



Estonian Nature Tours

Trip	: BEARS & BIRDS IN ESTONIA
Period	: Wed07Oct – Sun11Oct 2015
Group size	: 6/7 pax
Grading	: Day walks only, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel and/or guesthouse with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Tarvo Valker
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Organizer/Agent	: Estonian Nature Tours, e-mail: info@naturetours.ee

A 5-day fully-inclusive holiday focusing on the spectacular bird migration and Brown Bear tracking and watching

Estonia in the autumn is a magnificent destination for the birdwatcher who wants to see forest species, such as woodpeckers and forest grouse, together with raptors and arctic migration, with that added touch of eastern rarities and even some mammals. In western Estonia, wetlands are always full of life in the autumn. From early September until late October, thousands of ducks, geese and cranes use these wetlands as their last feeding and roosting grounds before their final migration to the wintering sites. The sight of tens of thousands of common birds like Chaffinch and Brambling can be very impressive and these can include large numbers of Goldcrests, Northern Wheatears and Common Starlings.

Estonian forests are renowned in Europe for their healthy populations of mammals with around 700-800 Lynx, over 150 Wolves, 500-600 Brown Bears and almost 20,000 Beavers – tremendous numbers for such a small country. In all, sixty-four species of mammals have been recorded in Estonia including several European rarities, the most endangered examples being the European Mink, several species of dormouse and the Flying Squirrel.

Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to Haapsalu

Day 2 Matsalu National Park

Day 3 To North-East Estonia; Bear hide

Day 4 Alutaguse forests; alternative overnight in Bear hide

Day 8 Departure

Highlights

Birds: massive Arctic waterfowl migration – including thousands of Long-tailed Ducks, Velvet Scoters and Red-throated Divers, spectacular passerine migration with tens of thousands of Siskins, Chaffinches and Bramblings, possible massive invasion of Jays and Nutcrackers, stunning raptor migration with hundreds of Sparrowhawks in few hours, Bewick's Swan, Rough-legged Buzzard, White-tailed Eagle, Common Crane, Hazel Grouse, Grey-headed Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker, Tengmalm's Owl, Pygmy Owl, Great Grey Shrike, Waxwing, Yellow-browed Warbler etc.

Mammals: Raccoon Dog, Red Fox, Elk, Roe Deer, Wild Boar (probably), Brown Bear, tracks and droppings of Lynx and Wolves etc.

1 Wed (7th October) TALLINN, to West-Estonia

We will pick you up from Tallinn Airport and drive to West-Estonia. We make some birding stops on a way before we check-in and eat our first dinner together at the guesthouse (Roosta Holiday Village).

2 Thu (8th October) MATSALU NATIONAL PARK

Following our coastal pursuit for migratory and staging waterbirds we reach Matsalu National Park. This is the most famous bird area in Estonia, known as one of the most important breeding and stop-over areas for waterfowl and shorebirds in the whole of Northern Europe. Over 40 sq km, this reserve consists of large open floodplains and coastal meadows, riparian and coastal woodlands, river delta and marshlands and shallow Matsalu Bay with 3 th ha of reedbeds, numerous islands and 7 birdwatching towers around it. This makes this reserve wonderful as migratory staging place for vast numbers of coastal and waterbirds. Matsalu Bay is typically covered with white spots of about 20 thousand Whooper and Bewick Swans, tens of thousands of Goldeneye, Pochard, Wigeon, Teal and waders. Also several thousands of Barnacle, Bean, Graylag and White-fronted Geese harvest the grass of local meadows and fields and the very rare Lesser White-fronted Geese can be found amongst them. Matsalu area is also well known as an autumn Crane concentration area. As many as 20 thousand birds gathering around the bay and feed in adjacent fields (the peak time is mid-September!).

We will drive to the Puise Peninsula in the early morning and explore a variety of Põgari-Sassi coastal habitats. We also visit Haeska watchtower. The record for the highest day list of bird species in Northern Europe was achieved from this tower in May – 128 species by nightfall. After lunch we drive around in more agricultural landscape where we hope to see flocks of migratory birds - including hundreds of Bramblings, Chaffinches and Waxwings. Besides passerine migration we hope to improve our bird list with several raptors, such as Rough-legged Buzzard and maybe even Hawk Owl! When it gets darker, we shall watch from viewing platforms and while enjoying the geese or late Cranes we'll also look out for White-tailed Eagles, harriers – and Elk. Dinner at the local guesthouse (Roosta Holiday Village).

3 Fri (9th October) To North-East Estonia; BEAR HIDE

We will start from the most north-westerly point, the Põõsaspea. This small north-stretching spit is situated at the migratory crossroads where masses of waterbirds coming from the Bothnian and the Finnish Bays meet. Cape Põõsaspea is the best place for autumn passage waterbirds. During one season, nearly 2,5 million Arctic-breeding wildfowl passed this narrow bottleneck, with daily totals sometimes exceeding 100,000. Best daily counts here include 8,400 Velvet Scoters, 6, 000 Greater Scaups, over 2, 000 Red-throated and Black-throated Divers. Around 300,000 Long-tailed Duck passes that point during first two weeks of October. Rare birds from that point include Little Auk, Yellow-billed Diver, Grey Phalarope, King Eider, Yellow-browed and Dusky Warbler, Desert Wheatear.

Later in the morning, we will move to 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. 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".

After check-in and a lunch at the hotel we will take a walk through the forest (1 km) to the Bear Hide (packed dinner with us). The wooden hide is cozy, with comfortable seats and viewing slots at the front and beds at the back so you can sleep in the very darkest part of the night or catch a nap. At the far end is a separate dry toilet (wet napkins/tissues provided). Brown Bear can appear at any time during the night (sometimes even before). Raccoon Dogs and sometimes even Wolves occasionally visit the feeding place (Bear Hide/Art Hotel).

4 Sat (10th October) ALUTAGUSE FORESTS; BEAR HIDE (ALTERNATIVE)

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 with the first rays of the morning sun. Forest tits, 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. We will enjoy our late breakfast at the hotel and take a rest until to lunchtime. In the afternoon, we will visit Alutaguse lowland where forests alternate with mires and human settlements are sparsely located. The area is a good habitat for the species of deep forest like owls (even the Great Gray, Ural, Pygmy), woodpeckers (Three-toed, White-backed, Black), grouses (Capercaillie, Hazel Hen, Black Grouse) and Brown Bear and Wolf. Later in the evening, we will have an owling session before we return to the hotel or if people are keen to we could have another overnight at the bear hide (Art Hotel and/or Bear Hide).

5 Sun (11th October) 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-stone 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: **955 Euro per person**
Single suppl. 150 Euro

Includes:

English-Estonian speaking guide throughout the journey. All meals and all local transport. Bear hide costs (1-2 nights). Entrance fees to protected areas. All overnights in shared double:

www.altmoisa.ee

www.artcafe.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/>

NB! There are many amazing holidays you can't afford to miss... When you would like to travel with your friends we would be happy to give you more information or offer an extra tour with special price whenever you find a suitable time.

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