name changes or alternative names are also included to minimise the confusion!

BIRDS - AVES

GROUSE, PHEASANTS & allies - Phasianidae

Hazel Grouse *Tetrastes bonasia* : 1 en route on 26th, heard Soometsa forest on 1st.

Black Grouse *Lyrurus tetrix* : 3 males Matsalu N.P. on 26th, 2 males + 2 females Tuhu Bog on 30th.

GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS - Anatidae

Taiga / Tundra Bean Goose *Anser fabalis / serrirostris* : With none watched on the ground at close range, separating these in flight is very difficult, and all are treated together as one species here. Noted on 6 days with lots, especially Matsalu National Park on 26th, a few moderate flocks Tahu on 27th, a few various sites on 28th, a few Sõrve on 29th, a few Tuhu Bog on 30th, a few Soometsa forest on 1st.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser* : Noted on 5 days with a few various sites on 26th, c. 200 Soolu + Haeska on 27th, a few various sites on 28th, several Sõrve on 29th, 2 Sõrve on 30th.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* : Noted on 5 days with 50+ Haapsalu on 26th, 10-12 Soolu on 27th, a few various sites on 28th, a few Sõrve on 29th, 1 Kabli on 1st.

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla* : 20-30 Põõsaspea on 26th, several Sõrve on 29th.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* : Noted on 7 days with 1000s Haapsalu+ on 26th, 1000s various sites on 27th, 10,000+ various sites on 28th, several Sõrve on 29th, c. 15 Tuhu Bog on 30th, 6 Kabli + 4 Häädameeste on 1st, several 100 high over Tallinn on 2nd.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* : Noted on 7 days with a few Haapsalu on 25th, plenty various sites on 26th, lots various sites on 27th, 28th, 29th, and 30th and several various sites on 1st.

Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* : 30+ Tahu + 2 Soolu on 27th, plenty Kabli + Häädameeste on 1st.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* : Noted on 4 days with 3 Haapsalu on 26th, 7 + 5 Soolu on 27th, 2 Sõrve + lots en route on 30th, lots Kabli + Häädameeste on 1st.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* : 1 juvenile Häädameeste on 1st.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* : Noted on 6 days with 1000s Haapsalu on 26th, 27th and 28th, 5 Sõrve on 29th, various Sõrve on 30th, 2 Pärnu on 1st.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* : Noted on 6 days: 1000s Haapsalu + Põõsaspea on 26th, 1000s Haapsalu on 27th and 28th, several Sõrve on 29th, plenty Sõrve+ on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* : Noted on 6 days: plenty various sites on 26th, 100s Haapsalu on 27th, 100s various sites on 28th, plenty Sõrve on 29th, plenty various sites on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* : Noted on 3 days with 1 female Haeska on 27th, 1 female Sõrve on 29th, 50+ Sõrve on 30th.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* : Noted on 6 days with 2 females Põõsaspea on 26th, 4 Haeska on 27th, 40+ Puise on 28th, a few Sõrve on 29th, 6 Sõrve on 30th, a few Häädameeste on 1st.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* : 4 Põõsaspea on 26th, lots Haeska on 27th.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* : Noted on 4 days with a couple of small flocks Põõsaspea on 26th, 1000s en route on 28th, 100+ Sõrve on 29th, lots en route on 30th.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* : Noted on 4 days: several 100 Põõsaspea on 26th, 100+ en route on 28th, a few Sõrve on 29th, several en route on 30th.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* : C.10 various sites on 26th, plenty Sõrve + 10 Loode on 29th.

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca* : 6+6 Põõsaspea on 26th, 3 Loode on 29th.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* : 6 Põõsaspea on 26th, 25+ Loode on 29th.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* : Plenty Põõsaspea on 26th.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* : Noted on 6 days with 100s Põõsaspea+ on 26th, plenty Haeska on 27th, lots various sites on 28th, lots various sites on 29th, plenty various sites on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

Smew *Mergellus albellus* : 3 Haeska on 27th, 5 Häädameeste on 1st.

