

Tour leaders: Peeter Vissak
Neil Anderson

Participants: Aaron Woods
Roy Maycock
Carole Fleming
John Roberts
Val Roberts
David Gaunt
Helen Gaunt

Day 1 Sat June 7th Sunny

Heathrow-Helsinki- Tallinn- Hiiumaa

We departed Heathrow at 7.30 + arrived promptly in Helsinki ready for our connecting flight to Tallinn some 50 minutes later. This latter plane was much smaller, relatively empty + fun in the air!

After changing money into local kroon (eek) we then met by the local organiser Marika + our guide, Peeter. Boarding our bus for the trip we set off to Rohukula for a 90 minute ferry journey to the second largest island- Hiiumaa. We did a little botanising at the now defunct Haapsalu railway station before leaving the mainland.

Following dinner at our guest house Dagen Haus we explored the local area. Several Common Rosefinches were singing + amongst the plants were Field Wormwood (1 of several Breckland specialities we would see on the trip), Smooth Rupturewort + Mountain Clover.

Day 2 Sun June 8th Sunny

Kopu Peninsula- Valdma Wool Factory

Having had a good night's sleep + a hearty breakfast we headed for the Kopu Peninsula. Our first foray was in the pine/spruce woods (insect repellent useful here!) where we found such floral delights as Chickweed Wintergreen, May Lily + Twinflower. Large parties of Crossbills were seen + heard over the tree tops.

We then visited an information centre in the surrounding woods where Val spotted the first of many Bird's-nest Orchids. Oak Fern + Herb Paris were also noted.

For a fine contrast a coastal walk yielded the attractive composition of yellow Woad flowers complimenting blue Vipers Bugloss + white Sea Kale. A fine rose was identified as *Rosa vosagiaca*. Heath Fritillaries + Grizzled Skipper added to our butterfly list.

The adjacent woodland yielded several spikes of the diminutive Lesser Twayblade (new for me!) along the grassy path. Lesser Butterfly Orchid + Hepatica (leaves only) were also recorded.

After lunch we briefly visited the third oldest working lighthouse in the world which stands at 37metres high!

The afternoon woodland walk which included some boggy areas introduced us to Cranberry, Butterwort + Labrador Tea. A small orchid "garden"(not cultivated) added Fly, Military + unopened Fragrant Orchids to our growing list..

For an experience of the local culture we were shown around the Valdma Wool Factory which was started in 1841.

Day 3 Mon June 9th Sun/cloud/windy

Hiiuma- Saaremaa

We said our farewell to Hiiuma as we embarked on to the ferry at Saru port at 8.15. As we sailed we saw families of Eider + a few Goosander.

After the hour long sailing we drove to Viidumae with the assistance of a local expert. Our first stop was to see Moor King, which she found for us, but sadly not in flower yet! *Dactylorhiza russowii* was in flower + the real enthusiasts were looking at sedges which included *Carex davilliana*.

The next stop was to see a captivating scene of many blue flowered *Iris sibirica* where the cameras were avidly clicking away! Another speciality was a descent (not many of these in Estonia!) to a bog to see Alpine Butterwort in flower.

Following a tasty lunch we were welcomed into the adjacent orthodox church to look around before exploring some meadows where we encountered the colourful Wood Cow-wheat + Wild Liquorice.

A short drive took us to our accommodation at the comfortable Pilguse manorhouse where we would reside for the next 2 nights. After dinner I walked with Carole down to the marsh where we were lucky to see a juvenile White-tailed Eagle being mobbed by a pair of Magpies, fishing Caspian Terns + a fine collection of robust, deep coloured Early Marsh Orchids, which others of the group then came down to photograph.

Day4 Tues June 10th Overcast/windy

Tagmoisa Peninsula-Vilsandi

This morning we set off for the Tagamoisa peninsula. En route we stopped to see + photograph Common Cranes in a field. Along the track I (Neil) spotted a couple of splendid Sword-leaved Helleborines from the bus which we then got off + photographed.

Continuing to the sea at Vilsandi we did some plant hunting which added Sea Wormwood + Sea Milkwort to our tally. Driving farther along the coast we found many Early Marsh Orchids + *D. baltica* for comparison with its broader, flatter leaves + whitish centre to the lip.

Driving along another road, it was Val's turn to spot a new orchid from the bus- this time several spikes of Red Helleborine in peak condition.

After lunch Peeter took us to Loode Oak Grove where we were to have the experience of a lifetime. Though many had gone over, there were still hundreds in full flower, of stately Lady's Slipper Orchids. What a spectacle (on the previous trip which had been 2 weeks later all were spent!).

Mandjala was next on the agenda where we saw many of the daintily attractive *Dianthus arenarius* with frilly white flowers. Near the beach Roy + Aaron found the small but rare *Alyssum gmelinii* which Peeter had not previously seen here.

Our final stop was at Viiristi where we noted *Vicia cassubica* + in the wood John discovered a Pyramidal Bugle.

Day 5 Wed June 11th

Sunny start, heavy showers later

Before departing Saaremaa we had a quick visit to the Kaali Crater formed by a meteorite some 4000 years ago which is up to 60 metres deep in places.

We then caught the 10.00 ferry to Virtsu on the mainland + we did some botanising at Nedrena where there was a stunning colony of Wood Cow-wheat that mainly had white instead of the normal purple bracts. There was much to see in the wooded meadow before we ventured on to the boardwalk to the raised bog where we recorded Bog Rosemary, Cloudberry + Dwarf Birch.

