

Trip	: WILD FLOWERS & BUTTERFLIES IN ESTONIA
Period	: Sun06Jul – Sun13Jul 2014
Group size	: 6/8 pax
Grading	: Day walks only, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Peeter Vissak
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Local organizer/Agent	: Estonian Nature Tours, e-mail: info@naturetours.ee

An 8-day fully-inclusive holiday in search of wild flowers and other wildlife of Estonia, amongst them a fine selection of orchids and rare butterfly species such as Baltic Grayling, Scarce Heath, Scarce Fritillary, Frigga's Fritillary, Bog Fritillary, Cranberry Blue, Clouded Apollo, Northern Chequered Skipper, Poplar Admiral etc.

In recent years Estonia has been a magnet for birdwatchers and botanists from Europe and beyond. Now this Baltic State is also becoming a mecca for butterfly and dragonfly enthusiasts eager to see the country's speciality species. Because of its history, large parts of the country have remained completely wild, while farming methods in many areas are unintensified resulting in a mosaic of excellent habitats such as numerous flowery meadows, natural forests and massive bog areas.

Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to Haapsalu

Day 2 Osmussaar island

Day 3 Matsalu National Park, to Saaremaa

Day 4 Viidumäe & Sõrve

Day 5 To South-East Estonia; Mukre bog

Day 6 Järvselja & Taevaskoja; Beaver boat-trip

Day 7 Piusa & Vastseliina

Day 8 To Tallinn, departure...

Highlights

Wild flowers:

Raised Bogs / Northern Labrador Tea (*Ledum palustre*) some latest specimen in bloom, Cranberry species (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*, *V. microcarpus*), Common Coral root (*Corallorhiza trifida*) may still be found blooming; Dwarf Birch (*Betula nana*), Sundew species (*Drosera anglica*, *D. rotundifolia*), on bog lakes with mineral nutrition Water-lily species (*Nymphaea alba*, *N. candida*), Bulrushes (*Trichophorum alpinum*, *T. cespitosum*) and Rannoch-rush (*Scheuchzeria palustris*).

Wooded meadows & meadows / Knapweed Broomrape (*Orobanche elatior*), Blue Moor Grass (*Sesleria caerulea*), Downy Fruited Sedge (*Carex tomentosa*), Sticky Catchfly (*Lychnis viscaria*), Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*), *Laserpitium latifolium*,

Calcareous fens / Davall's Sedge (*Carex davalliana*), Alpine Butterwort (*Pinguicula alpina*), Fen Orchid (*Liparis loeselii*); Large Pink (*Dianthus superbus*),

Coastal meadows, marshes / Common Thrift (*Armeria maritima ssp. elongata*), Early Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata* + *D.i. ochroleuca*), Dragon's Teeth (*Tetragonolobus maritimus*), Holy-grasses (*Hierochloa odorata*, *Hierochloa australis*)

Sandy sites / Sand Pink (*Dianthus arenarius*), Yellowgreen Catchfly (*Silene chlorantha*), *Arenaria procera*, Spurious Butterbur (*Petasites spurius*) probably finished ;

Woods / Chickweed Wintergreen (*Trientalis europaea*), Serrated Wintergreen (*Orthilia secunda*), One Flowered Wintergreen (*Moneses uniflora*), Yellow Bird's-nest (*Monotropa hypopitys*),

Twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*);

Rivers, banks / Greater Water-Parsnip (*Sium latifolium*), a Bur-reed (*Sparganium microcarpum*);

Throughout West-Estonia / Wood Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum nemorosum*), Crested Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum cristatum*), Russow's Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza Russowi*), Dark Red Helleborine (*Epipactis atrorubens*), Red Helleborine (*Cephalanthera rubra*), Garden Speedwell (*Veronica longifolia*), Melancholy Thistle (*Cirsium heterophyllum*), Siberian Iris (*Iris sibirica*)

Butterflies: Woodland Brown (*Lopinga achine*), Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*), Large Blue (*Maculinea arion*), Cranberry Blue (*Plebejus optilete*), Scarce Fritillary (*Euphyryas maturna*), Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*), Bog Fritillary (*Boloria eunomia*), Scarce Heath (*Coenonympha hero*), Moorland Clouded Yellow (*Colias palaeno*), Lapland Ringlet (*Erebia embla*), Large Chequered Skipper (*Heteropterus morpheus*), Pallas's Fritillary (*Argynnis laodice*), Clouded Apollo (*Parnassius mnemosyne*), Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*) etc.