Goosander *Mergus merganser* : Noted on 5 days with 40+ various sites on 26th, 25+ various sites on 27th, plenty various sites on 28th, several various sites on 30th, plenty Kabli on 1st.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* : Noted on 4 days with 40+ Põõsaspea on 26th, 1 Mändjala on 28th, plenty various sites on 29th, 3+ Sõrve on 30th.

DIVERS - Gaviidae

Red-throated Diver/Loon *Gavia stellata* : Noted on 3 days with a few Põõsaspea on 26th, 4 from ferry on 28th, 10+ Loode on 29th.

Black-throated Diver/Loon *Gavia arctica* : Noted on 3 days: several Põõsaspea on 26th, 4 from ferry on 28th, 2 Loode on 29th.

GREBES - Podicipedidae

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* : 2 Põõsaspea on 26th.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* : Noted on 6 days: lots various sites on 26th, 25+ Haapsalu on 27th, plenty various sites on 28th and 29th, several Sõrve+ on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

HERONS & BITTERNS - Ardeidae

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* : Noted on 6 days with c.10 Haapsalu on 26th, 2-3 Haeska on 27th, a few various sites on 28th, 10 Sõrve on 29th, 9 Sõrve on 30th, 15+ Kabli + Häädameeste on 1st.

Great [White] Egret *Ardea alba* : 1 Haeska on 27th, 21 Kabli on 1st.

CORMORANTS - Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* : Noted on 6 days: plenty or lots various sites daily from 26th - 29th, lots Sõrve on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

FALCONS & allies - Falconidae

Common/Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* : Noted on 4 days with 3 Tahu+ on 27th, 2 en route on 28th, 2 Sõrve on 29th, 2 en route on 30th.

Merlin *Falco columbarius* : Noted on 3 days with 1 female Soolu on 27th, 1 female Loode on 29th, 1 Nätsi wood on 30th.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* : 1 juvenile Dirhami on 26th, 1 Sõrve on 29th.

HAWKS, EAGLES & allies - Accipitridae

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* : 1 Haapsalu on 26th, 1 Laelatu on 28th.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* : Noted on 6 days with 1 juvenile Põõsaspea + 2 adults Haapsalu + 1 adult Matsalu National Park on 26th, 1 immature Soolu + 2 adults Haapsalu + 1 Haeska on 27th, 6+ various sites on 28th, 3 Sõrve + 2 Loode on 29th, 3 en route on 30th, 2 Häädameeste on 1st.

[Western] Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* : Noted on 3 days with 3-4 Haapsalu on 26th, 1 juvenile male Tahu + 1 Haapsalu + 1 Haeska on 27th, 1 Haapsalu on 28th.

Hen/Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus* : Noted on 4 days with 2 Haapsalu + 1 adult male + 1 female Matsalu National Park on 26th, 1 adult male Soolu + 1 female Haeska on 27th, 1 female + 1 male en route on 28th, 1 Sõrve on 29th.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* : Noted on 6 days with 2 Põõsaspea & 1 en route on 26th, 6-7 various sites on 27th, 2+ various sites on 28th, 40-50 Sõrve+ on 29th, a few en route on 30th, 1 Häädameeste on 1st.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* : Just 1 Tahu on 27th.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* : Noted on 6 days with 2 en route on 26th, 8-10 various sites on 27th, several various sites on 28th, 25+ Sõrve on 29th, 15+ various sites on 30th, several en route on 1st.

RAILS, CRAKES & COOTS - Rallidae

Eurasian/Common Coot *Fulica atra* : Noted on 4 days: 1000s Haapsalu on 26th-28th, 2 en route on 30th.

CRANES - Gruidae

Common Crane *Grus grus* : Noted on 7 days with 35+ en route on 25th, 3500 Haapsalu & 3500+ Matsalu National Park on 26th, >1500 various sites on 27th, 1000+ various sites on 28th, 500+ various sites on 29th, 2 en route on 30th, 21 Häädameeste on 1st.

OYSTERCATCHERS - Haematopidae

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* : 1 Põõsaspea on 26th.