A healthy lunch was consumed at Polli Farm (which is used for yoga + other holistic practices) after we had removed our footwear!

The wooded meadows at Laelatau were our next destination. Several species of orchid were seen such as Sword-leaved Helleborine + Fragrant as well as another target species- *Viola elatior*.

Rain was now getting heavy + we drove to Puhtu wood where we could observe Swallow-wort next to the bus without getting wet!

Before our arrival at the Altmoisa guesthouse we had a roadside stop as Val had spotted some interesting white flowers from the bus, which were revealed to be some fine, late flowering *Anemone sylvestris*. Also here we photographed some crested Cow-wheat.

It was good to arrive at Attmoisa for a hearty, warm meal + remove our wet clothing. David + Helen were privileged to have the luxurious bridal suite- we hope they had good nights!

Day 6 Thurs June 12th

Early showers/ cloud then sunny

Altmoisa- Marimetsa Bog- Matsula National Park

After breakfast I led the group along the new boardwalk opposite Altmoisa in the rain. In addition to Early Marsh, Fly + Military Orchids I was able to locate a colony of tiny Musk Orchids. Aaron discovered + captured a moor Frog for us to see; a heavily blotched critter!

We then drove to Marimetsa Bog which involved a trek through some spruce woods, where Carole + John in particular enjoyed the fungi, until we reached the boardwalk. Carole opted out of this long trek around various bog communities. Two species of sundew, Labrador Tea, Bog Bean + the (very rare in the UK) Rannoch Rush (not a rush at all!) were amongst the plants we encountered. Birding was exciting here too, with a hunting male Montagu's Harrier, a pair of Great Grey Shrikes + various breeding waders. During sunny spells insects such as Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary + Eastern White-faced Darter were a welcome addition to the fauna. The party arrived back fairly exhausted with a couple of moans about the length of walk, which certainly exceeded Peeter's estimate of 6km, nearer double that!

Marika supplied a well earned + delicious picnic lunch before we explored the exhibits at the Matsula Visitor Centre + watched an informative film about this special reserve.

The day was concluded by visits to Matsula Bay + on to Salavere to see the cliffs. Toothwort, going over, and Perennial Honesty were seen in the wooded area here as Golden Orioles uttered their distinctive fluty song.

Day 7 Fri June 13th

Sunny

Osmussar Island

With light winds + sunny conditions it was a perfect day for our crossing to Osmussar Isand from Dirhami Port. The crossing took about an hour + as we approached c200 Goldeneye + smaller numbers of eider took flight.

Osmussar has an interesting history with chapel remains dating back to the Swedish occupation. During the Soviet era visitors were not allowed here. Today the island is farmed by a single family in a traditional way.

Aesthetically pleasing were the mosaics of yellow, orange + red flowered forms of Kidney Vetch which adorned drier areas. Amongst the Early Marsh Orchids was a good number of white flowers. On a damp area near a lake many Marsh Helleborines were shooting through the turf, some in bud, ready to open in several days. Also here were some more Musk Orchids + having told the group this was the area we had previously located Fen Orchid, Aaron eventually found one + then several of these subtle flowers, which was new for both him + Roy.

Due to the very dry spring in Estonia one of the specialities here was an anti-climax- rather depauperate plants of the legume, *Oxytropis pilosa*. John discovered an extensive colony of Madwort along a stretch of shore.

Glanville Fritillaries + Common Blues were common + amongst the birds were Barred Warbler singing + a nearby male Red-backed Shrike.

The return journey was calmer than the previous crossing + the birders appreciated some close views of drake Velvet Scoter.

Day 8 Sat June 14th

Cloudy, wet afternoon

Altmoisa- Tallinn

Unfortunately it was time to leave the very comfy Altmoisa + head for the capital, Tallinn. At my request Peeter took us to the city's botanic gardens which in addition to formal areas had stretches of native plantings in grassland, woodland + lake

Several Red Squirrels were seen here as well as some new plants such as Cowbane + Bog Arum by the lake. Some of the group visited a special fungus exhibition which I missed, but those that went were impressed with.

We then headed for lunch at the Kuldse Notsu Tavern after which we said our farewells to Peeter + our driver who had both served us admirably during our stay.

Starting at 16.30 we were given a special guided tour of the old city. Tallinn is a UNESCO World Heritage City as it has the finest medieval city centre in northern Europe, with much of the old town dating back to the 15th century. Our guide explained the often tragic past of this small Baltic country which only attained independence as recently as 1991, while we enjoyed the wonderful architecture + entered a couple of the churches.

The evening concluded with an atmospheric final dinner at the renowned Olde Hansa Restuarant where the group had much fun- especially Helen who had the giggles with her various attempts at photography over the dinner table. We were joined by Marika who had put together the excellent itinerary we had enjoyed over the past week.

Day 9 Sun June 15th

Sunny

Tallinn- Helsinki- Heathrow

Following breakfast at the centrally located Barons Hotel the group had free time to explore or shop in the town before being whisked by taxi to the airport at noon. Our first flight to Helsinki departed at 14.30 where we had an hour before our London bound flight which arrived at 17.10. Time for us to say our final farewells after a thoroughly enjoyable holiday with many excellent plants, fauna, landscapes + meals!

Neil Anderson / June 2008