Birds: Eurasian White Stork, Black Stork, White-tailed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Corncrake, impressive selection of waders and woodpeckers, Citrine Wagtail, Savi's Warbler, Crested Tit, Penduline Tit, Golden Oriole etc.

Mammals: Red Fox, Raccoon Dog (probably), Elk, Wild Boar (probably), Roe Deer, Red Deer (probably), European Beaver etc.

[Estonian Orchids](#)

1 Sun (6th July) TALLINN, to Haapsalu

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport and drive to the western region of Estonia. After check-in at the guesthouse/hotel we have dinner together (Altmõisa Guesthouse).

2 Mon (7th July) OSMUSSAAR ISLAND

After an early breakfast we drive to the harbour in Dirhami village to take the boat to Osmussaar Island, where we spend the day botanising and watching butterflies. In late June and early July waders can be watched gathering on the island to feed and form small migration flocks. Osmussaar is an island with a long and interesting history with old chapel ruins and a cemetery dating back to Swedish occupation. For many years during the Soviet era it was closed to civilian visitors but is now farmed by a single family in a traditional manner. On Osmussaar Island one can find the following Habitats Directive Annex I habitat types: coastal lagoons, drift lines, vegetated stony banks, sea cliffs, coastal meadows, juniper formations, xeric calcareous grasslands, alvars, *Molinia* communities, species-rich fens and fragments of old broad-leaved deciduous forests. Alvars (limestone pavement) cover more than one third of the island, vegetation of dry calcareous alvars is sparse, but extremely species-rich. The rare Hairy Milk-vetch flowers on the island and *Androsace septentrionale*, *Armeria elongata* and *Hornungia petraea* reside on almost bare shingle. Viper's Bugloss and Stinky Cranesbill are sometimes extremely abundant on shingle walls, creating a unique bright blue and red backdrop. Osmussaar island is also notable for many orchid species including Fen Orchid, Musk Orchid, Military Orchid, Marsh Helleborine and more with 16 species possible. *Rosa majalis* and Lady's Fingers are especially attractive. Bare stones and dry stony alvars are often covered by several lichens. On the island breeding birds include Marsh Harrier, Black Grouse, Corncrake, Common Crane, Dunlin, Common & Arctic Tern, Barred Warbler, Red-backed Shrike. We'll search for a variety of dragonflies such as Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*), Brilliant Emerald (*Somatochlora metallica*) and Yellow Spotted Emerald (*Somatochlora flavomaculata*), also Green Hawker (*Aeshna viridis*), Arctic Bluet (*Coenagrion johanssoni*) and Dark Bluet (*Coenagrion armatum*). Butterflies fauna may be quite diverse too, including Bath White (*Pontia daplidice*), Eastern Baton Blue (*Pseudophilotes vicrama*) and Nickerl's Fritillary (*Mellicta aurelia*). Enjoyable lunch baskets are provided which we will enjoy part way round our walk. Dinner at the guesthouse (Altmõisa Guesthouse).