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS - Charadriidae

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* : Noted on 5 days with 17 Haapsalu on 26th, 25+ Tahu & 100+ Haeska on 27th, 100s various sites on 28th, 25+ various sites on 1st, 1 Tallinn airport on 2nd.

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* : 20+ Puise on 28th, 1 Sõrve on 30th.

Grey/Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* : Noted on 3 days with 2 Haeska on 27th, 10-11 Sõrve on 29th, 1 Häädameeste on 1st.

[Common] Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* : 2 Sõrve on 30th, 1 Pärnu on 1st.

SANDPIPERS, SNIPES & allies - Scolopacidae

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* : Noted on 3 days with 1 Matsalu National Park on 26th, c. 10 Haeska on 27th, 1 Puise on 28th.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* : 30+ Häädameeste on 1st.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* : 3 Puise peninsula on 28th, heard Häädameeste on 1st.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus* : 3 juveniles Puise on 28th.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* : 2 Häädameeste on 1st.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* : Noted on 4 days with 1 *alpina* race Põõsaspea on 26th, 1 Haeska on 27th, 10+ Puise on 28th, 25+ Häädameeste on 1st.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* : Noted on 3 days with 1 Puise + 12 en route on 28th, 3 Sõrve on 30th, 5 Häädameeste on 1st.

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS - Laridae

Common/Mew Gull *Larus canus* : Noted on 5 days: plenty Põõsaspea on 26th, lots various sites daily 28th - 30th, 100+ various sites on 1st.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* : Noted on 6 days: several various sites daily 26th - 28th, plenty various sites on 29th and 30th, 1 Kabli on 1st.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* : Noted on 6 days: lots various sites on 26th, several various sites on 27th, lots various sites on 28th, lots various sites on 29th, lots Sõrve+ on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

Baltic [Lesser Black-backed] Gull *Larus [fuscus] fuscus* : Single 1st-winter Dirhami on 26th and an immature Sõrve on 29th.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* : Noted on 6 days: lots various sites on 26th, lots Haapsalu+ on 27th, lots daily various sites from 28th - 1st.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* : Noted on 3 days with 6-10 Põõsaspea on 26th, 2+ Mändjala on 28th, 1 Sõrve + 1 Mändjala on 29th.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* : 1 adult Sõrve on 29th.

AUKS - Alcidae

Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle* : 1 Põõsaspea on 26th.

PIGEONS & DOVES - Columbidae

Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* : Noted on 6 days: several various sites on 26th, a few en route on 27th and 28th, lots various sites on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st, plenty Tallinn on 2nd.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas* : Noted on 3 days with 2+1 Tahu on 27th, 1 Puise on 28th, 5 Sõrve on 29th.

[Common] Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* : Good passage noted: 450 Dirhami & 200+ Haapsalu on 26th, 1000+ Tahu & Soolu on 27th, plenty various sites on 28th, 1000s Sõrve on 29th, plenty en route on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

OWLS - Strigidae

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* : 1 Soometsa forest on 1st.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* : 1 grey morph en route on 27th.

Eurasian Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum* : Heard singing Soometsa forest on 1st.

Tengmalm's/Boreal Owl *Aegolius funereus* : Heard calling Soometsa forest on 1st.

WOODPECKERS - Picidae

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* : 1 female Nätsi on 30th, 1 female Kabli on 1st.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* : Heard Soometsa forest on 1st.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* : Noted on 6 days with 1 Matsalu National Park on 26th, 1 Tahu on 27th, 1 Puise on 28th, 1 Sõrve + heard en route on 29th, 1 en route + 1 Pärnu on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus* : 1 Soometsa forest on 1st.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* : 1 male Viidumäe forest on 29th, 1 seen + 2-3 heard Soometsa forest on 1st.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* : 2 Soometsa forest on 1st.

SHRIKES - Laniidae

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* : Noted on 5 days: 1 en route on 27th, 3+ Puise area on 28th, 1 en route on 29th, 1 Sõrve + 2 en route on 30th, 1 Soometsa forest on 1st.

CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES - Corvidae

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* : Noted widely on 7 days, with an invasion occurring: 1-2 en route on 25th, several en route on 26th, 10-15 various sites on 27th, plenty en route on 28th, plenty various sites on 30th, several various sites on 1st, a few en route on 2nd.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* : Noted on 4 days with 2 en route on 26th, 3 en route on 27th, several en route on 30th, 1+ en route on 1st.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* : Noted on 5 days: 2 en route on 26th, 1 Soolu on 27th, 2 Massu on 28th, 6 Sõrve + 2 Loode oak wood on 29th, 1 Nätsi + 3 (Ted & Penny) Pärnu on 30th.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* : Noted on 7 days with 1 Haapsalu on 26th, a few Haapsalu on 27th, a few Haapsalu on 28th, plenty Sõrve on 29th, plenty various sites on 30th, plenty Pärnu on 1st, a few Tallinn on 2nd.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* : Plenty Haapsalu from 25th - 28th, plenty Sõrve on 29th, a few en route on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st, several Tallinn on 2nd.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* : Very common and widespread, and seen in numbers daily, including in Helsinki!

Northern/Common Raven *Corvus corax* : Widespread in generally small number and noted on 7 days.

TITS & CHICKADEES - Paridae

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* : Noted on 3 days: several Matsalu National Park on 26th, 2 Haeska on 27th, several heard Soometsa forest on 1st.

Willow Tit *Poecile montana* : Noted on 5 days with 3-4 Põõsaspea on 26th, heard Tahu & 1 Soolu on 27th, heard Laelatu on 28th, 1 seen + one heard Viidumäe on 29th, several Soometsa forest + Kabli on 1st.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater* : Several Põõsaspea on 26th, 1-2 Massu on 28th, 1 + heard Kabli on 1st.

[European] Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus* : 2-3 Põõsaspea on 26th, 1 Kabli & 3+ Pärnu on 1st.

Great Tit *Parus major* : Noted quite commonly and widely daily, except on 25th.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* : A few Põõsaspea on 26th, a few various sites on 27th, a few various sites on 28th, several various sites on 29th, several various sites on 30th, plenty (including migrants) on 1st.

SWALLOWS & MARTINS - Hirundinidae

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* : Noted on 4 days with 3 en route & 3+ Haapsalu on 26th, a few a.m. & 10+ Haeska on 27th, plenty various sites on 28th, 8+ Sõrve+ on 29th.

[Common] House Martin *Delichon urbicum* : Singles Haapsalu on 26th and Puise on 28th.

BUSHTITS, LONG-TAILED TITS - Aegithalidae

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* : 7-8 Matsalu National Park on 26th, 5-6 Pärnu on 30th and lots on migration on 1st.

LARKS - Alaudidae

Woodlark *Lullula arborea* : 1 Põõsaspea on 26th, c. 15 Soolu on 27th, 2 Sõrve on 29th 1 there on 30th.

Eurasian/Common Skylark *Alauda arvensis* : Plenty various sites on 27th, heard Puise on 28th, several Sõrve on 29th, 4-5 Sõrve on 30th, several various sites on 1st.

OLD WORLD WARBLERS - Sylviidae

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* : 1 Soolu on 27th, a few various sites on 1st.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* : Noted on 5 days with 1 Matsalu National Park on 26th, 2 Soolu + 2 Haeska on 27th, several Massu on 28th, a few Sõrve on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* : 1 Matsalu National Park on 26th and 1 immature Sõrve on 30th.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* : Just 1 Tahu on 27th.

BABBLERS & PARROTBILLS - Timaliidae

Bearded Tit/Reedling *Panurus biarmicus* : 10 + 10 Kabli & 5 Häädameeste on 1st.

CRESTS & KINGLETS - Regulidae

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* : Several 100 Põõsaspea on 26th, heard Tahu & Soolu and 10+ Haeska on 27th, several Puise + Massu on 28th, several Viidumäe+ on 29th, several various sites on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

WRENS - Troglodytidae

[Winter] Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* : Noted on 4 days with 1 Põõsaspea + 1 Matsalu National Park on 26th, 2 Sõrve on 29th, 2+ Sõrve on 30th, several heard Soometsa forest on 1st.

