



Estonian Nature Tours

Trip	: ESTONIA IN AUTUMN
Period	: Fri19Sep – Fri26Sep 2014
Group size	: 6/8 pax
Focus	: Birds
Grading	: Day walks only, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Kaarel Võhandu
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Agent/Organizer	: Estonian Nature Tours, e-mail: info@naturetours.ee

An 8-day holiday focusing on the spectacular bird migration in Western Estonia.

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.

Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to Haapsalu

Day 2 Põõsaspea, Haapsalu & Matsalu

Day 3 Matsalu National Park & Leidissoo

Day 4 To Saaremaa island

Day 5 Saaremaa island, Sõrve

Day 6 Sõrve, to Pärnu

Day 7 Kabli & Soometsa forests

Day 8 Departure

Highlights

Birds: Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, tens of thousands of Eurasian Cranes, White-fronted Geese and Bean Geese, peak autumn migration of songbirds, waders and waterfowls, Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon, Black Grouse, White-backed Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Black Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-browed Warbler (probably), Nutcracker, Crested Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Bearded Tit, Lapland Bunting etc.

Mammals: Wild Boar & Raccoon Dog, Red Fox, Elk, Roe deer, Red Deer, European Beaver, tracks of Brown Bear, Wolf, & Lynx (probably) etc.

1 Fri (19th September) TALLINN, to Haapsalu

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport and drive to Haapsalu. After check-in at the hotel we will go for some birding at Haeska watch tower, heading back to Haapsalu late afternoon.

Dinner at restaurant (Promenaadi Hotel).

2 Sat (20th September) PÕÕSASPEA, HAAPSALU & MATSALU

We will start from the most north-easterly point, Cape Põõsaspea. This small north-stretching spit is situated at the migratory crossroads where masses of waterbirds coming from the gulfs of Bothnia and Finland 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. The biggest daily counts here include 8,400 Velvet Scoter, 6,000 Greater Scaup, and over 2,000 Red-throated and Black-throated Divers. Around 300,000 Long-tailed Duck pass the point during the first two weeks of October. Rare waterbirds seen from this location include White-billed Diver, King Eider, Grey Phalarope and Little Auk. Rare or scarce passerines have included Desert Wheatear and Yellow-browed and Dusky Warblers.

After a lunch at Roosta, we will visit Haapsalu town, nearby. This region has many shallow sheltered bays, coastal lagoons, marshlands and reedbeds. The spectacular view from the coastal promenade over Haapsalu Bay can deliver tens of thousands of Goldeneye, Coot, Greater Scaup, Tufted Duck, Wigeon and other wildfowl, including Smew. Regular distractions include White-tailed Eagles, and Common Cranes, swans, waders and other exciting birds are all present. Later in the afternoon, we make a first visit to Matsalu National Park. 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 (Promenaadi Hotel).

3 Sun (21st September) MATSALU NATIONAL PARK & LEIDISSOO

Following our coastal pursuit of 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 3,000 hectares of reedbeds, numerous islands and seven 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 the white spots of about 10,000 Whooper and Bewick Swans, tens of thousands of Goldeneye, Pochard, Wigeon, Teal and waders. Also, several thousand Barnacle, Bean, Greylag and White-fronted Geese harvest the grass of local meadows and fields. The Matsalu area is also well known as an autumn Common Crane staging area. As many as 20,000 birds gather around the bay and feed in the adjacent fields (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 and a short break we travel out to enjoy wetlands and heathland forest environment. We hope to be entertained by Black Grouse, whilst other attractions in this area include Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse, Wryneck and Nutcracker, and some interesting woodpeckers. We also will go for an owling session. If we are fortunate we may hear and hopefully see Ural or Eagle Owls hunting for small mammals at the forest edge (Promenaadi Hotel).

4 Mon (22nd September) To Saaremaa island

After the late breakfast we visit Matsalu National Park once again. We will climb observation towers to scan over the marshes and a bay and visit woodlands and seminatural habitats to improve our bird list with several new raptors, woodpeckers or warblers. Later in the afternoon, we drive to Virtsu where we take the ferry at 5.00pm. At half past 5 we arrive at Kuivastu harbour on Muhu island and drive to Kuressaare town in Saaremaa island. After check-in and a short rest we will eat our dinner at the hotel ([Saaremaa Hotel](#)).

5 Tue (23rd September) SAAREMAA ISLAND, SÕRVE

This morning we target the Sõrve Peninsula and Sääre Spit. This is over 50 km long and a narrow peninsula stretching south-westerly from the rest of the island. This is the last point before take-off for landbirds and the surrounding open sea and islets are excellent points for watching seabirds. This is the best place in the country to watch skuas, waders, and diving ducks. The Sõrve is famous for its frequent sighting of rare birds and, especially during autumn migration, the chances are good. Migrant raptors can be seen in good numbers, especially Sparrowhawk, buzzards, harriers, falcons but also Lesser Spotted and other eagles. The migration of passerines at peak times often includes enormous numbers. It is an unforgettable experience to follow the passage of hundreds of thousands of Chaffinches, Bramblings and Siskins from the watch point atop an old Soviet military concrete fortification. In the cape, there are bird stations for ringing and observing migration and we also visit a ringing station where we can see some birds in the hand – perhaps even eastern rarities ([Saaremaa Hotel](#)).

6 Wed (24th September) SÕRVE, to Pärnu

After breakfast we will continue our birding at Loode coast and Lõu Bay and also have a short visit to Sõrve Bird Observatory again. We come back to the mainland in the afternoon and follow the direction of bird migration toward the south-west part of the county, the Pärnu area. We will visit old growth coniferous and mixed forest in order to experience the autumn calling season of resident Black, Grey-headed, Three-toed and White-backed Woodpeckers as well as listen for calls of Hazel Grouse ([Wesset Villa](#)).

7 Thu (25th September) KABLI & SOOMETSA FORESTS

Today we will travel out in the early morning and visit the Kabli bird station near the Latvian border. This is our oldest bird station, equipped with a huge 18m high Helgoland type bird trap. In the bird station, there is good chance we may get a close look at the continental race of Long-tailed Tit, Willow Tit, Crested Tit, Nuthatch and other woodland passerines. In the night-time, the Ural, Tengmalms, Pygmy and Short-Eared Owls are trapped as well. After a very nice lunch in local village, we will visit a lookout tower and wooden pathway in the Tolkuse bog. We can enjoy the misty mystery of bog lakes and colourful patterns of peat mosses, which in combination with crane and geese migration under a deep blue sky will summarize our special northern autumn experiences... We also will go for an owling session ([Wesset Villa](#)).

8 Fri (26th September) To Tallinn, departure...

In our way back to Tallinn, we have a short visit to some old growth coniferous and mixed forest once again. We will return to Tallinn by late morning where we have some free time to visit the old town before having our last lunch together. After the lunch we will drive to the Airport to catch your homeward flight at...

Price: **1150 Euro per person**
Single.suppl. 210 Euro

Includes:

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

www.promenaadi.ee

www.saarehotell.ee

www.wesset.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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