3 Tue (8th July) MATSALU NATIONAL PARK, to Saaremaa

Today we will visit Matsalu National Park. Matsalu is the most famous reserve and oldest Ramsar wetland site in Estonia. At times of peak passage over a million diving ducks have been estimated along the coast here, whilst counts of wild swans and Barnacle Geese regularly number tens of thousands. But Matsalu is much more than just an avian motorway service station and among the 170 breeding birds recorded from the reserve are species such as Red-necked Grebe, Bittern, Osprey, White-tailed Eagle and Caspian Tern. Although the reserve is designed for birds, the avifauna cannot be considered separately from the protection of their roosting, feeding and nesting areas. Open communities, especially meadows, belong to the most valuable parts of Matsalu landscapes. Unlike many other reserves in Estonia, the landscapes are strongly influenced by human impact here and these semi-natural communities need annual management (grazing, mowing). We will look out for Purple Milk-vetch and Crested Cow-wheat here, also various orchid species including Fly, Military, Musk and Geater Butterfly Orchids. In late afternoon we cross to Saaremaa island. Dinner at the guesthouse (Loona Manor Guesthouse).

4 Wed (9th July) VIIDUMÄE & SÕRVE

The day begins with visiting Viidumäe Nature reserve (Mäepea wooded meadow). Viidumäe is famous for its historically evolved (semi)natural diversity. There are several different wood ecosystems, fens, swamps, wooded meadows and alvar meadows here. The Rauna Hill near Viidumäe emerged from the early Ancyclus Lake stage of the Baltic Sea about 10 000 years ago, while later sea stages have broken some coastal cliff formations, now situated in the middle of the island. More than 700 species of vascular plants are found here (including endemic *Rhinanthus osiliensis*). Butterflies and moths consist of 675 species and include Woodland Brown (*Lopinga achine*), Scarce Fritillary (*Euphydryas maturna*) and in late June, Dark Green Fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*). Viidumäe is also a good place for several forest birds like Nutcracker and Red-breasted Flycatcher.

Saaremaa offers more excellent botanical experiences as we explore some protected landscapes in Sõrve peninsula – Järve Dunes (*Dianthus arenarius*, Dark Red Helleborine), Viieristi (Melancholy Thistle, German Asphodel), Sääre (Viper's Bugloss, Woad) etc. One of our next destination will be the Loode oak-grove – a wooded meadow or coppice like landscape with oaks as the main tree species, while the oldest generation is about 350-450 years old. There are also lots of different bushes (including two endemic hawthorn species) and rare plants including several orchids, (e.g. Lady's slipper – in June!, Burnt Orchid, Pyramidal, Green-veined Orchid and others plus *Rosa dumalis* and *Veronica longifolia*). There are marvellous birding sites among these locations and more than 245 species of Lepidoptera have been recorded in the grove and its surrounds, such as Woodland Brown, in July High Brown Fritillary (*Argynnis adippe*) and Pallas's Fritillary (*Argynnis laodice*). At night we will do some moth trapping. Dinner at the guesthouse (Loona Manor Guesthouse).

5 Thu (10th July) To South-East Estonia, MUKRE BOG

In the morning we will move back to the mainland. Our first stop will be at Laelatu wooded meadow. Wooded meadows are sparse stands with a grass cover that needs regular mowing and they are the most species-rich ecosystems in Estonia, some are among the most species-rich in the world. It has been counted that at Laelatu has 76 different vascular plants in one square meter! We'll also enjoy bog habitat which belongs to the Mukre Landscape Reserve before we move to the south-east region of Estonia. Reaching the bog trail (2.5 km) is rather extraordinary, as the small gravel road, leading straight through the bog, was built on tree logs. The 9 thousand year old bog has been under protection for 20 years and offers shelter to several rare birds such as Black Stork and Capercaillie. The bird list may include Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Woodlark, Great Grey Shrike, with luck a Golden Eagle, Golden Plover, White Wagtail and perhaps some Woodpeckers. There are also protected plant species, like Early Spotted and Lesser Butterfly Orchids while Bog Orchid and Fen Orchid are also possible, albeit not exactly at the boardwalk. However, the biggest thrill are the

Water Lilies, that literally cover large part of the bog lake just next to the 14-metres high watchtower. There are both Great and the Round-leaved Sundew, catching and digesting insects with their sticky leaves. In midsummer both should have their beautiful white flowers. On the red or green carpet of sphagnum mosses one can have a closer view of Dwarf Birch, Bog Rosemary, Cranberries, Cloudberry, Cottongrass and Rannoch-rush. In May and early June most of them are in flower, and in July it is possible to pick and taste delicious Cloudberry. Raised bogs have a remarkably rich butterfly and spider fauna. Sweet Gale, *Betula humilis*, *Eriophorum gracile*, Cloudberry, Sundew species and Labrador Tea are quite common here. Bog Fritillary, Scarce Copper, Arctic (Baltic) Grayling, Clouded Yellow and other species of butterfly can be expected. Later in the afternoon, after checking in at the guesthouse/hotel we have our evening meal at a local restaurant (Hansa Hotel).