NUTHATCHES & WALLCREEPER - Sittidae

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* : Heard at Tahu on 27th and Nätsi on 30th, but 3-4 various sites on 1st.

TREECREEPERS - Certhiidae

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* : 1-2 Põõsaspea on 26th, 1 Sõrve & 1 Viidumäe on 29th, 2-3 Sõrve on 30th, several various sites on 1st.

STARLINGS - Sturnidae

Common/European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* : Quite common and widespread and noted widely, daily from 26th – 2nd.

THRUSHES - Turdidae

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* : Several various sites on 26th, a few various sites on 27th, plenty various sites on 28th and 29th, several various sites on 30th and 1st.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* : 15+ en route on 26th, plenty various sites on 27th, lots various sites on 28th, a few Sõrve on 29th, 1 Sõrve on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus* : Heard Haapsalu on 25th, several various sites on 26th, plenty various sites on 27th, heard Sõrve on 30th, a few heard Soometsa forest on 1st.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* : 2-3 Põõsaspea on 26th, plenty various sites on 27th, 29th and 1st, several various sites on 28th, a few various sites on 30th.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* : Several Puise on 28th, plenty Sõrve on 29th, several Sõrve on 30th, plenty various sites on 1st.

OLD WORLD CHATS & FLYCATCHERS - Muscicapidae

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* : A few various sites on 26th, heard Tahu & Soolu and 2+ Haeska on 27th, several various sites on 28th, 1 seen + several heard various sites on 29th, several heard various sites on 30th, a few various sites on 1st.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* : 1 en route on 27th, 2 near ferry on 28th, 1 Sõrve on 29th, 1 male Häädameeste on 1st.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* : 1 Laelatu on 28th, 1 Sõrve + 2 Loode oak wood on 29th, heard Kabli on 1st.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* : 1 Põõsaspea on 26th.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* : 1 Soolu on 27th, 6+ various sites on 28th.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* : 1 Põõsaspea on 26th.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* : 1 Massu on 28th.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS & allies - Passeridae

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* : Noted on 3 days with 1 female Kuivastu + several Pärnu on 30th, plenty Pärnu on 1st, plenty Tallinn on 2nd.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* : 2 en route on 26th, 4 Haapsalu on 27th, 2-3 various sites on 28th, 5 Sõrve on 29th, 10-12 Kuivastu on 30th.

ACCENTORS - Prunellidae

Dunnock / Hedge Accentor *Prunella modularis* : 1 Dirhami on 26th, heard Tahu on 27th, 2 + heard various sites on 28th, a few Sõrve on 29th, a few heard various sites on 30th, a few heard Kabli on 1st.

WAGTAILS & PIPITS - Motacillidae

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* : Singles Puise on 28th, and Sõrve & Loode on 29th.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* : 1 sped past Põõsaspea on 26th. Seen and heard by Ted, and heard by JohnM twice, remarkably this is actually a national rarity!

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* : Plenty various sites on 26th, plenty various sites on 27th, plenty various sites on 28th, lots various sites on 29th, lots Sõrve+ on 30th, several various sites on 1st.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* : A few Põõsaspea on 26th, plenty various sites on 27th, heard various sites on 28th, lots various sites on 29th, several Sõrve & 8+ Tuhu Bog on 30th, a few on 1st.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* : Noted on 3 days with 2-3 heard and seen in flight Tahu on 27th, 1 Puise on 28th, 1 Sõrve on 29th.

FINCHES & allies - Fringillidae

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* : Common, widespread and noted daily from 26th, generally in large number and frequently visibly on migration.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* : A few on passage among the chaffinches: heard Põõsaspea + 1 Matsalu N.P. on 26th, 15+ Tahu on 27th, several Sõrve on 29th, several on 30th, a few on 1st.

European Serin *Serinus serinus* : 1 (or 2?!) Kabli on 1st.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* : A male Tahu on 27th, plenty Puise on 28th, plenty Sõrve on 29th, plenty various sites on 30th.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus* : Several Põõsaspea+ on 26th, lots on visible migration on 27th, plenty various sites on 28th, lots Sõrve+ on 29th, plenty various sites on 30th, lots various sites on 1st.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* : 30+ en route and heard Tahu & en route p.m. on 27th, several en route on 28th, a few Sõrve on 29th, 4-5 Sõrve on 30th, a few Häädameeste on 1st.

Common/Mealy Redpoll *Carduelis flammea* : 1 over Loode oak wood on 29th, 4-5 Kuivastu on 30th.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* : Noted on 5 days with 150+ en route on 27th, plenty Puise on 28th, plenty Sõrve on 29th, plenty Sõrve on 30th, a few various sites on 1st.

Common/Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* : 2 Puise on 28th, heard Sõrve on 29th, heard on passage on 1st.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* : A pair Matsalu National Park on 26th, 5-6 various sites, inc 'Northern' Bullfinches on 27th, 1 male Kuivastu on 30th, 2-3 Kabli on 1st.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* : 5 en route on 26th, 2-3 in flight Tahu on 27th, 4-5 various sites on 28th, 3-4 Sõrve & 2 Loode oak wood on 29th, a few various sites on 1st.

BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS & allies - Emberizidae

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* : 1 en route on 26th, plenty various sites on 27th, plenty Puise on 28th, plenty Sõrve on 29th, several Sõrve+ on 30th, several various sites on 1st.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* : 1 Haapsalu on 26th, 2 Tahu on 27th, several various sites on 28th, 2+ Sõrve on 29th, a few Tuhu Bog+ on 30th, 8+ various sites on 1st.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* : 1 male Põõsaspea on 26th.

MAMMALS - MAMMALIA

SQUIRRELS - *Sciuridae*

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* : 1 (Gill) Põõsaspea on 26th.

MICE, RATS, VOLES & GERBILS - *Muridae*

Wood / Long-tailed Field Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus* : 1 (saved by John R) Sõrve on 29th.

DOGS & allies - *Canidae*

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* : 1 Matsalu National Park + 1 Haapsalu on 26th, 1 (Pam) en route on 2nd.

Raccoon Dog *Nyctereutes procyonoides* : 1 en route on 27th.

SEALS & allies - *Phocidae*

Ringed Seal *Pusa hispida* / **Grey Seal** *Halichoerus grypus* : 1 with a small and curved face was seen by Pam at Mändjala on 28th but remains unidentified.

SHREW-MOLES, MOLES & DESMANS - *Talpidae*

European Mole *Talpa europaea* : Hills various sites on 27th, hills various sites on 28th.

PIGS - *Suidae*

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* : 1 en route on 29th.

DEER - *Cervidae*

[Western] Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* : Noted on 4 days with 15-20 Matsalu National Park on 26th, several various sites on 27th, a few en route on 28th, 6+ en route on 2nd.

Elk / Moose *Alces alces* : 1 (Ted) Viidumäe on 29th and 1 (Gill) en route on 2nd.

OTHER WILDLIFE

Moor Frog *Rana arvalis* : One Tahu on 27th was the only one identified with certainty.

Common Frog *Rana temporaria* : Other frogs, probably all this species, were noted on 3 days: singles Tahu & Soolu on 27th, 2 Nätsi on 30th, 1 Häädameeste on 1st.

Viviparous Lizard *Zootheca vivipara* : 1 Loode oak wood on 29th.

Large White *Pieris brassicae* : 1 Tahu on 27th, several various sites on 1st.

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni* : Loode on 29th, 1 male Häädameeste on 1st.

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* : 1 Kabli on 1st.

Camberwell Beauty *Nymphalis antiopa* : 1 Häädameeste on 1st.

Peacock *Inachis io* : 1 Koguva on 30th, 2 Häädameeste on 1st.

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* : 1 Loode on 29th, 2 various sites on 1st.