6 Fri (11th July) JÄRVSELJA & TAEVASKOJA; BEAVER BOAT-TRIP

Our itinerary takes us today to Järvselja forest which is surrounded mostly by moist habitats and target species include Large Chequered Skipper (*Heteropterus morpheus*), *Lycaena dispar* and *Argynnis laodice*. Järvselja is also famous for its high diversity of longhorn beetles, as several Estonian rarities (e.g. *Pachyta lamed*, *Leptura thoracica*, *Anoplodera variicornis* and *Necydalis major*) have been recorded here. We'll make a careful check of flowering umbellifers just in case. After lunch we will visit Taevaskoja, a magnificent Devonian valley with steep riverbanks, dry boreal pine forest and valley of the River Ahja with several interesting boreal species. In the evening (2-3 hours before sunset), we will take a boat ride through Emajõgi river to listen to the night sounds of the wetlands. Dusk is the time that Beavers leave their lodges to spend an industrious night felling riverside trees and saplings. A little quiet patience is required here, but with luck you are likely to see several individuals going about their nightly construction work and swimming about (Hansa Hotel).

7 Sat (12th July) PIUSA & VASTSELIINA

The first destination of the day will be a railroad dam and surrounding heath forests with pine trees near Piusa. This location with its partly forested and partly opened xeric/mesic sites are among Estonia's most species-rich butterfly sites. These sandy sites are also of high botanical interest, with Russian species invading along riversides from the south-east. The most interesting species are *Arenaria procera*, Yellowgreen Catchfly (*Silene chlorantha*), natural Hen-and-Chickens Houseleek (*Jovibarba sobolifera*), Sheep's Bit (*Jasione montana*), Dwarf Everlasting (*Helichrysum arenarium*), and several wintergreen and orchid species. Butterfly highlights include Large Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus alveus*), Moorland Clouded Yellow (*Colias palaeno*), Pearly Heath (*Coenonympha arcania*), Sooty Copper (*Lycaena tityrus*), Purple-shot Copper (*Lycaena alciphron*) etc. There is a chance of Large Blue (*Maculinea arion*) as well but the abundance of this species in Piusa region has severely declined during recent years.

It is also a good site for one eastern bird speciality - Greenish Warbler and quite often Golden Orioles can be heard calling in nearby forests. If you are lucky you may find some breeding woodpeckers, especially Black and Grey-headed Woodpecker.

After a nice lunch at a local tourism farm we will enjoy the riverbanks and flooded meadows of the River Piusa. The majestic ruins of Vana-Vastseliina stronghold were the site of the very first White Stork nest in Estonia, back in 1841. Along the riverside are seminatural meadows, partly covered by bushes and deciduous woods. Sand Martins and Kingfishers breed here and there are several interesting butterfly species. Large Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus alveus*), White-letter Hairstreak (*Satyrium w-album*) and Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*) are on the wing in July. If the weather is fine a good location will be chosen to run a moth trap overnight which we check in the early hours of the next day. Dinner at the guesthouse (Hansa Hotel).

8 Sun (13th July) To Tallinn, departure...

We will return to Tallinn by late morning and have a pleasant guided tour of Tallinn Old Town.

Tallinn was made a UNESCO World heritage Site in 1997 due to the medieval city centre, the finest in northern Europe, with cobblestone 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...

Price: **1250 Euro per person**
Single suppl. 230 Euro

Includes:

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

www.altmoisa.ee

www.loonamanor.ee

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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.

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