Comma *Polygonia c-album* : 1 Häädameeste on 1st.

Siberian Winter Damsel *Sympecma paedisca* : 1 on 29th.

Blue/Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* : 1 female Tuhu Bog on 30th.

Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta* : a few Loode oak on 29th, plenty various sites on 1st.

Black Darter *Sympetrum danae* : 3 males Tuhu Bog on 30th.

Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum* : several Loode oak on 29th, lots various sites on 1st.

Moustached Darter *Sympetrum vulgatum* : 1 female Häädameeste on 1st.

Bush cricket sp. *Tettigoniidae sp.* : 1 on 29th, 1 coast on 1st.

Elk fly *Lipoptena cervi* : Noted on 3 days with 1 Viidumäe on 29th, 1 en route on 30th, 1 (Gill!) on 1st.

Hornets *Vespa crabro* : Plenty Loode oak wood on 29th, plenty various sites on 1st.

John Muddeman, October 2010
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Photo gallery : a random selection of Estonian wildlife / scenes
(All photos © John L. Muddeman)



Barnacle Geese over feeding site



Bean Geese on the move



Bean Geese on passage over Saaremaa Island



Common Cranes on passage Haapsalu



Common Cranes over feeding site



Common Cranes on passage over hotel



Black Darter male



Camberwell Beauty



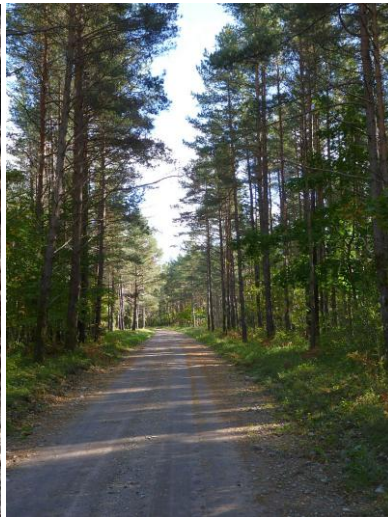
Ramaria sp.



Geastrum sp.



Viviparous Lizard



Viidumäe forest



Siberian Winter Damselfly



Kabli Heligoland trap catching area



Country restaurant interior



Lihula autumn colours



Loode oak wood



Põõsaspea peninsula



Fly Agaric



Old restored well at country restaurant



Saaremaa Island sunset



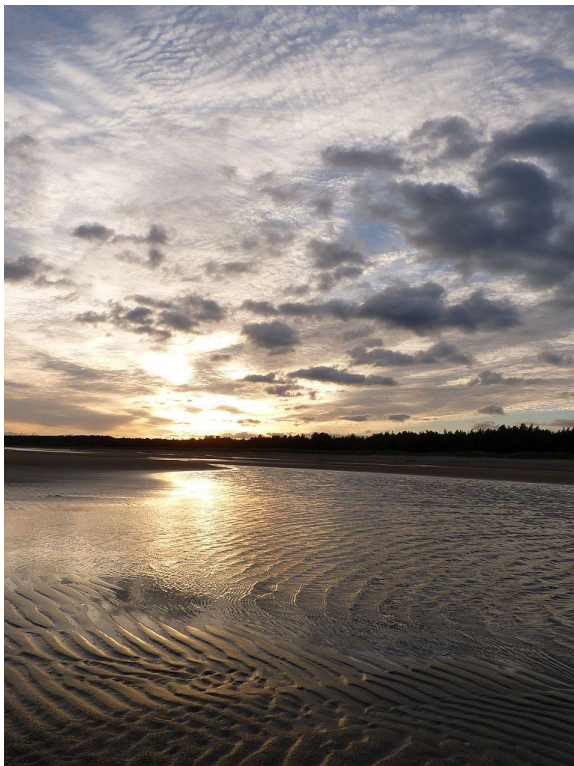
Moustached Darter female



Watching migration from the Puise tower hide



Part of old Tallinn



Shore and sky patterns on Saaremaa Island



Eurasian Tree Sparrow (in Pärnu)